UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

"Uniquely American Symptoms": Cold War American Horror Films as Repositories of White Nationalist Affect

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Gender Studies

by

Stephanie H. Chang

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Uniquely American Symptoms": Cold War American Horror Films as Repositories of White Nationalist Affect

by

Stephanie H. Chang

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

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Professor Kyungwon Hong, Chair

My dissertation, titled "'Uniquely American Symptoms': Cold War American Horror Films as Repositories of White Nationalist Affect," turns to the Cold War period to consider the violent contours of American imperialist policy and how, in its aim to reframe and re-center the project of whiteness, formulated ostensibly anti-racist modes of governance that have obscured its imperialist, white supremacist, and settler colonialist motives. In other words, whiteness, one of the destructive forces propelling the exploitation and eradication of racialized and gendered subjects, cemented its power during this period through the structural concealment of its violences. I trace a genealogy of Cold War whiteness through the American horror cinematic tradition and identify the covert rhetorical, representational, and affective strategies that upheld whiteness in the postwar era. Through the study of five films from each decade of the Cold War (1950s - 1980s/early 90s) -- *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964), *The Last House on the Left* (1972), *Flowers in the Attic* (1987), and *The People Under the Stairs* (1991) -- I argue that Cold War American horror films act as repositories of white nationalist affect and contain these historicized and cinematic formations of whiteness. As films that explore the anxieties tied to newly emergent geographies of postwar whiteness, the haunted guilt of white plantation

womanhood, tortured domestic white bodies in face of the Vietnam War, and the terror in investing in white carceral suburban space, they each identify distinct modalities of white nationalist affect during the Cold War. In other words, American Cold War horror films are a site that have captured the fleeting and obscured moments of white fear, horror, and terror that continue to live on in our cultural imaginary and impact how we understand structures of power in their current form.

The dissertation of Stephanie H. Chang is approved.

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Introduction

Released in 1962, John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* is film fixated on the sinisterness of Cold War geopolitics. Oscillating between a condemnation of the Communist left and the devious conservative right, the film is overrun with (what is ultimately justified) paranoia as multi-layered conspiracies are uncovered and just barely foiled. Very much aligned with its Cold War cinematic contemporaries in terms of content, theme, and emphasis on the Manichean positioning of the Cold War, *The Manchurian Candidate* does not tread in metaphor; rather, it is explicit in the ways it links Cold War violence directly to state structures at the heart of the conflict.[1]

Manchurian is perhaps best known for a scene that comes early in film wherein an American military platoon stationed in Korea is brainwashed. Eerily dreamy, the scene opens upon a Ladies' Gardening Cub meeting as the camera pans over, revealing the group of soldiers quietly sitting at the front of the room, politely listening to the gardening club proceedings.[2] The gardening ladies are soon revealed to be scheming Communists (a mix of Chinese and Soviet leaders) gathered to watch Dr. Yen Lo, a preeminent Chinese scientist who is demonstrating new brainwashing military technology. Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey), the tortured soldier at the center of the film, is introduced as the test subject and commanded to murder two of his fellow soldiers in cold blood. He does so without hesitation.

During the sequence, Yen Lo (Khigh Dhiegh), one of the primary antagonists of the film, provides a crucial framework for the sense of horror that undergirds the film. While explaining the brainwashing process to Zilkov (Albert Paulsen), a somewhat skeptical comrade observing the

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[1] This is particularly the case with the novel of which the film is based on. Richard Condon's 1959 novel goes even heavier into the "dramatics" of the story. Often credited as a pulp text, the book (and film) are often interpreted as unintentionally humorous, despite its somber tone.

[2] According to Matthew Frye Jacobson, this scene was specifically filmed with the usage of a "railroad track setup," the camera spun around 360 degrees, in order to catch all of the action. (Matthew Frye Jacobson, *What have they built you to do? : the Manchurian candidate and Cold War America* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006], 23-24.)

demonstration, Yen Lo describes just how he manages to control the soldiers. "Do you realize, comrade, the implications of the weapon that has been placed at your disposal?"[3] Zilkov asks, to which Yen Lo responds, "Normally conditioned American who's been trained to kill. Then, to have no memory of having killed. Without memory of his deed, he cannot possibly feel guilt. Nor, of course will he have any reason to fear being caught. And having been relieved of those uniquely American feelings, guilt and fear, he cannot possibly give himself away."[4] Notably, Yen Lo identifies "emotions" as the critical failure of the American soldier/subject. The existence of these so-called "uniquely American symptoms" allows him not only to brainwash an entire American troop and transform one soldier into an assassin and sleeper agent, but the existence of these unique American emotions facilitates the ultimate twist of the film: it is revealed that Shaw's own mother (Angela Lansbury) is his handler as it was she who sold out her own son to Yen Lo in a greedy and vicious bid for political power.[5] In other words, it is through guilt and fear, scripted as uniquely American feelings, that the American is controlled, either through the context of Yen Lo's sinister brainwashing experiment or Shaw's mother and her frenzied campaign for control over the American government. In other words, *Manchurian* is very much interested in the ways emotions impact the positioning of the US in face of the Cold War. It asks, what is the "risk" of being an American during a very active Cold War? Might this supposed "risk" be due to something as simple

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[3] *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by John Frankenheimer (1963; Hollywood, CA: United Artists), DVD.
[4] Ibid.
[5] The character of Robert Shaw's mother is somewhat complex but is crucial to the film. Throughout the movie Shaw has a mysterious handler who, through the usage of playing cards, "awakens" Shaw's dormant inner-assassin. It is indeed his mother who is his handler, though the brainwashing of her son proves to be just one of the moving part in Mrs. Shaw's plans. Desperate for entry into the American (global) political world since she was a young teen, Mrs. Shaw eventually marries Senator John Isely. Using her husband as a mouthpiece, Mrs. Shaw singlehandedly triggers a Communist witch hunt in the Senate, a la McCarthy, to build support for the Right (and subsequently, her husband, who she is pushing as a vice presidential candidate) while simultaneously working with Yen Lo and his fellow Communists for access to a personal assassin to dispatch of her political enemies. Notably, Shaw has a bad relationship to his mother as he finds her conniving and insincere and is desperate to get out from under her control. It isn't until Shaw's assassination of his mother and stepfather and his own suicide at the end of the film that ultimately relinquishes Shaw from the grips of his mother. The film does indeed present this relationship between Shaw and his mother as unhealthy, abusive, strained, and with incestuous overtones (the book takes this one step further as mother rapes a hypnotized Shaw at the end.))

as our emotions or un-namable as a national sense of affect that renders us so desperately vulnerable? Frankenheimer presents *Manchurian* as a horrific, albeit conceivable, Cold War possibility wherein America is subjected to a Communist takeover through the manipulation and exploitation of emotions.

In many ways Frankenheimer's film (and Condon's original novel) presents the Cold War as a moral battle; one between evil (the Communist forces) and good (the democratic West) with the "vulnerable" (and "innocent") American caught in the middle. Fully framing the Cold War as a "battle for hearts and minds," *Manchurian* suggests that emotion was a major weapon of the war. However, I ask: how does the film frame vulnerability in face of such a brutal conflict and which subjects are being centered through its discourse? Might there be a racial logic running through the center of this film? And if so, how does vulnerability and its associated affects, emotions, and senses become one of the most crucial mechanisms of mobilizing white nationalist American dominance during the Cold War?

My interest in *Manchurian* is how it frames geopolitical conflicts as contingent upon these "uniquely American symptoms" intermingling with the "terrors floating in the air in 1959" in producing a cinematic experience of postwar affect.[6] In other words, I dissect these "uniquely American symptoms" in order to examine the feelings, emotions and affects of the period, particularly in relationship to subject-making in postwar America. *Manchurian* specifically connects these feelings to a political conspiracy and the machinations of broader geopolitical powers. I diverge from this as I consider the ways such affects, feelings, and emotions can be articulated through the mundane, subtle, inarticulate. To do so, I turn to the Cold War horror film to re-contextualize the inexplicable-ness of Cold War horror and connect these "uniquely American symptoms" with race, gender, sexuality, and class. More specifically, I examine how affects,

[6] Greil Marcus, *The Manchurian Candidate* (London: The British Film Institute), 54.

emotions and feelings specifically tied to horror, terror, and fear were mobilized during the Cold War in bolstering white nationalist structures in a moment of racial liberalisms.

Should *The Manchurian Candidate* be categorized in terms of genre, it could perhaps be deemed both a political thriller and horror.[7] *Manchurian* relies heavily on an atmosphere of political horror, wherein antagonists take shape as monsters, "demons" even, and the sense of unease, confusion, and suspicion picks up immediately by the first note of the score, never letting up until the last few minutes of the film.[8] Greil Marcus writes of the plot, "*The Manchurian Candidate* is simple nonsense, an exploitation of terrors floating in the air in 1959: the terror of McCarthyism, the terror of Communist brainwashing – good hooks from the newspapers of the day. The Russians and the Chinese have made a zombie assassin out of an American soldier – and contrived to have him awarded the Medal of Honor, to place him beyond suspicion, beyond reproach."[9] Described as "an exploitation of (Cold War) terrors" with "zombie assassins" subjected to "Communist brainwashing," the film does indeed utilize horror genre tropes it is particularly striking in the ways its horrorscape is used in suturing together structures of emotions, Cold War geopolitical violence, and the fear of American "vulnerability."

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[7] Interestingly, reviewers have picked up on the sense of horror in the film. The film indeed utilizes horror tropes and aesthetics in creating the atmosphere of the political thriller. Much of this can be traced through the movie's characterizations: the film is heavy with particular gendered and racialized representations, most of which is utilized to present this very sense of horror. Yen Lo is an obvious postwar update to Fu Manchu, clad in his Communist garb, his Orientalized genius is his primary trait as he is entirely focused on the destruction of the West. (There is also a serious case of yellowfacing in the film, Henry Silva [a white actor] plays Chunjin, a Korean spy who is sent to America to watch over Shaw.) While clumsy in execution, the "Yellow Hoard" is very much a figure in this film. The character of Robert Shaw's mother is viciously characterized: a conniving woman only interested in her dim Senator husband for the access to his power, she is portrayed as hyper-intelligent, sinister, manipulative, and grotesque. Though this is much more present in the book, one of the primary ways that this is represented is through her "at any cost" grabs for power.

[8] As noted by Jacobson, much of this sense of unease in the film is due to how it was filmed: "From that opening sequence, with its long pre-credits 'tease' and then an explanatory voice-over for the first scene after the titles, the conventions employed in *The Manchurian Candidate* are those of 1950s Burbank television thrillers rather than Hollywood movies. The result, in addition to the promise not of a cheap film, but of an expensive television drama, is a distinct feeling of unease produced by otherwise commonplace scenes that just do not look right." (Jacobson, *What have they Built?*, 11)

[9] Greil Marcus, "The Last American Dream," *The Threepenny Review*, no. 38 (1989): 3.

To extend this analysis to other American horror films, how might we consider the ways Cold War American cinematic horrorscapes took shape during this time? I analyze the American horror film and its various forms during the Cold War period to consider the ruthless contours of American postwar racially liberal politics and how, in its aim to reframe and re-center the project of whiteness, formulated ostensibly liberal modes of governance that have obscured its imperialist, white supremacist, and settler colonialist motives. In other words, whiteness, one of the destructive forces propelling the exploitation and eradication of racialized and gendered subjects, cemented its power during this period through the structural concealment of its violence. I trace a genealogy of Cold War whiteness through the American horror cinematic tradition and identify the covert rhetorical, representational, and affective strategies that upheld whiteness in the postwar era. Through the study of five films from each decade of the Cold War (1950s - 1980s/early 90s) -- *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964), *The Last House on the Left* (1972), and *Flowers in the Attic* (1987), *The People Under the Stairs* (1991) -- I argue that Cold War American horror films act as repositories of white nationalist affect and contain these historicized and cinematic formations of whiteness.

Whiteness, whether it is articulated as social location, a structure of power, a process, a practice, a manner of conduct, a force, a scale of value, an investment, functions as the primary organizing logic in all matters of the American imperial state. A "hard to see" and "unmarked category" against which difference is constructed,[10] Jessie Daniels suggests that, "Whiteness is a location from which to dictate matters of privilege, injustice, oppression, inequality, protection and violence from the state. It is also a significant lens that informs the ways in which white people understand the world."[11] The forms of white nationalism that exist in the present day can very much

[10] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: From Identity Politics* (Pennsylvania: Temple University, 2006), 6.
[11] Jessie Daniels, *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 12.

trace its origins to the Cold War and active disavowal of racisms, which in turn resulted in the emergence of particular forms of Cold War whiteness. Hence, to carve out a genealogy of whiteness through the American horror film, I have turned specifically to the Cold War era because of the ways the period exhibited intense postwar shifts geopolitically, economically, and socially in which structures of whiteness were forced to recalibrate. In doing so, several questions emerge: how did whiteness persist as a structure throughout a period in which it was seemingly disavowed? How was whiteness strengthened through these covert mechanisms? And how might horror film provide a specific kind of context in which we may explore such murkiness?

Cold War Horror Film and White Nationalist Affect

I argue that much of these intricacies are located in cultural spaces, like that of the horror film. In large part this is due to the ways the horror film, particularly, as a cinematic form, is entirely invested in the insistence that horror is ongoing and that it persists – whether it be in a structural, individual, natural, unnatural, supernatural, rational, or irrational context. Broadly speaking, horror functions as a genre of both excess and limitation, often through the context of its many deliciously overplayed tropes (the haunted house, the serial killer, the ghost, the demonic, the dark and broken psyche) that ongoingly unsettles and lingers.

Horror seemingly works as a disruption. Yet, how does "disruption" truly work if we are to consider it in the context of Cold War whiteness? In some ways, I am particularly engrossed in the form of the horror film because of how dramatically limited it is. It can be an unapologetically un-expansive genre and instead grounded in messiness. Horror, particularly in its postwar shape, is not necessarily interested in future-making (unlike science fiction, for instance, it doesn't look towards the skies and dream as it is more afraid of the poisoned ground upon one treads), yet it doesn't necessarily want to affirm the present or past either. Horror and its time-bending qualities have been

well documented.[12] However, I am not only interested in the ways the genre plays with time, but how it also works in the creation and destruction of these violently material racial conditions. In other words, I find that the horror film, in its troubled form, is often contradictory. And in a moment in which the US ascended to globalized power and required the universal affirmation of its moral *goodness*, how might horror have functioned in such an intense moment as it caught the waste and filth of the period and put it to screen, and what does that do to the project of American state building?

In other words, whiteness, one of the destructive forces propelling the exploitation and eradication of racialized and gendered subjects, cemented its power during this period through the structural concealment of its violence. We can trace in horror film the contradictions of the mobilization of white nationalism, a formation in which exists the belief that whiteness is the superior racial group and therefore is entitled to power and domination. As affect shifted into Cold War governmentalities of both benevolence and hostility, white supremacy and fury was intertwined with white liberalism, sentimentalism and structures of sympathy. In other words, this link between sentimentalism, sympathy, benevolence and structures of whiteness were crucially drawn during the Cold War period. As Christina Klein argues, the usage of sentimentalism was crucial to the US dodging charges of being imperialist, excessive, unjustified in face of its aspirations of global domination over the "free world." In other words, by mobilizing the affects as modes of sympathy, benevolence, and sentimentalism, the Cold War is often posed as a war of legitimate defense and protection of the US state and global "democracy" and "freedom," which in turn successfully concealed its desire for US hegemony and dominance.[13]

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[12] Bliss Cua Lim's *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* is one such example.

[13] This then leads into Klein's theorizations around sympathy as one of the primary emotions of the Cold War used to win over "public support." By evoking sympathy, the American was urged to personally embody the Cold War as a conflict to partake in as they were made to feel a sense of obligation and responsibility. Klein breaks down the components of this sentimental mechanism as such: 1) the privileged narrative in such sentimental discourses was the

As films that explore the anxieties tied to postwar whiteness in the beatnik art scene in Southern California, (*A Bucket of Blood*), the haunted guilt of white plantation womanhood (*Hush, Hush…Sweet Charlotte*), tortured domestic white bodies in face of the Vietnam War (*The Last House on the Last*), and the terror in investing into carceral American suburban space (*The People Under the Stairs* and *Flowers in the Attic*), these five films each identify distinct modalities of white nationalist affect during the Cold War. In other words, American Cold War horror films are a site that have captured the fleeting and obscured moments of white fear, horror, and terror that continue to live on in our cultural imaginary and impact how we understand structures of power in their current form.

Affect, Emotion, and the Cold War Horror Film

By posing Cold War horror films as repositories of postwar white nationalist affect, this dissertation works to reframe bodies, subjects, feelings, and senses all within the context of the horror film by turning to theories of affect. As described by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, affect is referencing the particular impulses that are found within the states of in-between-ness; it is the forces that direct encounters and relations. They write, "Affect… is the name we give to those forces— visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion— that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us…across a barely registering accretion of force- relations, or

emphasis on "the human connection" and the role of the individual in the global community, 2) such a human connection transcended all social locations and categories (race, gender, sexuality, class) and subsequently relied on feelings of universal humanity, 3) exchange was required for upkeep of these relationships, 4) sympathy was crucial for this exchange, which Klein describes as "the ability to feel what another person is feeling, especially his suffering" and 5) violation of these relationships is the deepest 'trauma.' This is very important to note because it identifies the emotional conditions that allow for the continuation of structural injustice and white supremacy to proliferate (albeit through a different valence) in a campaign that claims (and centers) the importance of democracy, unity, and the love of humanity. Klein is ultimately asking, what are the ways in which emotions, sympathy, and "love" stand in as imperial and violent white supremacist structures? (Klein, *Cold War* Orientalisms, 14),

that can even leave us overwhelmed."[14] In *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, and Transnationality*, Purnima Mankekar identifies affect as a moment of pre-articulation, and like Seigworth and Gregg, consider it as "a sense of intensity prior to its capture by language."[15] This is, perhaps, on account of the fact that affect lacks a relationship to a specific system, code, or language, and consequently, "is irreducible to ideology."[16] Affect, or the impulses that direct a subject's senses, feelings, and emotions, troubles our understanding of the corporeal and any other such boundaries of the body not only because of the ways in which it exists pre and post subject (or body), but that they exist beyond the body. Moments, subjects, bodies, emotions, or feelings assumed to be in stasis, arguably never are as affect continues to circulate and reconfigure such matter. Furthermore, although often felt in the body, "affect cannot be biologized."[17]

This is further emphasized by Patricia Clough, who also suggests, "Affective bodily responses (move) beyond the body's organic-physiological constraints."[18] Ultimately, affect is able to explode and expand our understandings of what it means to be embodied, as well as the ways our bodies relate to societal structures and ideologies as it completely re-spatializes the ways bodies are understood to interact, move, transform, and contain feelings, sense, and impulses. While affect theory is similar to phenomenology and embodiment in that it is examining the relationship between "sociality and subject formation" or the way in which a subject emerges through its embedment and collision with the context in which it exists, the primary distinction between the three theories is that affect is not dependent on the existence of an individual, sovereign subject.[19] In fact, affect does not

[14] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.
[15] Purnima Mankekar, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 13.
[16] Purnima Mankekar, "Television and Embodiment: A Speculative Essay," *South Asian History and Culture* 3, no. 4, 606.
[17] Mankekar, *Unsettling India*, 13.
[18] Patricia Clough, introduction to *The Affective Turn*, ed. Patricia Clough and Jean Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
[19] Mankekar, "Television and Embodiment," 604.

even require a subject in order to subsist, nor does "a subject [exist] prior to affect."[20] Rather, affect "generates" subjects as it leaves "traces."[21] This is in part due to the ways affect remains un-articulateable and ungraspable, and therefore, exists without the need for a subject to translate and make said affect comprehensible.

Contending with the difference between affect and emotion, Steven Shavioro, in *Post Cinematic Affec*t, makes an important distinction between two, as he suggests that affect is "primary, non-conscious, asubjective, or presubjective, asignifying, unqualified, and intensive; while emotion is derivative, conscious, qualified, and meaningful, a 'content' that can be attributed to pre-constituted subject."[22] If we are to take this difference and apply it to our analysis of the process of subject-making, it becomes clear that affect generates subjects while emotion requires the presence of a pre-formed subject to exist. "Emotion is affect already captured by a subject," Shaviro writes.[23] Emotion must be "tamed" and reduced to be made comprehensible as it corresponds to a similarly legible subject.

Films act as permeable *repositories* that hold and contain temporally and spatially specific moments of terror, fear, and horror. Ultimately, I hope to retain the slippery nature of (American) horror cinema, which I consider to be the ways in which the horror genre occupies the surplus and subsequently dwells in the ambiguous rather than hard answers. While I do not intend to suggest that all horror directors are explicitly engaging the project of white nationalism and that I am reading horror specifically as a white supremacist cultural form (though it may be worth to consider the white supremacist foundations of cinematic technologies), I want to suggest that these films were nevertheless deeply embedded in these structures By tracing the line of whiteness through film, we

[20] Ibid, 605.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010), 3.
[23] Ibid, 5.

can come to understand how each horror film and subgenre has its own recognizable languages and codes which can then be read alongside the grammars of whiteness of different temporal and spatial contexts. By considering this relationship, my project aims to frame how the recalibration of the horror film industry aligned specifically with the shifting of domestic and global Cold War American policy and structures of white nationalist feeling, emotion, and affect.

Formations of Cold War Whiteness

How might we be able to conceptualize and trace the emotional formation of white nationalism/ whiteness during the post- World War II period as archived in the American horror film? What might 50's, 60's, 70's, and 80's American horror films expose about the relationship between cinematic depictions of horror, fear, terror, and whiteness being formulated as fragile, under siege, and vulnerable in a Cold War context? By turning to the Cold War horror film to examine the cultural manifestations and deployments of such histories of white horror and fear, we can create a genealogy of whiteness organized through the logics of emotion, feeling, and affect. Because my project traces this genealogy along the context of these matters, it aims to disclose the ways feelings, emotions, affects, and embodiments have become mobilized, validated, and located within the white subject and deployed in the management of people of color. This project will examine Cold War racial formation and the ways in which it has subsequently produced whiteness as the ultimate subject requiring state and institutional protection (at the cost of the extermination of people of color.)

Alexander Saxton suggests in his seminal text *Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990), that whiteness is an ideology that rests on three conditions, namely whiteness: 1) found its footing through the rationalization and justification of the slave trade and settler colonial land dispossession of indigenous people, 2) maintains hegemonic dominance in face of shifting social/ economic/

political needs and 3) is a process that is continuously in flux and readjustment.[24] Various scholars have expanded on Saxton's theorizations and suggest that the power whiteness holds has been derived through racialized labor that emerged in face of capitalist goals of accumulation. As Theodore Allen suggests in *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (1994), the needs of labor and economic markets (the "labor supply problem") lead to the formation of a racially-stratified and white supremacist society.[25] David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* (1991) similarly analyzes how the construction of whiteness was premised on specific economic conditions.[26] Tracing the histories of the white working class in the US, he points to the ways whiteness was socially constructed through instances of class conflict, which resulted in a capitalist market that was formulated through the racial stratification and designation of different forms of labor, class, and workers.[27]

In a similar vein, George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998) reads whiteness as its own economic system. He writes of the various ways in which legal, economic, and other structural policies affirm white supremacy and directly privilege white people and whiteness. Ultimately, he is identifying the *process* of how whiteness works, or more specifically, how the white subject emerges from as well as relies on capitalist structures.[28] Lipsitz argues that whiteness requires economic possession, investment, and asset acquisition, and that it is directly reliant on the taking of all of the resources, capital, space, and time, while leaving non-white subjects to remain exploited, continuously laboring, and unprotected— all of which is not only affirmed by the state, but is the very structure the state centers and privileges.[29] By investigating how the investment in whiteness

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[24] Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990).
[25] Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994.)
[26] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).
[27] Ibid.
[28] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.)
[29] Ibid.

makes white subjects, Lipsitz is able to explain why people are willing to buy in to the oppression of people of color, how it is done, and the ways seemingly separate individual and structural acts of racism are actually deeply intertwined with one another.[30]

In examining how the expansive structure of whiteness translates into the formation of the white subject, Lipsitz's work points to another crucial aspect of examining whiteness; that being theorizations around the white subject and white identity. As Ruth Frakenberg in *White Women, Race Matters* and Jesse Daniels in *White Lies* elaborate, whiteness is a socially constructed location (or "historically produced" as Saxton would suggest) from which matters of privilege, injustice, oppression, inequality, protection, and violence from the state are dictated.[31] And because capital, resources, and power of the American state are directly tied to the formation of specific racial hierarchies, whiteness remains privileged and invisibilized, while the standing of other racial groups are in direct relation to the ways whiteness needs to be calibrated.[32] It is the undergirding force that upholds the meaning and weight of racial structures, as well as explains the unquestioned privileges, powers, and protections that white subjects hold.

Sherene Razack offers an expansive conceptualization of a global white supremacy (premised upon anti-Muslim racism) in her text, *Nothing Has to Make Sense: Upholding White Supremacy through Anti-Muslim Racism*." In this passage, Razack makes crucial interventions in identifying the major tenants of whiteness. Challenging how whiteness is typically located both in terms of political positioning and institutionally, Razack writes:

> First…it is necessary to see [global white supremacy] as a register that spans far-right and liberal positions and that the register is animated by emotions that coalesce to

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.)
[32] Jessie Daniels, *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1997.)

> form an affect. Second, that the origins of white supremacy and white subjectivity can be traced to Christianity and imperialism and that its contemporary expression is inextricably linked with liberalism. White supremacy shifts and morphs according to the specifics of geopolitics and socioeconomic class, but a global white supremacy nevertheless persists. And third, that the law is where white supremacy and racial violence get legitimized.[33]

By emphasizing the highly affective and fluid qualities of white supremacy, Razack debunks the tendency in locating white supremacy onto particular bodies, times, and places, and instead urging that whiteness is pervasive in both liberal and far-right politics. This is particularly crucial to our conversation regarding Cold War whiteness, wherein during this period, the establishment of a liberal politic in the US was intended to not only establish global dominance, but also actively disavow whiteness (while covertly keeping it maintained.) As Razack urges, "A liberal position lies at the heart of racial governance where white subjects and white nations appoint themselves as keepers of the universal, authorizing who can and cannot gain entry… the challenge, then… is to see how far-right and liberal positions reinforce each other, anchoring a global white supremacy."[34] In other words, there is no justice to be found within the boundaries of the political structure of the US: the state itself is inherently a white supremacist entity, regardless of how the structure may be deployed.

Whiteness is haunted by the anti-black and settler colonialist violence crucial to its upholding. As Renee Bergland explains in *The National Uncanny*, whiteness and its properties are haunted through "the encounter with the other." In *The National Uncanny*, Renee Bergland analyzes the ways Indigenous people and bodies had been rendered into ghosts in early American literature. Through the trope like that of "the vanishing Indian,"[35] Bergland's study examines the "specific

[33] Sherene Razack, *Nothing Has to Make Sense: Upholding White Supremacy through Anti-Muslim Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2022), 5.
[34] Ibid, 8.
[35] Renee Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 2000), 2.

discursive technique of Indian removal— describing them as insubstantial, disembodied, and (a) spectral being."[36] The dominance of this particular trope within the American cultural and literary imaginary reveals that the United States requires itself to remain a haunted entity. Through structures of haunting, the US state is able to affirm itself through the control of "the other" as they are forced to embody "national guilt" and pose as "triumphant agents of Americanization."[37] In other words, the formation and proliferation of whiteness, white subjecthood, and the US nation is contingent upon the continuous literal and figurative/ literary murder, and subsequent ghostly return, of Indigenous peoples.

It is here I want to suggest that structures of haunting are encounters that have been forced into a continuous repeat, and that this particular encounter detailed by Bergland is one premised on death, ghostliness, and haunting and gives rise to the senses of dread, terror, fear, fascination, and the desire to know, control and consume. As Bergland suggests, "The central argument of *The National Uncanny* (is) telling the story of a triumphant American aesthetic that *repeatedly transforms* horror into glory, national dishonor into national pride."[38] What Bergland suggests as the act of "transforming horror into glory," is this act of the encounter. Because the encounter (which spells death for Indigenous people) is what generates the US nation, structures of haunting become sutured into official ways of knowing, thereby rendering it permanently in circulation. The US nation, whiteness, and white subjects require the encounter; it craves the encounter; it anticipates the encounter. Hence, the continued decimation of Indigenous people guarantees that this encounter— in the form of haunting— endures. As these encounters inform formations of whiteness *across* temporal and spatial boundaries, these affects are able to circulate because they remain unchained from a particular subject. Furthermore, by emphasizing the encounter, we are able to highlight that

[36] Ibid, 3.
[37] Ibid, 4.
[38] Ibid, 22.

whiteness does not emerge from a particular person, and perhaps more importantly, the "solution" to such a "whiteness problem" does not lie within one particular person. Rather it is a matter of broader, structural upheaval and dismantlement.

Conceptualizing the Cold War

The various stages of how the Cold War has been conceptualized (particularly from an American standpoint) can be traced alongside the timeline of the Cold War itself. As Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell write in *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, "Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, historians of the US… invoked 'the Cold War' in order to make sense of the fraught… 'armed peace' that defined modern international relations. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc… [it is] the name of a political order or world view that was responsible for key features of post-1945 American history."[39] As Isaac and Bell suggest, the major themes, methodologies, and political motivations that drive the various schools of Cold War thought have been directly impacted by the political context in which it is couched.

As D.C. Sharma articulates in "Trends in the Cold War Historiography of U.S. Foreign Policy," through the 1950s and early 1960s, Cold War Studies was dominated by a "conservative backlash" that directly situated the conflict as one between the US and the Soviet Union. For the scholars writing and producing in the United States, this approach aimed to suggest that the Cold War arose due to the Soviet Union's expansion into Eastern Europe, thereby urging the United States (as a global protector) into military action.[40] Thomas A. Bailey (*America Faces Russia*, 1950) and

[39] Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, Introduction to *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, ed. Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.
[40] D.C. Sharma, "Trends in the Cold War Historiography of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 55 (1994): 799.

J. Lukacs (*A New History of the Cold War*, 1966) were some of the major scholars, and such work often aligned with official US state documentation and record of the period.[41]

Starting in the 1960's, Cold War scholarship began to turn towards a radical, New Left framework that reworked theories on "responsibility" of the Cold War. Represented by such scholars like W.A. Williams and his work *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1962), D.F. Fleming (*The Cold War and its Origins*, 1961), and Christopher Lasch (*The Agony of the American Left*, 1969), this school of thought shifted responsibility for the Cold War away from the USSR and on to the US. Arguing that the US had always engaged in interventionist and imperialist action even prior to the Cold War, revisionist scholarship suggested that the US empire had created the spatial and temporal conditions for the emergence of the Cold War conflict and violence.[42]

A return back towards a more conservative (and celebratory) politic soon (re)emerged in response to such work.[43] Less interested in the question of who was responsible for th Cold War, these "revisionist" scholars examined the contexts and motivations of each political actor.[44] John Lewis Gladdis, the seminal scholar of this period, first came into prominence through his works *The Origins of the Cold War, 1941- 1947* (1972), *Strategies of Containment* (1982) and *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (1996).[45] The influence of Gladdis persists, as evidenced by his historical treatise *The Cold War: A New History* released in 2005. Espousing on the ethics of the Cold War, he states,

> The world, I am quite sure, is a better place for that conflict [the Cold War] having been fought in the way that it was and won by the side that won it. No one today worries about a new global war, or a total triumph of dictators, or the prospect that civilization itself might end…. For all its dangers atrocities, costs,

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid, 800.
[43] Ibid, 801.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

> distractions, and moral compromises, the Cold War… was a necessary contest that settled fundamental issues once and for all."[46]

As this quote suggests, Gladdis' writes from a perspective that not only insists on the rigidity of Cold War spatial and temporal boundaries (US vs USSR, West vs East), but also of the ideological formations of morality as well.

In face of such unshakeable justifications of imperialist US military might that continue to resonate in the field, new approaches to the Cold War with the interest of dissolving, dismantling, and destabilizing the very institutions, boundaries, and assumptions in which previous scholarship emphasized and relied upon began to develop. Intent on critiquing the body of dominant Cold War scholarship, a sampling of these efforts emerged in the field of Asian American Studies, as represented by scholars like Victor Bascara (*Model Minority Imperialism*, 2006), Grace Cho (*Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 2008), Jodi Kim (*Ends of Empire*, 2010), Josephine Nock-Hee Park (*Cold War Friendships*, 2016), Christine Hong (*A Violent Peace: Race, US Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific, 2020*) and Lisa Yoneyama (*Cold War Ruins*, 2016). Such works argue that the designation of the Cold War should not to be taken as a bounded or fully realized term. Rather, emphasizing the centrality of race and gender to the project of American Cold War geopolitics, these scholars suggest that the Cold War should be approached as a fluid and unstable process, framework, or analytic in order to "unsettle" the violent modes of its historical institutionalization.

Yoneyama, Hong, Kim, Park, and Cho specifically focus on the figure of the postwar Asian/American as they examine the role of the "protracted afterlife" of the Cold War in producing structures of liberal humanity through the racialization of people of color, like that of the Asian

[46] John Lewis Gladdis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), ix.

American. As Jodi Kim argues, Asian Americans have been constructed as an "immigrant, racial (minority) formation, or putative liberal citizen- subject of the U.S. nation-state, but also as postimperial exile or 'refugee' who simultaneously is a product of, bears witness to, and critiques imperialist and gendered racial violence."[47] In other words, examining the shifting formations of postwar racial structures are critical in identifying the ways dominant Cold War discourses have failed in reckoning with the ongoing and violent legacies of the Cold War.

Lisa Yoneyama explains in *Cold War Ruins* that her usage of the term, Cold War, is referencing a specific project of American imperialism, the institutionalized memorialization of the period, and the subsequent domination of such imaginaries.[48] Such an interrogation of official terminology aims to disrupt the very mechanisms that have allowed such domination to persist, as it is a way to identify the hegemonic temporal, spatial, historical, physical, and psychic boundaries and markings that need to be troubled and dissolved. *Ends of Empire* also uses the Cold War as a temporal, spatial, and analytical framework to analyze postwar US imperialism. More specifically, Jodi Kim poses the Cold War as an epistemological site (or a site that "persist(s) as a recursiveness, a structure of feeling, a knowledge project, and a hermeneutic for interpreting post-Cold war conjecture") that informs the analysis of the formation of contemporary Asian American cultural productions.[49] By reading the Cold War in such a way, *Ends* challenges the ascribed 1946-1989 timeline of the Cold War as it expands on the meaning of the "ends" of the Cold War, that being, the temporal limits, the spatial boundaries, the mechanisms and means of deployment, and the resulting fragments and ruins that continue on into the contemporary moment.[50]

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[47] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold* War (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 6.
[48] Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[49] Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 5.
[50] Ibid.

For my project, I intend to write in the vein of these Asian American Studies scholars, in that my evocation of the term "Cold War" will point to how this postwar moment made up of a complex matrix of political, economic, social policies, and conflicts became memorialized, historicized, and periodized in a broader Western imaginary. In doing so, I hope to actively reject the adoption and affirmation of these official ways of knowing regarding the Cold War.

Conceptualizing the American Horror Film

In the field of horror film studies, American horror films have been characterized by two major periods: classical horror films (1900's- 1940's) that (broadly) situate the horror on external sources and the "postmodern"/"psychological" horror film (1960s-) that feature the "horror of personality, armageddon, and the demonic," or the redirection of horror into the self.[51] This shift was in part due to de-centralization of the American film studio in 1948.[52]

"Independent" (or independently funded) forms of filmmaking subsequently emerged following the 1948 re-structing of the film industry, especially as directors, while no longer chained to specific studio constraints, were struggling with smaller budgets and lack of resources. While the designation of what constitutes as independent remains murky, the "growth" of independent film making resulted in the shifting formations, embodiments, and aesthetics of fear, horror, terror, and violence featured in horror films in the postwar period. Such a historicization has deeply impacted theorizations in horror film studies, as such a shift has been analyzed through such topics like the rise of the "B film," the growing narrative emphasis on psychological horror, the emergence of the slasher film (in all of its forms), the growing use of handheld cameras, and the rise of the character trope of the "final girl."

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[51] Charles Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 10.
[52] Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 76.

The field is often credited with having begun with Siegfried Kraceur's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film.* While Kraceur's work was not uniquely a study on horror film, it deeply impacted Robin Wood's 1979 *Introduction to the American Horror Film,* which is considered to be one of the earliest seminal works on American horror film. Coining the term "return of the repressed," Wood theorizes on the work of repression, oppression, as well as the role of "the other" through "elements of formalist, Freudian, Marxist, and feminist analysis."[53] Wood's analysis of the horror film as a site for capturing the surplus, unwanted, and repressed modes of being and the subconscious has influenced a multitude of different methodological and theoretical approaches in the field, but a primary analytic to have emerged is the psychoanalytic. As a genre that examines the "base instinct" of the human and consistently engages with what makes "us" afraid, scholars have turned to psychoanalysis when investigating the genre. Drawing on Freud, scholars like Barry Keith Grant, Linda Williams, Julia Kristeva (and her theories on the abject) and Barbara Creed (in her work *The Monstrous Feminine* [1993]) have produced their own interpretations on the psychoanalytic aspects of horror. However, critiques of this branch of horror film studies have emerged, as psychoanalysis has been found to be too simplistic, white, cis-, and male centric, heterosexist, and essentialist in its approach to the body, mind, and subject-composition.

Affect theory is not only useful to apply to the analysis of horror films in that it escapes the presumptions phenomenology and embodiment make in regards to pre-existing subjects, but also in the ways it focuses on movement and potentiality rather than as "stasis and arrival."[54] In doing so, we can refocus how subjects/ bodies/ objects interact with horror film. Unlike theories of phenomenology or embodiment that are fully attached to bodies or objects (and assume a particular way in which entities move), affect positions them through "encounters," or as Purnima Mankekar

[53] Ibid, 21.
[54] Mankekar *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality*, 13.

suggests: "subjects and objects function as nodes in the circulation of affect."[55] Although affect is un-anchored to a specific entity as it is "transitive and (unable) to be located," it is crucial to note that affect is not a disembodied, free-floating matter, but that it possesses materiality.[56] And because it is material, it is transferable, can build up, and circulate- all of which lend to its abilities in generating subjects. It circulates and transmits across space and time, which means it can pose subjects/ objects that are not necessarily within the same spatial and temporal plane within the means of an encounter. How might this be significant to our study of horror? Because affect has a materiality, affects as attached to horror films and senses of horror, terror, and fear, can be traced across time and space. In doing so, we are able to take seriously the broader structural histories and contexts in which such films are embedded, as well as point to the deep impacts and shifts that come from the circulation of such films. Furthermore, because affect remains un-articulatable and un-capturable by the consciousness, the affects as attached to such films does not become constrained by the limits of a physical body or subject, and such impulses and the subjects/objects it informs are no longer at risk of becoming essentialized or reduced. Ultimately, as a temporally and spatially unbounded analytical framework, we can more deeply analyze the structures in which such films are situated and consider horror films beyond a cinematic context.

Therefore, as a genre that relies heavily on the need to horrify, the body, as a dynamic entity that simultaneously produces and absorbs meaning, has become crucial to the genre as historically moments of fright have predominantly been located on the body. The emphasis on the body has not been lost on horror film theory, as the field is populated by theories on embodiment and phenomenology. Robin Wood's studies on horror as a matter of embodied difference between monsters and vulnerable human victims has continued to impact the field (Barbara Creed, Jonathan

[55] Ibid.
[56] Mankekar, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality*, 16.

Lake Crane, and Malcolm Turvey). Horror films have also been theorized phenomenologically, as some scholars have traced "the semiotics of the epidermis," or the ways moments of terror and fear emerge from the violation of the boundary that is human skin (Jack Halberstam, Jay McRoy, and Jennifer M. Barker).[57] And finally, there also exists the "cognitivist approach," which has been populated by scholars who have read horror as a disturbance of the normal; a 'frisson that comes about through the affective, apperceptive, and cogitative reflexes" when viewing such films (Noel Carroll, Joanne Cantor, Mary Beth Oliver, and Cynthia Freeland.)[58] While varying, Larrie Duddenhoffer argues in *Embodiment and Horror Cinema* that all of these approaches suggest that "the condition of embodiment, in some way or other, is what makes the horror film horrifying."[59]

In spite of its focus on embodied knowledge, horror film studies and its inquiries into the relationship between horror and race has not been a primary area of study. Matters of race only arise when discussing "explicitly" racialized films (*Night of the Living Dead*, *Blacula*, or *Get Out*) or specific character tropes, like that of the figure of the threatening foreign other (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Alien*). In face of this, a significant study conducted by Robin R. Means Coleman through her text *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (2011) examines the relationship between horror film conventions and the construction of blackness. Coleman's project is one of recontextualization and rehistoricization to examine this "genre of difference."[60] She suggests that difference is critical in understanding socio- political conditions at the time of production, and notably omits a psychoanalytic analysis of violence. Rather, her interest in horrific violence examines the way Blackness and horror work together to provide important "discursive inroads" as exhibiting

[57] Larrie Dudenhoeffer, *Embodiment and Horror Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.
[58] Ibid, 5.
[59] Ibid, 5.
[60] Robin R Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.

a sort of 'return of the re/oppressed."[61] The title, *Horror Noire*, references the dark (noire) and complex relationship between horror, blackness, and conceptions of good/ bad and other binaries of morality. And because of this murky relationship in which the dead and the horrific speak, she finds that horror films engage with structures of imagination and innovation to produce necessary forms of provocation.

Theoretical Approach

In this project, I attempt to draw together all of these fields of studies in order to consider the shifts in racial management in the United States via Cold War orderings. Ultimately, to excavate and trace postwar formations of whiteness, I argue that critical Cold War studies, whiteness studies, and horror film studies must intersect in order to reconsider the assumptions being made around the nation, the justification of imperial violence, the seeming dissolution of whiteness in face of growing racial tolerance and equality, boundaries between the body and mind, moral standards, and de-contextualized senses of fear and terror. This project examines the potential of the American Cold War horror film: as transmitters and repositories of Cold War affects, I find that horror film is a primary space for renegotiating state-sanctioned Cold War epistemologies due to ways they exist as troubling modes of post-Cold War being.

In order to conceptualize how whiteness has coalesced into its current configuration, I want to consider the ways we might be able to utilize American horror films to examine how the mechanisms of whiteness, or how whiteness is constructed, deployed, and given institutional power, shifted in face of a reordering of racial categorizations post WWII, decolonizing territories, and emerging liberation movements. I ask: how did whiteness morph when faced with dramatic, institutional change? How did whiteness cohere into fear? What does whiteness fear? How might

[61] Ibid, 7.

whiteness use fear, horror, and terror to make subjects? How does white fear then emerge within the site of cultural productions, like that of the horror film? How do horror films capture these moments? And how might we trace such feelings within horror films to divulge these naturalized and normalized mechanisms of white subject making?

I argue that horror films are sites of dissonance wherein master discourses regarding race, sexuality, gender, and class proliferate while are also simultaneously disintegrated, mocked, and exposed. Therefore, it is these tensions within the genre that disclose the invisibilized mechanisms in which whiteness requires to operate. Therefore, I suggest that turning to the Cold War American horror film can act as a crucial roadmap to understanding whiteness, white nationalism, and white supremacy both in its postwar and contemporary form.

A Project of Unsettlement

As I situate my project as one that contests official ways of Cold War knowing, I turn to Jodi Kim's theories on *unsettlemen*t as a primary theoretical framework to conduct my work. As *Ends of Empire* suggests, an "unsettling hermeneutic" is a framework that troubles hegemonic theories of the Cold War by contending with official forms of knowing. As she explains, to unsettle is an act of framing the Cold War explicitly as a moment of violent American imperialism. To "unsettle" is to suss out the dominant knowledges born of the Cold War that have worked to suture white supremacy, colonialism, imperialism, and anti-blackness to American geopolitical dominance and "post" Cold War modernities.

I aim to unsettle discourses around the Cold War by tracing Cold War formations of whiteness, and more specifically, the proliferation, maintenance, and preservation of white affect, emotion, and feeling in face of broader liberal, liberal policies adopted by the US. The official liberal state policies indoctrinated during the Cold War period emphasized that as the leader of the "free

world," the American government was dedicated to a platform of racial liberalisms and fighting for equality and democracy for all. Therefore, my work aims to deconstruct these policies as they were the very justification for the repudiation of racism and violence, involvement in the Cold War, and the establishment of a global American hegemony.

In order to unsettle official ways of knowing the Cold War, I draw upon a multitude of frameworks (Critical Cold War Studies, horror studies, Whiteness Studies) to examine how Cold War American horror films have functioned as repositories of white nationalist feeling. I argue that these mechanisms of whiteness as contained in these horror films erupt through feeling, emotional excess, and horrifically embodied subjects. I will be excavating whiteness by analyzing how cinematic horror in these films produce a kind of visual, sonic, and otherwise embodied experience. I primarily employ textual analysis as I examine the various components of the films (whether it be the visual [the images and arrangement and composition of said image on screen], audio [the role of music, sound effects, dialogue within the film], or audiovisual [the simultaneous expression of both components]) and utilize such a reading to disclose the ways white nationalist affect becomes captured within the film.

In analyzing these movies, I am interested in how the process of capturing such white nationalist feeling creates a very distinct kind of texture, or the states and modes of beings that are used to construct and affirm white nationalist projects that complicate our understanding of the postwar (and contemporary) moment. Being a genre of embodied texture, visually, auditorially, gutturally (i.e., the ways in which the horror films may induce a sense of sickness/ revulsion/ hollowness within the gut and belly) etc., the horror film is an ideal site in examining the very ways in which whiteness produces such a texture by becoming attached to bodies, places, times, and spaces as it continues to make/ un-make subjects.

I will turn to four decades of film to trace the ways whiteness formulated a network of feeling. I have intentionally turned to these films to understand the transnational circulation of American horror film and how the industry related to the broader politics at hand. I will be highlighting and closely analyzing blocking and direction (i.e., how are the characters directed to commit violence? How does violence and horror emerge from one body and land on another? What does horror "look" like (costuming, makeup, blocking)? How does the film expose the ways in which threats of horror manifest from the body, and how does this expose the ways in which whiteness has left its trace within horror films?). In other words, I want to highlight how horror emerges from various bodies, spaces, and objects, which then rubs off on to the spatial and temporal logics of each film's cinematic world.

Stakes and Interventions

As a project composed nearly 30 years after the official "end" of the Cold War, I aim to situate this work within the genealogy of scholarship interrogating the afterlife of the Cold War. The resonances of the conflict have resulted in the formation of particular subjects, time, and space— all of which have been molded in the legacy of state-sanctioned racial liberalisms that deny the existence of racial violence. These are the contradictions that emerge in the post-Cold War moment that continue to destabilize the ways in which we understand the US state and its imperialist violence. Therefore, I examine how these films work, exist, and circulate post- Cold War as a way to consider the conditions and consequences of the residual afterlife of the Cold War. For instance, these horror films not only trace the genealogy of white fear, but seemingly capture surplus, outdated, and destructive white supremacist affect and emotion, which in turn has been mobilized in creating conditions of racial violence. And because such moments reside in a cinematic medium, such senses, feelings, and affects of whiteness continue to be circulated, processed, and consumed.

My project asserts that cultural productions must figure into the tracing of the afterlife of the Cold War. As transmitters, receptacles, or repositories of such Cold War impulses, I find that culture becomes a primary site for renegotiating understandings around Cold War geopolitics due to ways they embody troubling and unsettling modes of post-Cold War being. Cultural productions were primary mechanisms for the deployment of American Cold War policy as they rendered broader, geopolitical events as deeply, personal matters and lived realities, by making legible such global moments by gathering them through affect, emotion, sentiment, and feeling.[62] In other words, this project aims to contribute to existing work on the materiality of cultural productions, and their impacts on subject, nation, and memory formation.

Ultimately, grappling with the legacy of Cold War horror films allow us to further complicate the ways we speak about and connect formations of whiteness during and beyond the Cold War period. By reading horror films through an unsettling hermeneutic and examining how they are situated in the afterlife of the Cold War, it pushes us to re-conceptualize not only the Cold War itself, but the role of white supremacy and white nationalism in shaping modes of living, dying, fearing, watching, and producing horror films.

Chapter Breakdown

In attempts to carve out this genealogy of whiteness through the American cinematic horror tradition, I am loosely grouping the films (as well as my analysis) through the decades of the postwar era. While I do not want to assert that there were hard lines drawn in terms of Cold War politics, white nationalist affect, or horror films by decade, I find that it is useful to consider these matters in this way because of how it offers a temporal tracing of these modes of whiteness and horror.

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[62] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 35.

For my **first chapter**, I will be considering the ways whiteness became embedded into the global and domestic landscape during the postwar era. In this chapter, I focus on Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), a film that follows the exploits of busboy Walter Paisley and his descent into murder just as his sculpting career takes off. Set amongst the postwar beat community in Venice, California, I turn to this film to examine the way Corman is posing modern art as a deployment of American Cold War power. As this film depicts, I argue that art is utilized as a Cold War mechanism of American global dominance and control, and it is through art that we can trace insecure masculinities that have etched themselves into postwar geographies. Through the subgenre of the black comedy, Walter is framed as a failing man and artist, and it is through his story that we trace the horror of white mediocrity in the face of the emergent postwar modernist art scene.

In **chapter 2**, I examine the need for whiteness to recalibrate its relationship to gender, sexuality, and class as th**e** struggle to contain the legacies of racial violence during the 1960s wherein the US pushed for a Cold War modernity and the need to discipline and decimate the racial other rapidly increased. In face of these recalibrations of "proper" whiteness (and in particular, proper white femininity), white women became a primary subject in American horror film not only as a site of legible victimhood, but also upon whose bodies this matter was configured. In this chapter, I examine *Hush… Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964), a film that tells the story of Charlotte, a paranoid old woman struggling to survive on her family's decaying plantation marked for demolition to make way for a new Louisiana highway. Through the focus on a "pyscho-biddy"[63] white woman, I argue the plantation is re-made into a site in which the uneasy tension between postwar white womanhood, Cold War technologies, and the right to white property and ownership clash as the legacies of slavery and ongoing racial violence is fully absorbed as mere subtext. Through this analysis, I work to carve out a Cold War Southern Gothic analytic.

[63] Peter Shelley, *Grande Dame Guignol Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.)

As evidenced by the horror films within this period, there was an emphasis on white womanhood and the white woman psyche. Through this refocus of *proper* whiteness (and specifically white womanhood), white woman became the primary subject with access to the ability to feel terror and fear, legibly understood as the victim, and in possession of full subjecthood. In other words, discourses around victimhood become aligned with the white woman. As the 1960's ushered in the cresting of the liberation movements of the Cold War era, the site of the plantation was further rendered as fraught and crumbling, the Southern plantation became the site of "dated" American structures of power, upon which such a disciplining takes the shape of *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* through the gendering of American regimes of racial violence.

In **Chapter 3**, I examine the 1970s, a decade in which the "realities" of racial liberalism and American Cold War policies emerged as the radical impulses of liberation movements of the 60's were beginning to be institutionally managed and dissolved. As the US moved towards the institutionalization of such racial struggles in favor of liberal understandings of racial justice, there existed a growing fear of the corruption of whiteness (in the form of land, body, and soul) as the geopolitical violence mounted. This chapter examines *The Last House on the Left* (1972), a retelling of Ingmar Bergman's *Virgin Spring* set in the suburbs of New York, in which extreme violence acts as a cinematic method to purge and cleanse the American state from manifestations of white evil. While the extreme horror of the film is born of the Vietnam War and the extermination of bodies of color overseas, the director appropriates this imperialist violence and displaces it onto the bodies of corrupted, innocent, and vengeful white subjects. I critique the director's anti-war rhetoric as one that ultimately serves to only emphasize whiteness' own vulnerability to corruption in face of the Vietnam War and broader Cold War violence.

During the 70's, horror films were thought to have become much more gritty, dark, explicit, and "real" (in terms of techniques and storytelling.) In this period, the Cold War (and more

specifically, the Vietnam War) trauma was directly imprinted into actual films through the influence on makeup techniques, monster design, and plot lines. As the ruthlessness of the Cold War became explicit, horror films needed to raise the ante in terms of their depictions of violence. Contextualized within the realm of Vietnam War and anti-war and post-colonial movements in the 70's, I believe that the intimate entanglements between the domestic(ated) white bodies and extermination of bodies of color overseas emerges viciously within the context of this film. I consider the Vietnam War horror film and the how shifting horror film techniques became sutured to the ongoing imperial violence. By examining *The Last House on the Left*, I want to highlight the ways the human embodiment of white evil is framed in the film and how whiteness exploited Vietnamese war trauma. By also examining the work of Tom Savini, a prolific special effects artist specializing in horror makeup, I consider the ways whiteness "grappled" with imperial brutality and how horror was used both to affirm and undo the project that is the memorialization of the traumatic Vietnam War violence.

And finally, **chapter 4**, examines the Cold War in its post-Vietnam War and post-Civil Rights form. I examine the site of the suburban home in order to consider the ways whiteness invested into carceral logics and geographies."[64] In this chapter, I turn to *The People Under the Stairs* (1991) and *Flowers in the Attic* (1987) to investigate the relationship between the suburban home, whiteness, and carcerality. A film that tells the story of a young black boy, Fool, who finds himself trapped in the Gothic home of his landlord and must fight his way out, I look to the depictions of low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles in *People* in order to identify how certain kinds of economic horrors become relegated to the site of the 80's ghetto (and other racialized spaces), and further intwined in the carceral logics of the suburbs. By putting *The People Under the Stairs* in conversation with the 1987 film, *Flowers in the Attic*, a movie that details the prolonged imprisonment

[64] Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 5.

of the Dollanganer children in their family's estate, I examine how failure permeated the suburbs, which in turn erupted into carceral logics.

American horror films allow us to understand how the American nation and empire (primarily defined by its fears and horrors) is deeply embedded within the project of whiteness, especially in a period like that of the Cold War. I read the horror films as repositories of whiteness in the sense that they hold/contain/ store these historicized and cinematic makings of whiteness that are contextually, spatially, and temporally specific. Films are permeable, in that they absorb, reconfigure, contest, and circulate white nationalist feeling, sense, and affect, which consequently allow us to not only understand how a network of whiteness is constructed and affirmed, but how the disavowal of such structures come to be. This is due to the ways they play with subject/ bodily, cognitive, temporal, and spatial boundaries, and cheekily, gruesomely, and terrifyingly embrace the very affects and emotions in which has come to be "repressed."

Ultimately, this project examines the contours of the violence of American Cold War and shows how America's appointment of itself as moral arbiter and principle defender of liberal democracy, pursued even as imperial and domestic racial violence continued apace, required a careful management of racial feeling. The horror film had an important role to play in this project of empire, connecting the domestic to the international and producing and sustaining an American subject able to resolve internal fears and contradictions and maintain a commitment to whiteness and to empire. I will be tracing how whiteness and white affect, feelings, and emotions become consumed, learned, preserved, and disseminated through the American Cold War horror film. By examining the horrific ways in which whiteness manifests in the horror film through a framework Critical Cold War cultural critique, I argue that the Cold War, as a significant entity to have shaped racial formations and violence in their current form, must be de-stabilized. Horror may be one such

place to imagine forms of accountability, challenge official forms of knowing and trouble the hegemonies of the Cold War.

Chapter One: "Sick, Sick, Sick!": *A Bucket of Blood* and the Failures of Postwar White Masculinity

The trailer to the Roger Corman's 1959 film, *A Bucket of Blood* opens with a blank easel, upon which a disembodied hand begins to paint. Loosely painting stick figures of various character—the artist, the poet, the figure model—a voice over proclaims, "All these are Beat, all these you meet in… *A Bucket of Blood*!" As the trailer cuts to clips from the film, the voice over continues, "Come to the land of living dreams! Where realists dream of the unreal! Beatniks at their bawdiest! The creative urge at its most primitive!" The build-up continues as bright bubble text pop on the screen, proclaiming, "A COMEDY OF ERRORS! A COMEDY OF TERRORS! THE PICTURE THAT'LL MAKE YOU…SICK, SICK, SICK…with LAUGHTER!"

The trailer captures the essence of the film: sarcastic and sardonic, it highlights the film's capped sense of dark humor through its representation of a West Coast "cool" beatnik community wherein horror deeply intermingles with art. The trailer also introduces the viewer to the film's main character, Walter Paisley, who is revealed to be the eager busboy of the Yellow Door, a Venice Beach beatnik café at the center of the film. He also happens to be the "sick, sick, sick" individual in question: so desperate to fit into the world of the Yellow Door, Walter turns to murder in attempts to make art.

The wording "sick, sick, sick" is a direct reference to the title of Jules Feiffer's 1956 collected work: *Sick, Sick, Sick: A Guide to Non-Confident Living*.[65] The collection gathers Feiffer's weekly cartoon strips of the same title formerly published in *The Village Voice*. Detailing the various "sicknesses" that plague the postwar American people, Feiffer's work explores the senses of aimlessness, fear, boredom, elation, confusion, jealously; his characters (which include businessmen

[65] Jules Feiffer was a prominent artist for *The Village Voice*. A self-identified beatnik, many of his cartoons were political in nature. Feiffer also illustrated the 1961 classic, *The Phantom Tollbooth*.

struggling with the meaning of life, an interpretative dancer ushering in spring, a jaded woman bored of her dates, a sad eleven-year-old boy striving to fit in, Oedipus and his therapist, a scientist building nuclear bombs) evoke a sense of disquiet, ennui and preoccupation deeply psychological in nature. *Sick, Sick, Sick* is darkly humorous as it captures the essence of the "Beat Fifties," and in many ways, resonate with the tone of Corman's film.

Like the cartoon strip, *Bucket* very much centers around this matter of postwar "sickness," though more so in the context of grotesque horror and less so the mundane (a la Feiffer's reading). To do so, Corman turns to the Beatnik art scene to consider these seemingly horrific "sicknesses" that plague the postwar American. Art, in *A Bucket of Blood*, exists as a kind of receptacle of human excess. By examining the depictions of postwar art movements in *Bucket*, how might we consider the ways whiteness, masculinity, and domestic Cold War cultural shifts manifest into absurd artistic horror? Furthermore, how might we be able to mine the racial logics at the heart of this so-called Cold War "sickness" in order to challenge the ways this concept has becomes vacated of much of its racial and gendered contexts?

In this chapter, I examine Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* and its usage of the horror comedy genre in constructing the sympathetic serial killer sculptor, Walter Paisley. By centering the film on Walter's desperate and murderous bids for artistic and social recognition, the film frames 1950s modernist art and culture as a deployment of American Cold War power that proves to be vacuous, absurd, alienating, and consequently, deadly. By intentionally setting the film's bloodbath in the heart of the Los Angeles beat art community, *A Bucket of Blood* depicts the horror of white mediocrity and failure in the face of the emergent postwar modernist art scene.

In other words, I read the ways Corman specifically poses the "sick", i.e., "hyper"-emotional, impulsive, and "accidentally" murderous Walter as an embodiment of insecure American white masculinity grappling with the seemingly impossible conditions of postwar America. By specifically

examining the ways white masculinity is constructed in the context of this film through setting and characterization, I consider the gendered and racialized implications of the deployment of modernist art as an ideological bolster for the US empire in the postwar era. Walter becomes a site for reading the failure of white masculinity in face of such a process. In this regard, I argue that Corman's signature usage of the horror comedy to create sympathetic monsters is crucial to his identifying the seeming violent cost of American campaigns to dominate the realms of intellectual and cultural production during the Cold War 1950s.

A Bucket of Blood and the Cold War Cultural "Underground"

I choose to begin my dissertation with an analysis of *A Bucket of Blood* because of the ways it intersects multiple pulses that is crucial to the study of Cold War horror film. Therefore, while *Bucket* is not Corman's most successful nor most popular film, the political junctures in which the film occupies is crucial to the analysis of American Cold War horror films released in the decades following *Bucket*.

One of the most notable aspects of *Bucket* is that it released at moment of significant transition, not just in terms of American horror films, but broadly American culture. And at the time of *Bucket's* release, there had begun the emergence of postwar mass culture, which in turn became a Cold War political battleground. As David Cochran states in *American Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era*, the postwar era, "witnessed an explosion of new forms of mass media… which precipitated a cultural crisis."[66] In attempts to carve out a specific American cultural politic that could be in full service to the state, the "prominent intellectuals… found that the growth of these mass-cultural forms posed a serious threat to the republic by despising traditional high

[66] David Cochran, *America Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 3.

culture," in that they "depersonalized the author, dehumanized the audience, appealed to the lowest common denominator, and offered new opportunities for the growth of mass tolitarian movements. Thus… an all-out war was declared in defense of traditional high-cultural values and against the incursions of mass cultures."[67] He argues there was a push to censor these cultural forms "to repress the darker aspects of American social thought – the strong sense of doubt and contingency, the fears born of World War II, the atomic bomb, the Cold War, and replace them with a much more affirmative vision."[68] However, Cochran urges that the "violence, chaos, moral ambiguity, and alienation that marked such disparate popular-cultural forms as film noir and comic books did not disappear. Rather they were driven underground resurfacing in other popular-cultural venues."[69]

Mass culture, as Cochran argues, became a particularly powerful site, as it is through mass culture wherein an "underground culture" in which cultural productions primarily situated in "genres dismissed as hopelessly corrupted mass-cultural forms"[70] managed to "produce art that went to the heart of the cultural contradictions of Cold War society, that thrived on chaos, ambiguity, irony, and juxtaposition."[71] As detailed by a multitude of scholars of Cold War culture (including the likes of Christina Klein, Frances Stonor Saunders, Thomas Doherty), culture was a major site of Cold War contestation, both on a domestic and global level. *Bucket*, as made evident through its narrative focus on "societal detritus" resulting from the conflicts of the Cold War and in the ways it represented new forms of culture-making that challenged hegemonic "high-culture" values of Cold War American society, is one such example of an underground "mass cultural form."

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid, 13.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid, 14.
[71] Ibid.

Cochran dubs Roger Corman as a filmmaker whose work was one of "vulgar modernism."[72] Borrowing the term from J. Hoberman, Cochran describes it as a sensibility that is concerned with "the specific properties of its medium or the conditions of its making."[73] Analyzing *Bucket* (alongside *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Creature from the Haunted Sea*, the three films making up Corman's unofficial trio of black horror comedy), Corman created a "tawdry, alienating universe with a modernist comic vision."[74] In other words, what made Corman's work particularly revolutionary was its sense of self-awareness and its willingness to "flout" Cold War cultural norms, a critique that could very well be extended to the other postwar horror films I analyze in this project.

While I do agree that *A Bucket of Blood* is indeed politically significant and resides at the juncture of a multitude of pulses of the postwar era, I argue that these analyses that solely frame horror film as radical sites of culture lack an analysis of structures of power, and in particular, race, gender, sexuality, and class and how they function within the broader scope of these films. Hence, this is where I situate my intervention, as I ask: how might these politically potent horror films also function as sites wherein postwar whiteness proliferate? Similar to all of the other films highlighted in this project, in attempts at mitigating these tensions, *Bucket* turns towards white male victimhood as the ultimate site in which to locate the horror of Cold War tension. Due to postwar horror films' tendency in posing whiteness as what is most in peril, the most vulnerable, and susceptible to be impacted by the Cold War geopolitics, I argue it is crucial that we read these films in relationship to structures of Cold War whiteness.

Set on the beach towns of Los Angeles, Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* tells the story of busboy Walter Paisely (Dick Miller) who desires to achieve a beatnik lifestyle, similar to that of the patrons that he serves (and in particular, poet Maxwell H. Brock [Julian Burton]) at the Yellow Door

[72] Ibid, 163.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

café. Returning home one night after a long shift, Walter tries his hand at sculpting in a "beatnik" fashion. As he grows increasingly frustrated with the task, Walter accidentally kills his landlady's cat. Panicking, he impulsively covers the cat in clay to mask his crimes. Realizing the "sculpture" for its potential, Walter brings the dead cat to the café the following day. Various beatnik customers, including his romantic interest Carla (Barboura Morris), see the piece and lauds Walter for his newly discovered artistic talent.

Following a party at the Yellow Door, Walter is trailed by an undercover police officer (Burt Convy) who believes that Walter is in possession of heroin. A scuffle inevitably ensues; Walter hits the police officer in the head with a frying pan, instantly killing him. In an effort to cover up and capitalize upon his murder, Walter resorts to his newly discovered habits: he covers the corpse of the policeman in clay and presents it as his next sculpture titled "Murdered Man." It is an instant success with the patrons of the Yellow Door. Walter becomes a local celebrity, though the upkeep proves difficult: following the successful unveiling of "Murdered Man," Walter kills once more. Luring one of the regulars, Alice (Judy Bamber), to his apartment under the guise of the request that she sit for him, he ends up strangling her with a scarf. Her clay covered corpse is showcased at a party the beat community throws in Walter's honor to celebrate his work.

It is during the party when the ruse comes crashing down on Walter. Digging under the clay only to discover real flesh and hair, Carla realizes that his sculptures are made of real corpses, and that he is a murderer. Carla, who Walter promised to sculpt, runs off in fear and is chased after by Walter into a lumber yard. As Walter pursues Carla, he is suddenly haunted by the voices of those he had killed and suddenly departs and forgoes the pursuit. The police, Carla, his boss Leonard (Anthony Carbone), and Maxwell find Walter in his apartment dead, having hung himself. Maxwell closes out the movie, noting the "pure" artistry of his lifeless corpse, as it was seemingly Walter's "best work" yet.

1950s Sickness and Art

A sense of "sickness" permeated the early postwar decades, and this is taken up in *Bucket*, albeit through a lens of horror and humor. In the postwar era, there was a turn towards psychology, psychoanalysis, and the working of the inner mind. As the rise in cultural conserservativisms lead to an increased concern with the ways shifting postwar society was resulting in deviance and "monsters" emerging from dark postwar underbelly, the 1950s became a moment both "legitimate" and "pop" psychiatric science began to dominate cultural and societal landscapes. As Nancy Schnog writes, "From World War II through the early 1970s, these core ideas—repression, resistance, the centrality of sexuality, the Oedipus complex, transference—wielded a tremendous amount of power within the academy while gradually filtering into and becoming part of the psychological common sense of the American middle and upper class."[75] Notably, pop culture chimed into the national conversation, as Schnog notes, "Popular cultural forms in America have helped to stir widespread interest in psychoanalysis and its therapeutic offspring."[76] While its emphasis on the therapeutic is rather light (if entirely absent), *Bucket* very much can be located amongst this growing American postwar fascination with the "self, its interior…inner experience…and psyche" through its study of the "sick" beatnik.[77]

The beatniks of *A Bucket of Blood* are sick. Malaise permeates the club, the "premier" artists of the establishment all "ill" from the postwar conditions of "peacetime," and spend most of their energy grappling with the costs of existence. They are discontented, jaded people and see art as a way out. (Though, as Walter proves, art is just as deadly as the rest of the society.) However, what is

[75] Nancy Schnog, "On Inventing the Psychological," in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America*, ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 5.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid, 1-2.

crucial to note about narratives of postwar "sickness" that pervades cultural forms at this time is that it remains decontextualized from structures of race as it poses it as a universalized, amorphous threat that puts "all" at risk. Therefore, this chapter works to reframe and re-contextualize the usage of "sickness" as a trope in *Bucket* and specifically dissect it through the context of white man victimhood.

In *Bucket*, Walter, unfortunately, is an unwitting sponge to all of these "discontents": desperate to fit in with the many artists of the Yellow Door, he tries to channel his own postwar melancholy as he attempts to mimic the Yellow Door patrons and their art (as created through trouble, trauma, and pain.) In other words, though Walter is ultimately identified as the "sickest" of the bunch, it is crucial to note that he was merely made to inherit the sickness in the café. In other words, "sickness" was crucial to the Yellow Door artists in establishing their legibility as persons and artists, at whatever cost.

Notably, this turn toward the "inner monster" also significantly changed the industry of American horror films. As Charles Derry wrote for *Cinefantastique* in 1974, "Did the horror film die in the fifties and early sixties?…Yes." More specifically, he clarifies that the "classic horror film" had "merely been supplanted by at least two major sub-genres: the science fiction horror film in the fifties, which was a logical outgrowth of the end of the war and atomic bomb anxieties; and what [he] calls the horror of personality films, which seem to have started later, during the sixties."[78] In face of Cold War anxieties of mass destruction, horror films of the early 50s were focused on external threat and monsters, whether that be in the form of giant crabs, aliens, Nazis, or blobs. However, by the late fifties and early sixties, "what was horrible, however, was man. It was a horror that was specific, non-abstract, and one which did not need a metaphor."[79]

[78] Charles Derry, "The Horror of Personality," *Cinefantastique*, Fall 1974, 15.
[79] Ibid.

Creating the Beatniks of the Yellow Door

Bucket evokes a parody of the beats with the intention of drawing in teen crowds through its satirical take on contemporary culture. As Corman suggests, this film was "hip, cutting edge."[80] He goes on to state, "*A Bucket of Blood* was a satire for beatniks. Since the beatnik movement was well known at the time, the very subject and the way in which we addressed it made audiences burst into laughter within the first few minutes. They knew what we were doing and there was no issue."[81]

In other words, there was a certain audience literacy upon which *Bucket* relies. "Juvenile delinquency might have been a dead issue by 1959," writes Mark Thomas McGee, "but no one had taken a good look at the folks too old for rock and roll and hot rods, the ones who hung out in dingy coffee houses instead of malt shops, who wore sweatshirts, smoked dope, and listened to free-form poetry and progressive jazz, a group of people collectively known as Beatniks."[82] While the beats/beatniks have a much more complicated cultural and historical significance than as expressed by McGee, it is notable that art and the creation of art is what he identifies as the most defining aspect of the Beatnik. Hence, in true black-comedy fashion, this becomes the major point of mockery in *Bucket*, as the film lambasts the pretense that is beatnik "artistic" creation. Ultimately, Corman ridicules and identifies the various trappings that make up the art and youth Beat scene of the late 1950s.

How does Corman construct the world of the Yellow Door? The Yellow Door, at first glance, appears to be a rather humble establishment: the entrance is an unassuming door up a half-flight of stairs. Once entered the building, the viewers are treated to equally dingy space; the walls

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[80] Roger Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990), 88.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Mark Thomas McGee, *Roger Corman: The Best of the Cheap Acts* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1988), 95.

are filled with modernist paintings, sketches, and folk art, various sculptures littered around the room. There is also a small stage, perpetually occupied by jazz musicians and spoken word artists. The Yellow Door is populated by young Beatniks: sunglasses clad, beret wearing, their finger snaps and cigarette smoke fill the room. The mundanity of the café is notable, as Morris states: "The locations in (Corman's) films vary between extremely standardized houses and offices… the very dreariness of these black-and-white dramas is an early indication of Corman's view of the world as a closed, empty, pointless place."[83] The coldness of the café makes room for a specific kind of personhood: a newly enlightened (albeit skeptical and artistic) American man, though his inclusion is on a conditional basis. In other words, in the Yellow Door, the boundaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality are drawn very explicitly. As the viewer is brought through the world of *Bucket*, they are made to ask: who has access to art and art/ knowledge production? What does it mean to create in this postwar landscape, and who gets validated as an artist?

Corman drew inspiration from the postwar jazz club/café/ art club and the "trendy beat coffeehouse scene he experienced as a student."[84] To construct the world of the Yellow Door, Corman took from his personal experiences as a student at Oxford University; his tuition paid for by the GI Bill. Upon return from military service, Corman applied to Oxford University in hopes of receiving more training in English literature to bolster his filmmaking skills[85]. While there, he got involved with the jazz club scene nearby.[86] As he details in his autobiography,

> I…started hanging around all the great cafes like the Deux Magots and the Café Flore. I immediately fell in with a crowd of American students. Existentialism was the rage in postwar 1950s Paris. We were all major existentialists, and we belonged to hip jazz clubs like

[83] Gary Morris, *Roger Corman* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 10.
[84] Ibid, 62.
[85] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 60.
[86] Corman also took this time to write several movie treatments, most of which were never made.

> the Rose Rouge and the St.-Germain-des-Pres and swapped membership cards.[87]

His interests in jazz clubbing and postwar existential intellectualism deeply influenced his filmmaking career, which is made the most explicit in *Bucket*. Getting the chance to re-create these moments through an American context when he was slated to direct *Bucket*, Corman and Charles B. Griffith, the screenwriter of *Bucket* and ultimately, Corman's life-long collaborator, "spent a long evening drifting in and out of coffeehouses along Sunset Strip" in Los Angeles. [88]

By setting the film in the world of West Coast beatniks, *A Bucket of Blood* highlights the impossibility that permeated the postwar American cultural landscape. Walter is the figure upon whom the ultimate tragedy is inscribed, and with his death, the film ends somewhat grimly when considering the events leading up to his suicide. While it is a film literally born from standard and generic American domestic trappings (in efforts to keep budgets low, Corman had reused the sets from the film *The Diary of a High School Bride*: a coffee house, a living room, a police station, and an apartment), Corman's choice to focus his narrative on populations of youth nihilistically expounding on philosophy, ways of "proper" living, and exclusive modes of art-making threaten to undo the tightly controlled image of postwar domestic perfection.[89] The patrons of the café construct rather morbid ways of being. Through this, the figure of Walter disrupts not only the world within the film but also stands to disrupt the broader politic of which this film is produced.

Art and Postwar Cynicism

[87] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies,* 15.
[88] Ibid, 62.
[89] Dennis Fischer, "Charles B. Griffith: Not of this Earth," in *Backstory 3: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 60s*, ed. Patrick McGilligan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 164.

Following one of his spoken word performances at the café, Maxwell, the pompous poet and unofficial leader of the Yellow Door, is flanked by Walter. In awe of Maxwell's skills, Walter quickly repeats Maxwell's poem, to which Max only scoffs. Mocking Walter's recitation, he retorts, "Creative living (is ideal) … to be uncreative you might as well be in your grave or the army."[90] As the group laughs, Walter responds, "They tried drafting me once… couldn't past the test."[91] As Walter leaves to tend to his waiter duties, the costumers laugh once again as Maxwell gets in his last gibe: "Walter has a clear mind--one day something will enter it, feel lonely and leave again."[92] Through this exchange, it is established that Maxwell is indeed top dog, and guards his position as leader fiercely. To him, a Beatnik is an enlightened entity, one who embraces "true" and "honest" art and insists on living as so. Always speaking in riddles and rhymes, Maxwell is the gatekeeper of Beatnik "knowledge" as it is only him and those he accept who are made privy the "proper" understanding of Art. In a postwar world that has been ravaged by war, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and total societal collapse, art is life, art is death, and by adhering to such clichés, one will be allowed into the Yellow Door beat scene.

Unsurprisingly, Maxwell's interpretation of Beat art is entirely decontextualized from any kind of analysis regarding broader structures of power. Rather, he focuses on a liberal rendering of life, death, and the human, as he holds "art" to be the ultimate form of expression. Entirely leaving his identity as a white man with power uninterrogated, his musings on "life," "death," and "art" are meant to be taken as the ultimate word. In other words, while never "explicitly" stated in the film, the Beat community in the Yellow Door very much relies on the same racial and gender logics pervasive of American postwar society. White, middle/upper class, straight, attractive: those who are not able to adhere, like Walter, are locked out.

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[90] *A Bucket of Blood*, directed by Roger Corman (1959; Los Angeles, CA: American International Picture), DVD.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film, *Rope*, the film's ambiguous intellectual Rupert Cadell (played by Jimmy Stewart) glibly states in the middle of a dinner party hosted by two murderers: "After all, murder is—or should be—an art. Not one of the 'seven lively', perhaps, but an art nevertheless.[93] And, as such, the privilege of committing it should be reserved for those few who are superior individuals." One of the over eager murderers and dinner hosts, Brandon Shaw, quickly adds, "And the victims, inferior beings whose lives are unimportant anyway," to which Cadell finishes: "Obviously."[94]

While the term "art" is evoked loosely in *Rope*, the film's contextual emphasis helps to draw a clear connection between art, WWII war time violence and postwar trauma, and the flimsy designation that is humanity, murder, and horror.[95] Made eleven years prior to *A Bucket of Blood*, both of these films are deeply fixated on postwar formations and subsequent deconstructions of white masculinity and its inclinations towards violent domination, to the point in which white masculine violence is read as an art. In a cinematic echo of sorts, Maxwell the poet opens *Bucket* with a similar rumination on the correlation between art, death, and the horrific ways in which art corresponds with (and perhaps satisfies) murderous impulses. To the beat of jazz in the background, he recites his spoken word:[96]

Where are John, Joe, Jake, Jim, Jerk? Dead. Dead. Dead.

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[93] "Seven lively" is a reference to Gilbert Seldes' text, *Seven Lively Arts* (1923) in which Seldes argues for the importance of "lowbrow" culture.

[94] *Rope*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1957; Burbank, CA: Warner Bro Pictures), DVD.

[95] Following this exchange, one of the guests especially bothered by these assertions brings up the Holocaust as a way to fully debunk the connections being drawn by Cadell and Shaw. Shaw continues, calling Hitler impulsive and that Shaw would have murdered Hitler due to his stupidity.

[96] The jazz score was composed by Fred Katz, a musician very much involved with jazz music throughout the postwar period. A classically trained cellist, Katz was a founding member of the Chico Hamilton Quintet and ultimately went on to composing for commercials, films, and TV series. He went on to also compose for Corman's *Little Shop of Horrors* in 1962. The music within the film is performed by Paul Horn, a notable saxophonist during the postwar decades. Having also performed with the Chico Hamilton Quintet, Horn went on to work with Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, Buddy Rich, Cal Tjader. A significant West Coast session player, Horn is in the actual film, playing a saxophonist accompanying the many patrons of the Yellow Door. (Chris Barton, "Jazz cellist and educator Fred Katz dies at 94," *Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles, CA], Sept. 9, 2013; Paul Horn, *Inside Paul Horn* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.])

They were not born. Before they were born,
they were not born. Where are Leonardo, Rembrandt,
Ludwig ? Alive. Alive. Alive.
They were born. Bring on the multitude with a
multitude of fishes. Feed them to the fishes for liver oil...

To nourish the artist. Stretch their skins upon an easel...
to give him canvas. Crush their bones into a paste...
that he might mold them. Let them die.
And by their miserable deaths... become the clay
within his hands... that he might form an ashtray
or an ark.

Swim on, you maudlin, muddling, maddened fools.
and dream that one bright and sunny night,
some artist will bait a hook and let you bite
upon it. Bite hard and die. In his stomach, you
are very close to immortality.[97]

Maxwell's poem is a succinct first glimpse into the atmosphere of the Yellow Door. While serious within the world of the film, the poem is meant to be an exaggerated parody of spoken word performances of the period. Bloated, dramatic, and pompous, Maxwell is introduced to the viewers as a much too self-important artist: full of provocative and faux-intelligent speak, he belittles the conformist non-artist and their non-life while idealizing the violently romantic life of the artist. Life is fleeting, and it is through art in which one can find life-affirming meaning. Corman leans heavily into such clichés in order to render Maxwell identifiable as a beatnik.

The poem is also effective in the ways it explicitly makes the connection between violence, art, and the postwar era, through this emphasis on the relationship between life, death, art and white postwar masculinity. This poem sets the film's black humor tone; it fully serves Corman as he ultimately has the last word as he points to the hubris of his characters. The poem is an act of

[97] Corman, *A Bucket of Blood.*

foreshadowing; Maxwell unwittingly details Walter's future killings through his seemingly provocative words. "Stretched skin" and "crushed bones" do indeed become Walter's "clay within his hands." As Morris writes, "Brock stands on a stage far above Walter, but he is 'above' the busboy in every sense—the ultimate hollow hipster who uses verbal paradox to delineate and cruelly control an entire self-enclosed world."[98] As Maxwell's biggest admirer, it is perhaps no surprise that it was Walter who would ultimately take up Max's words too literally. In "committing to memory all of Brock's poems and takes them so much to heart," Walter unintentionally "uncovers Brock's hypocrisy *and* uses Brock's words literally as an excuse for his murderous acts."[99]

Art, in other words, acts as a medium to navigate the breakdown of the postwar white masculine subject in this film. The work of *Bucket* is full of different forms of art: as the film opens with Maxwell reciting spoken word, the camera pans around the Yellow Door and the viewers are treated to seeing the many ways in which art is created in the cafe: through jazz music, painting, sketching, writing, and of course, sculpture. Corman does not pinpoint a specific kind of art movement, but instead gestures broadly to the art aesthetics of 1959. In doing so, art is evoked in *Bucket* very much through parody and approximation and portrayed more so as a practice, a lifestyle, and ultimately, a mode of deviance. While the film draws upon the labor and style of individuals that were involved in the Beat art movement, *Bucket* is itself a jaded approach to postwar art; it is much more fixated on the structures of emotions that are associated with these movements, less so the actual practice itself. Art is a medium to analyze these postwar affects, and in the case of *Bucket*, it are tragic, excessive, and horrific (though are capable in erupting in seemingly darkly humorous ways.)

[98] Morris, *Roger Corman,* 47.
[99] Ibid.

While art certainly has a particular context in *Bucket*, I argue it is also useful to consider the ways structures of art functioned in the US in 1959 that may further contextualize how art is tied to gender, sexuality, and race within the film. The Cold War greatly shaped approaches to American art, not only in terms of thematics, but also due to the way modern art became a crucial cultural mechanism in the "cold" fight against the Soviet Union. As Greg Barnhisel suggests, modern art took on the meaning of "new" and subsequently "pro-Western, pro-'freedom,' and pro-bourgeois…. evidentiary of a pro-Western way of life."[100] In other words, modern art fulfilled an affectual, state-affirming need in which something as complex, incoherent, yet sophisticated as modern art could be mobilized to maintain American hegemony during the Cold War. Modern Art was believed to be an "ultimate" manifestation of American democracy. Unlike Soviet Art that was intensely realist in its approach and functioned as state propaganda, modern art in the US was upheld and believed to be a free, independent, creative, unique and ultimately dominant form of art. Modern art also indicated a robust growth in creativity which was claimed to be symbolic of the fast-developing American populace.[101]

Notably, as Barnhisel suggests, modernist art was initially intended to be an art form "autonomous from the practice of daily life, not subject to evaluation by social or political criteria… (rather) a celebration of the virtues of freedom and the assertion that the individual is sovereign."[102] In other words, modern art was intended to be de-politicized, individualized, and detached from broader structures and institutions. This, arguably, allowed modern art to be mobilized as:

> A set of formal techniques and attitudes… (that included) allusiveness, abstraction, fragmentation and indirectness, the sense of being belated within a cultural tradition, the

[100] Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 2.
[101] Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*, 20.
[102] Ibid, 3.

> subsumption of emotion under formal technique, the retreat of the personality of the artist into the background behind different 'masks' or narrative voices, and above all, high seriousness.[103]

However, these "qualities" of modern art made it a prime site for the CIA and several other government-funded American cultural organizations in advancing their state-building agendas. During the postwar era, these organizations began to promote modern art through such industries including, "publishing, academia, the mass media, arts and cultural foundations, the theater worlds" in order to affirm the legitimacy and superiority of postwar American (Western) democracy.[104]

The intellectual formation around the modern art movement, argues Christina Klein and Cochran, primarily coalesced around the Cold War liberal intellectual. "Disdaining the McCarthy Red Scare…right-wing isolationism… and radical progressive approaches," Cold War liberals turned to the middle ground to establish a liberal politic and build "a consensus… to…isolate subversive political tendencies, but also…to…domesticate and integrate formerly critical cultural and political forms."[105] "Liberals within the consensus," Cochran argues, "viewed themselves as… a 'vital center.'"[106] Hence, modern art and abstract expressionism and their focus on "creating a new style celebrating individualism and freedom," subsequently "dovetailed nicely with the new liberal vision."[107] Ultimately, abstract expressionism became "the visual manifestation of Cold War liberalism… and expression of American culture's freedom and vitality."[108] In other words, particular forms of modern art became a privileged site at the front of the charge for America's cultural Cold War fight for dominance.

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Government organizations included the United States Information Agency (USIA), Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) to the Ford Foundation. (Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*, 5.)
[105] Cochran, *America Noir*, 5.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid, 6.

Bucket evokes a multitude of art movements from the time of the film's release. As evidenced by the paintings and artworks featured throughout the Yellow Door, the celebrated hyper-"realism" of Walter's sculptures, the free verse-stylings of the café poets, the jazz score accompanying every scene (both diegetic and non-diegetic), the so-called "Beatnik art" in *Bucket* referenced broader movements of Pop Art, Modern sculpture, Neo-dadaism, the new Jazz age.[109] Art in *A Bucket of Blood* interpreted Beatnik as a movement tied to modernist art, which itself was moving from the "fringes to the center." To Corman, art was an ideal site to choose for topical parody and satire. As he suggests, *Bucket* "commented on the ambitions and pretentions of the art world."[110] However, I argue that the film does more than just that.[111] With the usage of black comedy to explore postwar modern art, Corman's film art is useful in investigating the formations and implosions of the postwar white male subject.[112]

The Black Comedy

Relatedly, the tone of the film was crucial to producing the sense of postwar cynicism that pervades the film. An early (if not the earliest) example of the black comedy (sub)genre in American horror film, *Bucket* points to a postwar shift in horror audience demands in the late 1950s.[113] Corman himself details, "Film scholars may disagree and find some title I've never heard of, but I believe I

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[109] 1959 is widely considered to be a crucial year for the evolution of jazz. The four major jazz albums of the year (Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*, Dave Brubeck Quartet's *Time Out*, Charles Mingus's *Mingus Ah Um*, and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, 1959) functioned as a moment of transition for the jazz, similar to the way *A Bucket of Blood* functioned for Corman, AIP, and the horror film genre as a whole. (Kaplan, Fred, *1959: The Year Everything Changed* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).

[110] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 62.

[111] Alongside developing a consistent acting and film crew team that he continued to draw upon for the rest of his filmmaking career, Corman also consistently worked with several screenwriters including Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Mark Hanna and R. Wright Campbell, many of whom were critical figures in the American horror literature scenes (Constatine Nasr, *Interviews,* 185) during the postwar period.

[112] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 63.

[113] *A Bucket of Blood* was doubled billed with Bernard G. Kowalski's *Attack of the Giant Leeches*, a film that is perhaps deemed more "classically 1950s" monster/sci-fi fare. *Attack* is set in the countryside and features a pair of killer leeches murdering people across the quiet landscape. (Paul Blaisdell, *Monster Maker, Randy Palmer* [Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997], 186.)

was the first and only filmmaker working in the black-comedy 'genre' for some time."[114] As a film released in 1959, *Bucket* came out in a moment in which movie ticket sales had begun to dip. In the late fifties, Corman's film distribution company, AIP, began to embrace parody and comedy-centric horror films, in accordance to shifting audience interest. *Bucket*, in other words, was notable for ushering in the black comedy trend for the postwar era as a form of mitigating postwar affect.

Corman's claims are not verifiable, and filmmakers have always recognized humor as a genre that goes hand in hand with horror. The popularity of black comedies, or at least films that exhibit some kind of genre-mixing of horror and humor, has come in waves, whether it be in the context of 1930's/40's comedy-horrors, 1950s black comedies, 90s slashers, or 2010s nostalgic retro films. In today's film language, the term "black comedy" implies a kind of self-awareness or self-parody, as these films demonstrate a certain kind of "in-the-know" understanding or cultural savvy, particularly about the genre itself. As evidenced by Feiffer's comics for *The Village Voice*, this trope of the audience/creator "in-joke" was part in parcel of the beatnik culture. Hence, much of this "sense" of "self-awareness" that the beats in the film so readily believed themselves to possess adopted to screen by Corman.

In many ways, *Bucket* deploys the "in-joke" rather cruelly: both the viewer as well as the characters that populate the world of the film understand (to a degree) the exclusive and intricate ways that the "beatnik" world and culture work. The only one who cannot buy in to the beatnik scene is Walter; therefore, he is made to be the victim-monster. However, the black comedy facilitates the opportunity for a multi-sited critique: while Walter is indeed the monster, devolving into a serial killer solely for the purposes of acceptance and access to white masculinity, *Bucket* also lambasts and criticizes the environment that fostered Walter's deviance, "exposing" the modern art

[114] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 62.

scene not as one that fosters individuality, personal drive, freedom of expression, but one deeply laden with structures of violence and power.

When we consider the humor in the film, much of it is derived from the miscommunications and misunderstandings, both on part of Walter and the beatniks. Initially, Walter only speaks truthfully, but because the style of speaking amongst the café patrons tends to emphasize sarcasm and one-upmanship, the beatniks are slow to catch on to or entirely disregard Walter. For instance, in the scene when Walter's boss and love interest discover the (murdered) cat sculpture, his boss asks, inquiring of the knife in its side: "How come you put a knife into it?" to which Walter responds, "I didn't mean to." His boss scoffs, and asks: "Just got carried away, huh?"[115] In this moment, the boss does not pick up on Walter's confession of murder and fails to realize that the sculpture is, in reality, a mutilated cat corpse. Connections between individuals feel false and affected, and although the beatniks highly value, and are almost obsessed with, the sense of feeling "alive" (following a decade of death and existing in the threat of rapid destruction), the community is decidedly dead. Through the elements of black comedy, Corman points to the unsustainability of postwar life: both in terms of Walter's necessity to turn to murder in order to affirm his masculinity and artistry, but also the pretentious, contradictory, and toxic beat community. In this way, the subgenre of black comedy allows Corman to explore how untenable life and art-making were in the postwar era, despite the state's assertion otherwise.

Non-Art, 1950s horror, and American International Pictures

As a form of "underground culture," Cold War horror films established a presence in the postwar American cultural landscape in a substantially different way in comparison to something like that of the modern art movement. Just as deeply impacted by postwar shifts, Cold War horror film emerged

[115] Corman, *A Bucket of Blood.*

in the face of massive structural reorganization in the film industry (due to *US vs. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*), which lead to the focus on producing B-movies that turned toward trend and exploitation-centered based storytelling and aesthetics. In other words, horror films, while very much not a part of the "official" American Cold War nation-building processes, thrived in postwar economic structures that favored films such as *A Bucket of Blood*.

In 1948, the Supreme Court issued the ruling *US v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* An anti-trust lawsuit targeting seven major film companies—Paramount, Universal, MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Bros., Columbia, and RKO— *US v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* aimed to end the common practice of "block booking," wherein studios owned different chains of theater, resulting in major companies directly controlling what kinds (as well as volume) of films that would be shown across the country.[116] Following the ruling, "independent" studios were able to establish a foothold against major studios, subsequently shifting the hegemony of the Hollywood studio system that had dominated the early decades of American cinema.[117] This entirely changed ways in which horror films were produced, distributed, and viewed.[118] Companies like that of American International Pictures (AIP) and Allied Artists emerged as low budget champions as they dominated box office charts and effectively changed the practices within the film industry. [119]

Following the lawsuit, companies established before the ruling either struggled or went out of business, while "new independent companies emerged to fill the void, bringing with them a style

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[116] Blair Davis, *The Battle for the Bs: 1950s Hollywood and the Rebirth of Low-Budget Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 10.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid, 4.
[119] As these films monopolies were broken down in order to make room for a seemingly "stronger," "accountable," and perhaps even "American" economy while moving into the postwar era, US vs Paramount resulted in the end of the B-movie in the ways that they had existed in the pre-Cold War period. Beginning in the 1930s and into the 1940s, B-movies were made to generate a profit (Davis, *Battle of the Bs*, 1) in order to support the bigger budgeted "A films." (Davis, *Battle of the Bs*, 1) From this, the practice of the double bill emerged. Films shown as double bills were often "two films screened in a given movie theater each night…often of 'different quality.'" An A-level film with a major cast and relatively expensive production values were normally followed by a B- movie with lesser-known actors, a lower budget, and reduced production values.

of filmmaking that was decidedly rawer and inherently riskier."[120] As the studio system crumbled, these films emerging in face of a new cinematic structure became the big earners of the decade. B-films took on a different shape and bloomed into their own kind of business focusing in on new genre cycles, demographic patterns and marketing approaches in order to fulfill "increased quantities of cinematic entertainment."[121] Furthermore, the invention of the TV also changed the production of film, and specifically that of the horror film. As the incentive to go to the theater decreased with the introduction of television, independent companies were particularly concerned with producing on a lower budget. These films made for low budgets ended up fueling the "B-Market" of horror films, which in its own way, occupied a particular aesthetic, method, and context of telling horror stories that cycled back and ruminated on the traumas of WWII and the postwar era. These films existed in as an unnerving space that shaping ways of being, living, and existing in the 1950s present.

The Emergence of the B-Movie/ Shifting Postwar Horror Industries (American International Pictures)

A Bucket of Blood is one of the films deeply associated with these shifts in the film industry in large part due to its distribution company, American International Pictures (AIP), which was one such B-movie company that emerged in the postwar era. American International Pictures was established in 1954 by Samuel Arkoff and Jim Nicholson.[122] While the company was in competition with the likes of Universal, Columbia, and other bigger companies, AIP rose to the ranks as one of the biggest production companies of horror and exploitation films. The company made several different genres

[120] Davis, *Battle of the* Bs,10. Such a practice was said to have developed prominence during the Great Depression when film attendance began to dip. By showing two feature length films for the price of one, audiences would be drawn to the cinema. According to Davis, by 1932, about 40% of American theaters were double-billing their films, increasing to 85 percent in 1936. (Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 3) Much of these strategies to double bill were in attempts to remain competitive with the studio owned theaters. Following the antitrust ruling in 1948, the entire structure took a dip as tickets began to decrease.
[121] Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 1.
[122] Michael J. Weldon, *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 42.

of film (including sci-fi, teen, Western) and came to be known as a low-budget producer of film that translated into high capital returns.[123]

AIP as a production company was specifically interested in engaging "niche" (but economically potent) audiences as well as certain popular topics all in the name of turning a profit.[124] As a company that aimed to produce "entertainingly" controversial films, AIP, according to Yvonne D Sims, "earned its reputation by shamelessly copying and mass-marketing trends or whatever social problem received great publicity in American culture. [125] In other words, these company was not necessarily bent on challenging the particular societal structures in which these films were embedded within; rather, they were focused on counterculture sentiments and "youth disillusionment" in order to capitalize upon a growing youth market that seemingly desired to see such representations on

[123] In the 1960s, the company turned to distributing international horror films (predominantly Italian films), and in the 1970s, began to turn to releasing movies that were in popular genres at the time including kung-fu and gangster films. It was also during this period that the company produced several blaxploitation films (several of which were horror films) including *Blacula, Sugar Hill, Abby* and *J.D.'s Revenge*. AIP also expanded into TV production (creating American International Television in 1964) and had several subsidiaries. Such companies included Anglo-Amalgamated Film Distributors, Cinerama Releasing Corporation, Commonwealth United Entertainment, Italian International Pictures, Telefilms of Canada, United Producers [Releasing] Organization, US Films/ Fanfare Film Productions, Trans-American and Hallmark Releasing Corporation, which pioneered much of the television movies industry. AIP was eventually sold to film company Filmways, which itself was then purchased by Orion in 1982. Much of AIP's catalog is now owned by MGM-USA. (Rob Craig, *American International Pictures: A Comprehensive Filmography* [Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019.])

[124] A mythos regarding the company has made its round on the internet in the past decade or so: supposedly, Arkoff is often attributed to having dubbed the so-called "ARKOFF formula,"[124] which stood for: "Action (exciting, entertaining drama), Revolution (novel or controversial themes and ideas), Killing (a modicum of violence), Oratory (notable dialogue and speeches), Fantasy (acted-out fantasies common to the audience), Fornication (sex appeal for young adults)." Multiple verifiable sources have cited this "formula" (including Indie Wire and university libraries) without a clear source. The most likely lead is from an article, "Straight from the Mogul's Mouth: D2DVD Film School pt. 2" on the website "Pulp 2.0" which states that Arkoff had first discussed this formula during a 1998 interview with the Producer's Guild of America magazine. I was not able to verify this exchange. (Cunningham, "Straight from the Mogul's Mouth: D2DVD Film School pt. 2." *Pulp 2.0*, last modified August 31, 2005, https://d2dvd.blogspot.com/2005/08/so-there-i-was.html.)

[125] Practices such as the double bill defined AIP's business model. According to Yvonne D Sims in *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture*, the company "succeeded largely because they hired directors who worked within the structure of a strict budget and were either unknown or no longer part of the Hollywood A- List" in efforts to cut down on budget. (Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation,* 62) Similar strategies were taken when hiring actors as well. Furthermore, AIP was particularly savvy in terms of identifying a new market: that of the youth, and specifically, the teen. Turning to popular trends when making their low-budget films, the films "were profitable as double features at drive ins" which proved to not only be particularly popular with the American youth, but also ushered in a new way of consuming film

screen.[126] Arguably, this was quite different from movies being produced at this time. While other popular 1950s films such as *Gidget, Tammy Tell Me True* and *That Funny Feeling* often told stories that reaffirmed Cold War conservativism, many of the AIP produced films focused specifically on topics that cracked the veneer that was postwar America, though not necessarily with the intention of radical change.[127]

Notably, AIP's ethos resonates deeply with Corman, which not only manifested in Corman's filmmaking style but also lead to a long-term partnership between Corman and AIP. As Corman described his filmmaking process: "Logic, cunning, conning, a little daring. I was learning how to do whatever I had to do to get what I wanted—and having some adventures in the process. But a big part of learning is also how to rely on instinct, especially when it comes to staying away from a bad deal altogether," Corman, to a certain degree, was invested in a certain kind of formula-driven filmmaking.[128] In many ways, Roger Corman embodied the shifting film industry of the postwar 50s, 60s, 70s, and beyond. A wildly varied career, Corman forged a path through American independent cinema, shlocked up horror particularly as he was one of the "first to recognize a previously untapped teen audience and then exploit the hell out of it," while later in his career was also responsible for widening the distribution of international films by Kurosawa, Fellini and Bergman.[129] Corman is somewhat of a cult figure in the horror film industry, often credited for creating some of

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[126] Yvonne D Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 63.

[127] While the company did not exclusively produce horror films, some of the most popular AIP films were horror films. Some example of horror films produced by the film company in the 1950 includes: *The Beast with a Million Eyes* (1955), *Day the World Ended* (1955), *Swamp Women* (1956), *It Conquered the World* (1956), *Not of this Earth* (1957), *Voodoo Woman* (1957), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), *The Undead* (1957), *Blood of Dracula* (1957), *War of the Satellites* (1958), *How to Make a Monster* (1958), *Night of the Blood Beast* (1958), *The Brain Eaters* (1958), and *A Bucket of Blood* (1959). All directed by the same few directors (Roger Corman, Edward L. Cahn, David Kramarsky, Herbert L. Strock, Bernard L Kowlaski), these films embodied the changing ways in which horror films were being designed, produced, distributed, and consumed.

[128] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 17.

[129] Chris Nashawaty, *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses: Roger Corman: King of the B Movie* (New York: Abrams, 2013), xvi.

the most lasting and influential postwar horror images/cultural products that have been crucial to establishing the genre of American horror.

In some ways, Corman was entirely disconnected from the structure of postwar modern art, and much of this was exhibited by how, through his "creative use of low budgets and his maverick independence" was able to "pioneer a new cinematic sensibility."[130] As Cochran explains, Corman made "no attempt to hide his low budgets, but flaunted them. The cheapness of the sets, costumes, and special effects and the absurdity of the plots and dialogue self-reflexively called attention to the medium and its limitations."[131] Corman had a "low-budget aesthetic," using the limitations imposed on him by financial considerations to make a social comment.[132] The limited number of actors, the few sparsely furnished sets, the outlandish (and sometimes "cheap" looking) special effects and ridiculous looking monsters of Corman's 1950s movies created worlds that were simultaneously claustrophobic, barren, paranoid, vacuous, and absurd.

A Bucket of Blood, as suggested by Corman, was different from his earlier fare. While his films made prior to *Bucket* were primarily action/ teen dramas and horror sci-fis, *Bucket* brought about a seeming "self-awareness" to Corman's oeuvre. As he suggests, "(Bucket) was a major departure in my career. (It) added a sharper, more satirical edge to my films and brought a new level of awareness to my work."[133] There was also an explicit stylistic change that would impact later films he made. As he explains.

> With these pictures (*A Bucket of Blood, Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Creature from the Haunted Sea*), I put together some of the definitive elements of my style: quirky plots built on somewhat gruesome

[130] Cochran, *America Noir*, 155.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 62.

> premises; fast-cutting and fluid camera moves;
> composition in depth; unconventional,
> well-sketched characters; and solid performances
> from the ensemble of 'Corman players.'[134]

Bucket was shot in five days with a $50,000 budget (an experience "that demanded an unprecedented kind of sprinting intensity from the director that proved its own loose, crazy highs just to keep it all flowing together" to which Corman ultimately deemed a success; the "audience at the sneak (preview) laughed throughout the film and applauded at the end."[135]

Because of its low budget, the film itself was shot on leftover set pieces from another AIP film, *Diary of a High School Bride*.[136]According to Mark Thomas McGee in *Fast and Furious: The Story of American International Pictures*, the film was made after Corman toured the set with writer Chuck Griffith. As Griffith states in an interview Dennis Fischer, realizing there was a "Beatnik coffeehouse, a jail, a lumberyard [from the] studio lumber department," an apartment, and a police station set still standing from a previous movie shoot, Corman requested Griffith to write a film utilizing these various settings for a budget of $50,000 ($555,992.54dollars in 2022 standards.)[137] In this way, the film embodied much of the ethos of the company, in that it was quickly made for a low budget, and intended to use up resources the company had on hand.

Crafting Walter and Postwar Masculinity

> Corman's films show man as a passive, servile, conforming
> creature, victimized by natural forces only the lead 'truth-seeker'
> or the supersensitive aesthete seems to be aware of. The characters…

[134] Ibid. Individuals in this "ensemble" included Dick Miller (who played Walter), Jack Nicholson, Barboura Morris (who played Carla), and Anthony Carbone (who played Leonard).
[135] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 63.
[136] *Diary of a High School Bride* was about a young, teenage bride marrying an older man and her fight to justify the union to her friends and family.
[137] Fischer, *Charles B. Griffith,* 164.

> inevitably drop out of conformist society in order to 'discover' some secret that will offer hope and meaning in their lives.[138] (Gary Morris, *Roger Corman)*
>
> ---
>
> Interviewer: In many of your films, you have a weak central character—someone who is sort of a schlemiel . . .
>
> Roger Corman: Of course, in things like *Little Shop of Horrors* and *A Bucket of Blood*, it was deliberate…I personally may rebel against the concept of the hero. It may be that I dislike the hero. And so I deliberately play up people other than the hero. I figure that if you've gone through school and the halfback is getting all the girls, and you get a chance to make films, and the format of the film is that the halfback gets the girl, you may deliberately undercut him.[139] (Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn, Interview with Roger Corman, September 6, 1973)

Walter's tragic tale, notably, provides a logic to the aforementioned postwar "sickness." *Bucket* specifically traces its main narrative of horror alongside that of a transformation. In other words, the viewers experience the film via Walter's journey into becoming an artist-murderer-monster. Hence, his emotions and experiences are the main driver of the film, and through that, the viewers are made to follow this very specific tale of a devolving white man, unable to access the class, sexual, and gender privileges he believes are entitled to him. Corman utilizes modernist art as the medium in which this man destructively attempts to find himself.

Film critic Gary Morris finds that the "Corman's oeuvre is replete with self-portraits of the artist trapped in a universe beyond his control."[140] This strongly resonates in *Bucket*: Walter very much "careens" towards his end; this particular path is what facilitates the shift in tone from a black

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[138] Morris, *Roger Corman*, 11.
[139] Constantine Nasr, *Roger Corman Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 79.
[140] Morris, *Roger Corman*, 51.

comedy into pure horror in *Bucket*. This is perhaps best illustrated through the progressions of his kills, and subsequently, his short-lived art career. The first time he kills/sculpts is through the accidental murder of his neighbor's cat. Overcome with guilt and fear, he disguises the cat by covering it in clay and displaying it as "Dead Cat." The second kill, "Murdered Man," comes about through yet another accident when he kills the undercover cop who had followed him home from the Yellow Door. While he is extremely reluctant and confused following this particular kill/sculpt, it is the third kill where there is a marked difference in Walter. Irritated by the snooty Alice, a frequent customer to the Yellow Door, and her doubt in his artistic skills, he tricks her into sitting for him, during which he confidently strangles her and covers her in clay. The next kill is a vicious beheading of a nearby construction worker, which is converted into a bust. His final "work" is himself, the "Hanging Man," which comes to be when he is unable to "acquire" Carla as one of his sculptures. His "best work," as deemed by Maxwell; it is only through death in which he finally gains a form of reverence he so desired from the beat community.

Much of Walter's transformation hinges on his relationship to "artists," as he gauges performances of normativity in relationship to the various people at the Yellow Door. Aspiring for a specific kind of legitimized white masculinity, he specifically looks towards Max the poet and to a certain degree, Leonard, his boss and the owner of the Yellow Door. Women, and in particular Carla who he deems pure, genuine, and worthy, are utilized to bolster and affirm his masculinity by functioning simultaneously as victim, love interest, and artistic muse. Posing Carla as the ultimate site of love, intimacy, and care, Walter craves a normative domestic livelihood. He proposes to Carla by the end of the film believing that he had achieved the proper artistic level and manhood. Upon her rejection, he defaults to murder.

According to Gary Morris, Corman's characters' "motive force is either the struggle for identity or a violent attack based on the recognized inability to achieve identity… (they) lived in a

bleak, often hopeless world surrounded by collapsing social institutions and death."[141] Notably, the narrative of the tortured artist (to the point of being driven to murder) is not new, in fact, according to Carlos Clarens, *Bucket* drew inspiration from the 1933 film, *The Mystery of the Wax Museum*.[142] A classic 1930's American horror film that has since been remade several times (including the 1953 and 2005 films *House of Wax*), *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* details the exploits of a believed-to-be-dead wax sculptor who, to create the most detailed and technical of wax figures, kills and dips the corpses of his murder victims into wax and then put onto display.

However, there is a specificity in the *Bucket* in large part due to the fact that the film is set during the Cold War and therefore draws upon structures of postwar masculinity. Walter's deviancy, is primarily derived through his presumed lack of artistry (and relatedly, his lack of masculinity.) Walter's artistic and general life choices are all violations, whether he is transgressing artistic standards, class standards, or general societal standards regarding a "proper" human life. And I argue this is in large part because of the ways he is chained to postwar structures of white masculinity. Resonating with white masculinist formations at the time such as the white nationalist underpinnings of nuclear war, the intense masculinist disciplining pervasive throughout structures of suburban domesticity, or structures of American manhood tied to broader Cold War geopolitics and war making, *A Bucket of Blood* dives into the complicated matrix of race, gender, and sexuality and considers just how absurdly violent such a matrix was during the postwar period.

In other words, art offers no such salvation or deliverance from postwar "sickness", nor is it immune to state exploitation and absorption. Hence, when Walter believes that to be a practitioner of the beatnik lifestyle would not only mean that he would be able to achieve proper manhood, but also that of proper humanity (and through that, acquire friends, respect, and most importantly, love),

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[141] Morris, *Roger Corman*, 8.
[142] Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997), 148.

he seals his own fate. Failing to contend with the broader structures attached to the postwar art movement in which he so deeply reveres, Walter ultimately only commits violations as he attempts to become part of the beatniks. Despite creating the most lifelike and "life-filled" art pieces (something that is declared as an ultimate mark of artistry and talent) out of all the artists in the Yellow House, he is doomed to fail and ultimately eliminated.

Conclusion: The Transition of Roger Corman (*Little Shop of Horrors*)

Roger Corman's 1960 film, *Little Shop of Horrors* can be interpreted as a somewhat "spiritual" sequel to *A Bucket of Blood*: like *Bucket*, the film takes place in postwar LA, although unlike *Bucket*, *Little Shop of Horrors* takes place in a flower shop on Skid Row. In many ways, *Little Shop of Horrors* is perhaps Corman's best known film, though in large part due to the high school musical circuit version (rather than Corman's original film). The film (which adopts a similar sarcastic, humorous, and self-aware tone like *Bucket*) also draws upon a very similar thematic to *A Bucket of Blood*: this time, Corman focuses on a working class, Jewish owned florist desperate to survive and navigate the 1960s. The main protagonist of the film, Seymour (Jonathan Haze), a shopkeeper, creates a new breed of the Venus Flytrap (Audrey II). Though Audrey II brings in business, her upkeep is high: she requires human flesh and blood to survive, and she has deemed Seymour her appointed hunter. Like Walter, his creation eventually careens out of control to the point where he has to make the ultimate sacrifice. The movie ends with Seymour climbing into the flower to be consumed. Like *Bucket*, the film is suffused with white male insecurity. Murder "accidentally" becomes the norm as both men quickly are able to identify the "easiest" and most vulnerable people to target to protect and (temporarily) empower themselves. They struggle with their relationship to white male power, and though they both end up making the "choice" to commit suicide by the end of the film, there is no broader reckoning with the power structures that have facilitated their choices to begin with.

In some ways, the transition that *Bucket* proved to be somewhat indicative of a shift not just for Corman himself, but for the horror industry broadly. *Little Shop of Horrors* was one of the first films of Corman's to be released through his own distribution company, Filmgroup, as he stepped away from working with AIP by the 1960s.[143] Thematically, both *Bucket* and *Little Shop* are "early" examples of a wider industry push towards focusing on psychological horror, or the postwar "sickness" to a much wider degree. The horror went "internal" (as mental health got further demonized), and as the 1960s began, it was the deviance of humanity, rather than any alien, monster, or a creature born of a science-experiment gone wrong, that becomes the main source of horror in horror films.

By the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the typical horror movie themes no longer were attracting the audiences at the high rates that they had earlier in the decade.[144] *American International Pictures* and Roger Corman's work came to be in a moment of massive change and transition, both within and beyond American borders. In a Cold War world, the company relied upon the making of a new US capital and economic structure, yet also turned to narratives that undid the work of the postwar empire building. In this way, I argue that *A Bucket of Blood* embodies the impossibilities and contradictions of American empire and whiteness. Examining the way postwar modern art and knowledge production during the 1950s was linked to the Cold War state building, *A Bucket of Blood* locates the narrative of sympathetic monster, Walter Paisley, to identify the gendered and racialized residuals in face of such a geopolitical project. By considering the changes in the industry that were soon to come, I find that it such modes of the horror film that can, in some ways, most astutely

[143] Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies*, 45.
[144] Because of this, AIP began to rely on the strategy of importation and exportation of films. Establishing the American International Export Corporation in 1960, the AIEC was the sales arm of AIP and was responsible for "distributing company product outside the US." AIP mostly turned to Italian film (including such films like *Sheba and the Gladiator* [1959] and *Goliath and the Barbarians* [1962]) but also distributed films from other countries, including France, Denmark, Germany, Britain and the Philippines. (Craig, *American International Pictures: A Comprehensive Filmography*, 78.)

trace the circulation of white affect, feeling, and emotion through the reformulation of such cinematic traditions.

Chapter Two: Cold War Southern Gothic: *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* and the Management of the Postwar Plantation

In her article, "The Cold War Gothic Poetry of Sylvia Plath," Kathleen Nichols examines what she terms the "Cold War Gothic." Utilizing Sylvia Plath's poetry as an example of the Cold War Gothic, she argues that Plath's writings were suffused with the dread of modern postwar horrors and intense fear of widespread nuclear destruction. A moment that was permeated by the sense that "history was dead, the future stillborn," all "trapped in a stagnant and decaying present that was incapable of going anywhere," the Cold War only could offer a "faceless and identity-less posthuman world that haunts."[145] There simply was nowhere left to go except 'blackness and silence.'"[146] It is this particular sense of deep, hopeless doom that informed the aesthetic/cultural traditions of the postwar era of which Nichols coins the "Cold War Gothic."

Dread, decay, and death similarly suffuses the world of Robert Aldrich's 1963 film *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*. The film tells the story of ailing, town pariah Charlotte Hollis, the last direct descendant of a decaying plantation marked for demolition in 1960s Louisiana. Conflicting forces clash on the Hollis Plantation as Charlotte's world begins to crumble: as the Louisiana Highway Commission closes in on Charlotte, demanding she leave, she desperately calls upon an estranged cousin to fight for Hollis House. Sweet cousin Miriam does indeed come, to the relief of Charlotte, but why is it that the moment Miriam arrives, strange happenings abound around the mansion? Are Miriam's intentions true? "Deliberate contradictions and reversals characterize the cinematic version of Robert Aldrich, which also parallels the bleak postwar (society)," writes Tony Williams in *Body and Soul: The Cinematic Vision of Robert Aldrich*, a pulse which proves to be central to *Sweet Charlotte*. By the end of the film, the contradictions and reversals are managed as Charlotte is

[145] Kathleen L. Nichols, "The Cold War Gothic Poetry of Sylvia Plath," in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. Charles L. Crow (London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014), 330.
[146] Ibid, 338.

cleared of her crimes (no longer the town pariah) and "redeemed," and the state gains control over the land.

With its focus on secret plots, ghostly hauntings, and violent family inheritances, *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* is a crucial entry in the genre of Cold War Southern Gothic horror. Like Plath's text, *Sweet Charlotte* captures a moment of "desperate" postwar transition. However, I make one departure from Nichols' framework: through my analysis of *Sweet Charlotte*, I make a crucial intervention into the Cold War Gothic, in that through the critique of *Sweet Charlotte*, we can consider the racial logics that undergird the anxieties of postwar horror. In this chapter, I consider how Charlotte and the former plantation are contained, their threatening Southern embodiments mitigated in favor of Cold War liberal development. In other words, I consider how the Cold War Gothic was not merely the anxiety of societal destruction in face of nuclear annihilation, but also an anxiety regarding the re-structing and destruction of "past" racial violence as the US forged its Cold War modernity. In *Sweet Charlotte*, an American haunting is born out of postwar liberalisms.

In this chapter, I formulate a framework of the Cold War Southern Gothic as I examine *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*'s complex positioning of white woman victimhood on the postwar plantation. I examine the film's inability in reckoning with legacies of racial violence and slavery, which also acts as an explicit cinematic moment of Cold War liberal management. As Charlotte is made to embody and absorb the Gothic excesses of the Southern postwar plantation, *Sweet Charlotte*'s horror emerges from Cold War mechanisms bent on the neutralization of past and present Southern racial violence.

Cold War Gothic Film

According to Daniel Schnopp-Wyatt, Gothic horror film witnessed a resurgence between the years of 1957 to 1976.[147] The proliferation of the Gothic on the postwar screen, Schnopp- Wyatt argues, indicates a moment in which the US attempted to forge new methods to "tell stories" and transmit social "mythology" through film.[148] Postwar white America was afraid; it was imbued with a sense of fear, horror, and anxiety towards, "the threat of a communist planet and nuclear annihilation…conformity and dissent, ethnic mutinies, juvenile delinquents, uncontrolled science, and changing gender roles."[149] The Cold War Gothic horror film often featured a "world of decay" where "mansions crumble…once magnificent edifices reflecting the moral decay of the family that dwelled within. Families crumble, poisoned by secrets, prone to madness… the innocent who stumbles into the family or into the family seat finds herself gazing into the void."[150] In other words, with its emphasis on the abject, unspoken, and the repressed, the Gothic seemingly proved to be effective in mitigating (through metaphor) these postwar anxieties.

As elucidated on by Kathleen Nichols, the postwar period was haunted by the threat of death and destruction, which in turn, "deprived life of meaning."[151] This listlessness found direction in the Gothic, as Schnopp-Wyatt states, "the Gothic world is neither lawful nor irrevocable… many a body or soul is preserved by the elimination of this liminal state. To be entertained by the Gothic

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[147] As Schnopp-Wyatt explains, three major kinds of gothic horror films were particularly popular during this era, that being, films featuring Frankenstein, Dracula, and the figure of the lesbian vampire. All of the kinds of films revolved around sex, death, and power. The first film of the gothic horror boom was The Curse of Frankenstein, released and produced in 1957 by Hammer Studios (one of the great British film companies of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.) (Schnopp-Wyatt, "Bloody Kisses," 83) Schnopp-Wyatt suggests that the Gothic is a multi-dimensional term as it is, "An aesthetic, a sensibility that has been applied to landscapes, paintings, film and literature. It has been applied to music, architecture, ornamentation, and subcultures. It has been applied to works of 'high culture.' It has been seen as an expression of both personal and cultural anxiety. It is an aesthetic of invocation. It speaks the language of terror and mystery, of despair and malignity, of human puniness and isolation. (Scnopp-Wyatt, "Bloody Kisses," 31) Some identifiable tropes of Gothic genre include: the haunted, sprawling mansions, rotten and decaying ruins, the Trickster, the Wise Old Man, and the Hero.

[148] Or what Schnopp-Wyatt defines as a "potent vehicle for the creation and conveyance of myth by virtue of the psychological duality of the moving image – it is simultaneously real and unreal." (Schnopp-Wyatt, "Bloody Kisses," 90.)

[149] Daniel Schnopp-Wyatt, "Bloody Kisses: Cold War America's Love Affair with Gothic Horror Film" (PhD diss., Union Institute & University, 2005), 63, ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

[150] Ibid, 32.

[151] Ibid.

is to experience death and undeath by proxy, to take an unnerving but safe glimpse into the void… combining pleasure with an intimation of mortality."[152] In other words, the Gothic offered a space to indulge in the question of what it means to reach total destruction in face of the Cold War.

The Psycho-Biddy Genre (Hagsploitation)

While certainly categorizable as a Cold War Gothic horror film, *Sweet Charlotte* has a unique take on the genre as the film also falls under the subgenre of hagsploitation (also known as Grande Dame Guignol, psycho-biddy horror and hag horror.)[153] Aldrich's two films, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* and *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* are perhaps some of the most well-known in the genre. [154] A popular story type that dominated the horror scene through the 1960s and into the 1970s, hagsploitation drew inspiration from Gothic novels of the 18th century, Victorian novel and theater, early horror cinema from the 1920s and 1930s, film noir, and of course, as indicated by its name, the Grand Guignol theater based in France during the late 19th to the mid 20th century.[155] As evidenced through these various influences, hagsploitation embodied a kind of Gothic representation that painted portraits of the perils of white aging womanhood in the postwar world. In his work, *Grande Dame Guignol Cinema*, Peter Shelley describes the of woman characters at the center of the genre:

> (Grande Dame Guignol) is an amalgamation of two key and seemingly contradictory concepts—the grande dame and Grande Guignol. A grande dame is defined as an older woman of great dignity and prestige. A cultural and literary archetype,

[152] Ibid, 51.
[153] Peter Shelley, *Grande Dame Guignol Cinema: A History of Hag Horror from* Baby Jane *to Mother* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 2.
[154] Ibid, 13.
[155] "Grande Guignol" refers to the Grande Guignol theatre company in Paris active during the late 19th through the mid 20th century. The grande guignol plays specialized in "macabre shockers" that always featured graphic violence, like gouged eyeballs, burning and torn flesh, beheadings, acid-burnings, dismemberment, and other forms of torture and mutilation. The plays explored themes of suffering, insanity, vengeance, and the fear of the unknown through extreme exploitation and body horror. (Shelley, *Grande Dame Guignol.)*

> she is usually portrayed as a flamboyant woman
> prone to extravagant and eccentric fashion, such as feather boas, large hats,
> and excessive costume jewelry. She may be preoccupied with
> the concept of ladylike behavior, and expect all those around her
> to conform to her high standards of etiquette.[156]

As Shelley suggests, this genre was rife with contradictions: how might white womanhood simultaneously be unraveled and affirmed in the world of postwar shlock horror? However, it is these very contradictions that open up hagsploitation as a productive site to be critiqued and examined, particularly concerning the structure of white womanhood, its shifting power during the postwar era, and its complex relationship to victimhood.

The "grande hag dames" of the Guignol subgenre are gendered in particular ways; their characterizations often identified as grotesqu*e*. The grotesque, as defined by Dara Downey, is a focus on "the odd, the eccentric, and the physically or sexually atypical."[157] In other words, grotesqueries permeate the genre; Aldrich's work in the psycho-biddy genre is no different. In describing Bette Davis' character in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*? (a description that is very much applicable to Charlotte (also played by Davis) in *Sweet Charlotte*), Shary and McVittie identifies her "grotesque-ness" and "psycho biddy" tendencies as she is "psychotic and unpredictable, a nightmare vision of a woman refusing to pass quietly into the proper performance of senescence."[158] These "grotesqueries" do not only emerge through characterizations, performances, and character design within these films, but also through the casting. Hagsploitation films often feature older actresses who had been popular "glamours divas" of decades past (Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Mary Astor,

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[156] Shelley, *Grande Dame Guignol*, 1.
[157] Dara Downey, "The Gothic and the Grotesque in the Novels of Carson McCullers," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, ed. S.C. Street and C.L. Crow (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 365.
[158] Timothy Shary and Nancy McVittie, *Fade to Gray: Aging in American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 85.

Tallulah Bankhead, Olivia de Havilland) but have since now turned into "abject witches."[159] In many ways, some argue that this subgenre is exploitative not only in content but also in terms of its production.[160]

I specifically look towards hagsploitation in my study of Cold War Southern Gothic in large part due to their convergences: both subgenres are interested in the grotesqueries of age and aging, the unearthing of family secrets, and horrific manifestations of "unsavory" pasts. Time and space are rendered blurry in these (sub)genres, and when considering the figure of the old, white, and once genteel Southern woman, they collide and manifest into disaster as evidenced by *Sweet Charlotte*.

What do we do about Sweet Charlotte?

While *Sweet Charlotte* exists at the intersection of several (sub)genres, the film hones in on one primary question: what is Cold War America to do about the South and its "difficult" histories? The film uses the figure of Charlotte Hollis to contend with this question, an ailing white woman who is the sole (direct) descendant that stands to inherit the Hollis plantation. But to Charlotte, the plantation is not merely a site of family wealth; rather, by the end of film, it is quite clear that Charlotte sees the plantation as an extension of herself.

The Hollis estate, the plantation at the heart of the film, is haunted. Though, it is not "explicitly" haunted by the spirits of former enslaved people or the racialized violence of the past. Rather, the haunting takes the form of the murder of a white man, for which the blame is fully

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[159] Tomasz Fisiam, "Hag Horror Heroines: Kitsch/Camp Goddesses, Tyrannical Females, Queer Icons," in *Redefining Kitsch and Camp in Literature and Culture*, ed. Justyna Stepien (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

[160] However, it is also important to note the subgenre has also been situated in the context of the queer and camp. As Fisiam writes, "Grande Dame Guignol operates in a similar manner to (MGM musicals.) Dance numbers are replaced with emotional verbal gymnastics. But the rich costumes, hyper-stylized settings and, most of all, iconic actresses are all present. The aesthetics of camp are reflected in an unashamed over the top-ness, for 'camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is too much.'" (Fisiam, "Hag Horror Heroines," 46) By examining the (hyper) theatricality of the genre, I believe we may mine and deconstruct the importance of the subgenre and read the various intersections that make up those involved in these films as well as its consumers.

placed on Charlotte. His murder is what is identified to be the "trouble," the main roadblock that is stopping Charlotte from "properly" aging, relinquishing ownership over the plantation, and allowing the state to transition her property into idealized Cold War space. His death, and nothing else, is the defining historical "trauma" of this Southern plantation.

By the end of the film, the Hollis planation (and all of its remaining residents) become a site of Cold War management as it is the state that ultimately prevails. The Hollis descendants are eliminated, the last sent away to be institutionalized and the land is now state property. The fate of Charlotte and the plantation are linked: Hollis Plantation, like its previous owner, will be razed over, the interstate highway will be built, the racial violence managed and forgotten; the project of Cold War empire building will continue. Charlotte, and all of her Southern plantation excesses, are successfully contained.

Robert Aldrich, Postwar Genre Filmmaking, and *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*

The director of *Sweet Charlotte*, Robert Aldrich, primarily known for his gritty action, Western, and noir films of the 1950s (*Apache*, *Vera Cruz*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *World for Ransom*, *The Big Knife*), was at the "center of the idealistic post-war experiment in independent filmmaking."[161] Having first started in Old Hollywood as a production clerk and eventually promoted to assistant director at RKO, Aldrich's career embodied the tensions permeating the shifting postwar film industry.[162] As Aldrich began to produce and direct films and TV, he was often derided as too commercial and derivative, though also lauded as "iconoclastic, anti-authoritarian… revolutionary in message." His films often

[161] Edwin Arnold and Eugene Miller, *The Films and Career of Robert Aldrich* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1986, vii.

[162] In *Body and Soul*, Tony Miller offers a breakdown of this industry shift. He writes, "Aldrich began directing long after the McCarthyite reaction had destroyed the social and political alternatives that briefly appeared in pre-and-postwar American society. These features opposed both the dehumanizing conspicuous consumption of the 1920s (also characterized by labor injustice and racism and the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Depression revealed that the system failed." (Miller, *Body and Soul*, 3)

detailed the battles of individuals against the system, depicting their struggle to "regain a sense of self-worth, of identity, in opposition to the crushing forces of authority."[163] His dramatic form of cinematic storytelling is perhaps what influenced Aldrich to pivot towards horror (specifically that of the psycho biddy film) in the 1960s. Beginning with *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*?, Aldrich then directed *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* through 20th Century Fox. While unable to eclipse its predecessor in box office success, *Sweet Charlotte* is still considered as a film of significance in Aldrich's filmography.

Film scholars often read Aldrich as a filmmaker driven to making films with a message. As Williams elaborates, in order to do so, Aldrich was deeply influenced by the progressive-focused 1930s Cultural Front movement.[164] However, this emphasis on progressiveness proved to be a struggle for the rest of his career as the ethos of the postwar era clashed with his filmmaking ethics. As Williams suggests, "How could Aldrich follow these (progressive) ideals in later inhospitable (postwar) decades? How could he continue interrogating the false nature of the American dream when a reactionary society had silenced other critical voices?" [165] It was perhaps due to the tensions undergirding his filmmaking that led to an eventual rocky career, as Cold War American society "had destroyed radical 1930s hopes for a better world,"[166] and in some ways, Aldrich himself.

Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte begins in 1927 at a celebration on a lush former plantation, dubbed the Hollis House, in Ascension Parish, Louisiana. During the party, John Mayhew (Bruce Dern), a local man, is found brutally murdered with his hand severed and head decapitated. The young daughter of the mansion, Charlotte Hollis (Bette Davis), is blamed for the murder as she is

[163] Arnold and Miller, *The Films and Career of Robert Aldrich*, 2.
[164] Such filmmakers that he would draw political inspiration from included Lewis Milestone, Charlie Chaplin, Jean Renoir, Abraham Polonsky, and Joseph Losey. (Williams, *Body and Soul*, 6.)
[165] Tony Williams, *Body and Soul: The Cinematic Vision of Robert Aldrich* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 13.
[166] Ibid., 4

the scorned lover of the married John. The party ends with a distraught Charlotte running into the crowd of guests, streaked in blood; her father and patriarch of the mansion, consoling her.

The film then jumps to 1964. Charlotte is now a lonely and isolated spinster and living in the dilapidated Hollis mansion. Charlotte has been cast as the town pariah; the whole town still believing her to be the murderer. Now fully a recluse, her home is under threat as the Louisiana Highway Commission intends to demolish the plantation to make way for the new highway. Charlotte has been fighting the Commission for some time. Resorting to shooting at the workers with a shotgun, she is still threatened to vacate within ten days.

Desperate for help, Charlotte calls upon her last remaining relative, Miriam (Olivia de Havilland), her estranged cousin, to come help her challenge the commission in stopping the demolishment of the Hollis planation. Miriam, as it is eventually revealed, has her own agenda as she arrives only to immediately begin her plot to drive her cousin mad. Through various stunts, Miriam (alongside her lover, Drew Bayliss [Joseph Cotton], who also happens to be Charlotte's on-call doctor) succeeds in making Charlotte losing her sanity through the culmination of tricking Charlotte into thinking that she murdered Mayhew (played by Bayliss), who had seemingly come back to life. However, their wicked deeds are soon punished as the next night, Charlotte overhears them reviewing their "successful" scheme, and promptly murders the plotting lovers (by dropping a large flowerpot upon their heads). The next day, Charlotte is taken away to the sanitarium, while the true culprit of the original murder is revealed: it was the wife of John Mayhew that committed the murder, and her cousin had known all along. Miriam had orchestrated the whole plot (Miriam blackmailed Jewel Mayhew, sent threatening letters to Charlotte addressed from Jewel for the past 40 years turning Charlotte into the recluse that she was, driving Charlotte to murder.) Though Charlotte is ultimately driven off the plantation (presumably to be incarcerated at a state sanitorium), she is redeemed.

Aldrich, Power, and the Mis-Identification of the "Postslavery" Plantation South

Aldrich's attempt at creating a progressive message in *Sweet Charlotte* is messy: by posing Charlotte as the Gothic protagonist-in-peril, the film completely fails in identifying the ways structural powers are at play on the planation. Focused on the crumbling excesses of a "postslavery" South, the film turns toward grotesquery as it dramatizes and speculatarizes the residual horrors of plantation slavery. However, the film does nothing to interrogate slavery in relationship to white supremacy and the ways in has shaped Black lives and deathscapes; rather, it mournfully approaches the plantation as a site of "damaged" whiteness that, in turn, resulted in the unfair persecution of a white woman. In other words, *Sweet Charlotte* attempts to address a particular kind of social ill of the 1960s as it attempts to ask: how might the US contend with its "shared" trauma of slavery? But by focusing on the ailing figure of the white plantation woman, the film not only entirely obstructs the reality of the racial violence of slavery and the plantation system but how such violence was crucial to the bolstering of an American Cold War regime. Furthermore, gender is crucial to the ruse as the hero of the tale is an aging white woman, driven mad and rendered fragile by circumstances.

Referring to *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* as "cannibal time in Dixie" during an interview with Andy Warhol's magazine, *Interview*, Aldrich's *Sweet Charlotte* has a particular focus: deviant white subjecthood entirely fixated on consuming itself.[167] The film specifically presents the plantation as a place of "cannibalistic" white subjects, an unresolved site of unhinged whiteness that does not quite "fit" in the schema of Cold War Sixties modernity. As the white characters of *Sweet Charlotte* scramble to establish dominance and "consume" one another, the plantation transforms into a harmless "home" of an individual family's cannibalistic power struggle rather than a site of white supremacy built upon brutalized, enslaved Black bodies. In other words, Aldrich does indeed

[167] Arnold and Miller, *The Films and Career of Robert Aldrich*, 20.

recognize that something about the Hollis House is corrupt and violent, but he entirely mis-identifies the source.

In many ways, Aldrich's struggle in portraying accurate depictions of power, race, and property was impacted by Aldrich's own relationship to wealth and old American power. A white man born into a prominent East Coast family ("the Aldriches of Rhode Island"), he had a direct connection to and was supported by long-accumulated generational wealth and status.[168] In spite of this, Aldrich felt alienated from his family and wealth; his son William once suggested that, "(In the [Aldrich] family) there was a lot of competition, a lot of emphasis on achievement…Dad always felt that he had more to prove than anybody else."[169] In 1977, Aldrich detailed in a letter to screenwriter Theodore Apstein that "there was little or no discussion of art or culture or theatre or music in (the) home… family conversations were predominately concerned with politics and power."[170] Film historians have observed the way this sense of detachment from his lineage impacted his filmmaking. Arnold and Miller in *The Films and Career of Robert Aldrich* write, "There was always a sense of the outsider about Robert Aldrich, an acknowledgement that he played his own game, made his own rules, went his own way."[171] Director Peter Bogdanovich referred to Aldrich as "a true maverick," one who wrestles with the question of power both on and off screen[172] and "believed that existence was conflict, that power inevitably corrupts, and the honest man was bound to lose… he believed that (you) had an almost existential obligation to hold to your basic principles," his films often reflecting a "quasi-mythic conflict."[173] Believing that his "outsider" status would somehow

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168 According to Silver and Ursini, Aldrich comes from a long line of prominent individuals. This includes American Revolutionary War generals, the founder of Rhode Island Colony, bankers, businessman, and politicians. His aunt Abigail was married to John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller, alongside his wife, were responsible for the establishment of MOMA, (Alain Silver and James Ursini, *What Ever Happened to Robert Aldrich: His Life and His Films* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1995), 3.
169 Alain Silver and Elizabeth War, *Robert Aldrich: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), 3.
170 Ibid, 4.
171 Arnold and Miller, 1.
172 Eugene L Miller and Edwin T. Arnold, *Robert Aldrich: Interview* (Jackson: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), viii.
173 Ibid.

absolve him of his privileges as a rich white man, it is no wonder that Aldrich could not quite properly come to terms with the ways in which structural power works; his "progressive" politics remaining quite limited in its scope as he clung on to liberal definitions of man, humanity, and power.[174]

I argue that Aldrich's sense of disgruntlement with white, "old" American money and his detachment, without a proper interrogation, of these structures is in part what ultimately accounts for: 1) his fascination (and arguably, identification) with the "psycho-biddy" genre and 2) his gross misinterpretations of oppression, villainy, and victimhood. His "pycho-biddy" films are concerned with ailing white women and institutions that "once" held power. In other words, I believe that Aldrich can indeed identify that these American institutions are inherently oppressive, though ultimately fails in recognizing the racial violence and devastation that "bled into the land" of such sites.[175] Hence, power and oppression take on skewed meaning in *Sweet Charlotte* as he utilizes Charlotte and her deviant white womanhood to represent the tragedy that is the American plantation.

Creating Charlotte and the Grotesqueries of White Woman Victimhood

In an article for *Cinefantastique*, Charles Derry details the cinematic influences of *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* (as well as *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, a film that is often considered a companion piece to *Hush…Hush*).[176] According to Derry, Aldrich drew upon notable thrillers including *Psycho*

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[174] Silver and Ursini, *What Ever Happened to Robert Aldrich?*, 11.

[175] Again, it is notable that the film industry poses Aldrich as this "maverick" despite all of his contradictions and lack of clarity. As Williams states, "(In Ian Jarvie's) study of Robert Aldrich… Jarvie notes the presence of hysteria and authoritarianism in the director's films…and also recognizes that Aldrich's fascination with studies of individual entrapment in authoritarian situations evoked an aggressive formalism that depended heavily on the technical advances developed by Gregg Toland and others." (Williams, *Body and Soul*, 190) Relatedly, Aldrich "offers no false solutions or easy alternatives" when it came to his filmmaking. (Williams, *Body and Soul*, 14)

[176] One of the most fundamental (fan) discourses surrounding *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* regards the casting choices for the main leads. As expressed by Aldrich, this film was produced in large part due to the success of *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*?, and in particular to the on-screen pairing of Joan Crawford and Bette Davis. However, while the specifics are

(1960) and French film *Diabolique* (1955). Working with his screenwriter Lukas Heller and the novelist Henry Farrell from whom Aldrich's film is adopted,[177] Aldrich crafted these films with the intention of putting to screen a "psychological study of two women whose relationship was based on some past crime, yet a study which dealt very overtly with the ambiguity of insanity."[178] Starting with *Baby Jane*, Aldrich would establish "conventions" in his approach to the psycho-biddy genre. Across these two films, he 1) cast aging film stars (Bette Davis and Joan Crawford being the notable two, and in *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*, we see the addition of Olivia de Havilland, Agnes Moorehead, and Mary Astor) and 2) framed the film's horror around these aging individuals grappling with violence ("the crime") committed many decades ago. In other words, it is not merely the horrifying spectacle of a female's aging mind and body in which these films are focused, but specifically the way age (and subsequently, mortality) forces one to grapple with the violence of the past. According to Aldrich, he created *Charlotte* largely in part because of audience demand and the possibility of a "re-teaming of Farrell, Crawford, Davis, Heller, and Aldrich,"[179] though ultimately Crawford was removed from the project and de Havilland brought in. The usage of aging star power presents a particular twist on morality. As Derry puts it, "In *Baby Jane* we finally see that Baby Jane is really not the guilty one. In *Charlotte*, we discover that Charlotte is not really crazy. The motif of the character who is in some way a misfit, outside the mainstream of society, who can exhibit more sense and humanity than others, is (Aldrich's) theme."[180]

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debated/ have been mythologized, Crawford was initially slated to play Miriam, though the role was ultimately passed on to Oliva de Havilland. While never officially confirmed, it is claimed that this was due to Davis' dominance and bullying on set which amounted to Crawford leaving the project, citing illness as the reason. (Williams, *Body and Sou)* This "feud" between Crawford and Davis not only converges with the psycho-biddy themes of the film, but is fascinates the fans today, so much Ryan Murphy's 2019 F(X) series, *Feud*, was a series fully dedicated to the depiction of events that occurred between Davis and Crawford during this time.

[177] Henry Farrell was a horror screenwriter and author active during the postwar era. Though having collaborated with Aldrich twice, Farrell eventually sued to receive writing credits for the film. (Henry Farrell, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*? [New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2013], 4.)

[178] Derry, "The Horror of Personality,"16.

[179] Ibid, 18

[180] Ibid, 19.

Aldrich's depiction of whiteness comes through not only in terms of the film's narrative but also the ways he shot the film. As Silver states, "Though (Aldrich's) films vary dramatically in terms of genre, a few techniques thread through his work, including strong side lighting, angles of unusual height or lowness, foreground clutter, and staging in depth."[181] This can explicitly be seen throughout *Sweet Charlotte* and in particular, the ways Charlotte herself is framed. Throughout *Hush*, she is framed with harsh angles, tight frames, and hazy lighting as the horror coalesces around her body. Charlotte also disassociates, often transcending time and space (much of this is due to Marion's scheming.) Curiously, these creative choices is perhaps due to the way "the cinematic universes" of Robert Aldrich involves a contradictory combination of body and soul."[182]

Through these characterizations, Charlotte's white womanhood is put at the center of the narrative, albeit through complex dimensions. She is framed not only as a pitiable old victim, potential murder suspect and villain, but also, a deviant white woman. Aldrich takes much time to frame Charlotte as detached, forlorn, and deeply connected to the crumbling plantation. The character design brings a physicality to these "dimensions": Charlotte's makeup is rather light, a "natural" look.[183] Her hair, trailing down her back, is often styled in clipped ponytails with headbands, cascading braids, or let loose as long waves softly framing her face. Charlotte is often clad in whimsical, often light colored, beautifully flowy, A-line dresses with dramatically flouncy skirts. Charlotte sharply contrasts Miriam, who, with her perfectly sprayed down coif, sleek shift dresses and fashionable pumps, is the epitome of the modern 60's woman. Miriam's sophisticated femininity further infantilizes Charlotte, a childish (and traumatized) mind that has not moved beyond the tragic night of the murder 40 years ago.

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[181] Silver and War, *Robert Aldrich: A Guide*, 12.
[182] Williams, *Body and Soul*, 13.
[183] This strongly contrasts her role in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*?, wherein Bette Davis's face was powdered white, her hair, tightly curled, makeup applied thickly. While Davis' character in *Baby Jane* was also portrayed to be grotesque, there was a sinister quality in Baby Jane, which was not really the case for Charlotte.

This is made quite clear in the first scene following the time jump. This scene opens on a wide establishing shot of a graveyard as the film cuts to a group of young children sneaking up to the Hollis mansion. "Boy, it sure is spooky round here. Especially the graveyard… gets spookier! You'll see," whispers one of the children, to which one quickly asks: "You think there really is a ghost?"[184] Another child responds: "Who knew… Charlotte is a ghost." Another boy interjects: "Here is the house! Gives me the creeps every time I see it."[185] One of the children is then pressured into breaking into Charlotte's home, dared by the other boys, and to take an item, proof that he had really gone inside. From this exchange alone, we see that Charlotte has been explicitly identified as a ghost. Forty years after the murder, Charlotte has indeed become what her father projected: she and the house are one and the same, both inspiring terror (and cruel curiosity) in the locals.[186]

As the child makes his way around the home, he spots a white music box on the table. As he reaches for it, he knocks over a glass, waking up the sleeping Charlotte. This is the moment we are finally introduced to an aged-up Charlotte. Hair gently billowing in the breeze, clad in a loose, girlish dress, confused, and disturbed from her reverie, she calls out to her dead lover. As the children run away, the film cuts back to Charlotte, silently weeping. She is lit in a high-key, low contrast lighting and enveloped in darkness, shadows bisecting her body; her head appears to be disconnected, seemingly floating amongst the black background of the scene. Utterly heartbroken, tears stream down her face, wishing for her dead lover as she is positioned to the right of the screen as the credits come in towards the left. A cruel ditty plays over the credits; the children sing as they run off, taunting Charlotte. The song transitions from a diegetic to a non-diegetic insert. The song goes:

> Chop, chop, sweet Charlotte
> Chop, chop, till he's dead

[184] *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*, directed by Robert Aldrich (1962; Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox), DVD.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

Chop, chop, sweet Charlotte
Chop off his hand and head.

To meet your lover you ran, chop, chop
Now everyone understands
Just why you ran to meet your love, chop, chop
To chop off his hand and head.

Chop, chop, sweet Charlotte
Chop, chop, till he's dead… *(song fades into mournful harmonica and violin accompaniment)*[187]

As evidenced by this scene, music is critical in rendering Charlotte as ghostly as it plays with the sense of victimhood and morality within the film. The cruel rhyme the children sing is a slight variation on the main theme that plays throughout the film. The tune is haunting, a melodic lilt that sounds equal part eerie and childish. The tune is her auditory connection to the past, as she often plays it on her piano when she desires to bring herself back to 1927. As Dr. Drew explains to Miriam: "People who obliged to live alone have a habit of creating company for themselves. Innocent fancies can become fixed delusions. I think she never fully accepted John Mayhew's death, at least part of her mind hasn't. Sometimes she speaks of him as if he were still alive here in this house. As if she can still feel his personality. She plays that old harpsicord song he wrote for her. Often at night she sits dressed as if she were still young and expecting a beau."[188] The song haunts both Charlotte and the viewers as its used not only as a plot device but also to create the mood of the film.

Much of how the audience feels toward Charlotte is also mitigated through lighting. As Harrington states,

[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.

> The house becomes an uncanny, sometimes threatening, and sometimes comforting force in its own right. The theatrical, expressionistic interplay of light and shadow, and Charlotte's movement in and out of darkness and through various registers of social and cultural categories, imbue the film with a sense of sorrow and dread that extends beyond the film's initial trauma to express a sense mournful nostalgia and a profound, haunted loss of both youth and love.[189]

The film is in black and white, noir-esque. With an emphasis on hard key lighting allowing for deep shadows to envelope the screen, *Sweet Charlotte* utilizes lighting, costuming, makeup, and music, as a major method of storytelling and characterization. At the beginning, the shadows make both the mansion as well as Charlotte look especially ominous and obscured, though this is soon switched up once Miriam and Dr. Bayliss' intentions slowly become revealed: Miriam and the doctor take on a sinister, evil look as Charlotte appears increasingly helpless. The lighting assists facilitating this "switch-up" as both Charlotte and Miriam take turns being bisected by dark shadows, their eyes often the only part of the body that is illuminated. In many ways, the lighting (mis)directs the viewer's understanding of who is suspicious, evil, innocent, the victim.

These different techniques come together at the beginning of the film when introducing Charlotte. During the party, the mansion is brightly lit; the space is extravagant, luxurious. Here, the viewers see Charlotte for the first time, albeit amid a break-up with John Mayhew. Charlotte is wearing a light tiered tulle dress, hair beautifully done. Clutching a doll, Charlotte comes off as childishly young (though she is presumably in her early 20s). Young Charlotte was played by a 56-year-old Bette Davis. As her face remains shrouded in shadow, it is only Davis' signature gravelly voice that identifies that it is indeed Davis. In this moment, the film starts by already emphasizing

[189] Erin Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity, and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* (London: Routledge, 2018), 250.

Charlotte's non-normative white womanhood by having an almost 60-year-old woman playing a young 20-year-old girl (who, in the film, is already rendered rather infantile and young for her age.) Davis' performance (she dances around, uses sing-songy voices, asks innocent questions) only enhances the emphasis on her deviance throughout the film.

The questions then emerge: what structures of white womanhood/ femininity are being crafted in this film? Charlotte is grotesque because she is not only seemingly deluded, but that the delusion has stunted her growth, her sense of maturity, her sense of responsibility. She is, ultimately, an inappropriate old woman, refusing to recognize the passing of the years, her aging body, and the crumbling mansion. She is an old woman obsessed with the past, and for viewers, it is equal parts tragic and "repulsive" to watch. In this way, she haunts the plantation and the film, because of her improper gender, sexual, and racial performance. While Mayhew was condemned to death for his sexual indiscretions, she has been cursed to live on as a ghost, haunting both herself and those around her. It is almost as if she should not be alive, particularly in the form in which she has taken. In this way, she is grotesque as she continues to live on in this twisted form, seemingly defying death (or at least the "natural" progression of aging).

The Racial Logics of *Sweet Charlotte*

Much of the racial logics of the film can be identified if we are to consider Charlotte's intimate relationship to the plantation. I argue that we must interrogate Charlotte's positioning in the film as it is crucial to understanding how the violence of Southern whiteness was purged, contained, and re-absorbed during the Cold War period.

The majority of *Hush… Hush Sweet Charlotte* is set in the Hollis House. This not only highlights Charlotte's isolation as a character in the world of the film, but it also emphasizes the ways the plantation's past cannot be disavowed, so much so that the characters cannot leave, frozen

in place. (Again, while Aldrich poses the murder of Mayhew as *the* defining past, I am looking at the contexts of slavery and Cold War development as I consider the Hollis plantation's past.) The connection between Charlotte and the plantation is emphasized through the opening scene of the film: *Sweet Charlotte* begins in 1927 with an establishing shot of a mansion overlaid with the offscreen dialogue of a man yelling, "This house, this plantation, this whole damn parish belonged to my family before your people stepped aboard the stinking cattle boats that brought 'em to this country!!! Don't you dare talk back to me boy!! My family seen this state crawling with lousy *carpetbaggers* that knew more about behaving like a gentleman than you do! I can't even look at Charlotte without ugly thoughts ripping my guts!"[190] A quick zoom and cut brings the viewers into the house as the shouter is revealed to be Sam Hollis (Victor Buono), the father of Charlotte, loudly chastising her lover, John Mayhew. He continues:

> I'd rather sooner one of my field boys. I could have killed him… you know what it's costing me not to kill you? *(Laughs)* My daughter and Jewel Mayhew's husband... my daddy sat out there on that veranda. Let this whole place slide to dust. When he died, there was nothing but debts and dirt. I touched that dirt and made it blossom. I fought to keep this house and to bring it back up! I don't have a son to give it to. Only Charlotte. And she ain't gonna give it to you. You ain't gonna have my home or my child. I created both and I'm gonna keep 'em.[191]

John quietly musters: "Listen, I'm gonna tell you somethin' -- your daughter ain't a little girl anymore and there gon' be other men in her life besides you!"[192] Charlotte's father pays no heed to John's retort as he demands that her lover end things and never see Charlotte again.

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[190] Aldrich, *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.

The opening scene is important in situating how race, gender, sexuality, and class not only play out on the plantation, but are integral to its formation and its maintenance. Once again, we see whiteness totally centered: the main concern is not the plantation and its ongoing violence; rather it is Mayhew's deviant whiteness (he is a married man, poor, of a pedestrian background) that renders him entirely unworthy of Charlotte, but more specifically, the family's inheritance. As emphasized by Charlotte's father, the Hollises are *the* family of the area: they are not just casually well off, rather they are slave owners through which they developed generational wealth and assets, the full beneficiaries of the system. The Hollises are so affluent that they own the land upon which the town is built (the town is named Hollisport, most likely in the honor of the family). And, in true white supremacist fashion, in a discussion regarding family wealth, property, and estates, there is no "explicit" mention of slavery.

Descendants of slave owners, these unquestioned positions of white power entirely skew Mr. Hollis' (and subsequently Charlotte's and Miriam's) assumptions around ownership and whiteness. Mr. Hollis evokes the term carpetbagger as a way of highlighting Mayhew's deviance. It is perhaps the most explicit term in the entire film, aside from "field boy," that acknowledges race and slavery. Used to stress the severity of (and his extreme disgust with) John Mayhew's indiscretion, Mayhew is unable to fit within the economy of the plantation. In other words, Mayhew is not merely undesirable, but he is entirely worthless, unable to add to the Hollis plantation and its assets.

As evidenced from this exchange, Charlotte and the land are deeply connected, not only in name, but in that they are the most treasured and "created" possessions of Charlotte's father. Hence, the way Charlotte is handled parallels how the plantation is managed. The purging, containment, and re-absorption of Charlotte's "psycho-biddy" Southern white womanhood facilitates the incorporation of the excessive racial violence of the plantation.

The Southern Gothic Genre

There is a regional specificity to Cold War Southern Gothic that is worth noting. To do so, I now turn to the genre of Southern Gothic on its own terms. Firstly, as Teresa Goddu writes, "(Southern) Gothic is most recognizable as a regional form. Identified with gothic doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation's 'other', becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wishes to dissociate itself. The benighted South is able to support the irrational impulses of the gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot."[193] In other words, the Southern Gothic examines the ways the South is positioned as a site that is deeply tarnished by "American shame." Arguably, the Hollis House very much is a site of shame: not only is it preventing Cold War expansion across Louisiana (thereby blocking the state's ability to be a part of the project of American Cold War modernisms), but the excessive, deviant Charlotte is irrational, wholly unable to fit "Enlightenment standards." Secondly, Maisha Wester describes the genre as one "that is aware of the impossibility of escaping racial haunting and the trauma of a culture that is not just informed by racial history, but also haunted and ruptured by it,"[194]or as Goddu simply states, the genre is "haunted by race."[195] Thirdly, the racial logic that permeates the Southern Gothic is the institution of slavery, leading to, as Farah Jasmine Griffin writes, "Southern earth (to be) fertilized with the blood of Black people…on the surface it is a land of great physical beauty and charm, but beneath it lay Black blood and decayed Black bodies. Beneath the charm lay the horror."[196] Charm in *Sweet Charlotte* is ultimately revealed to be rotten and deviant, though the origin of such rot remains murky and largely disregarded.

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[193] Teresa A. Goddu, "American Gothic" in *The Routledge Companion to the Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.
[194] Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 25.
[195] Goddu, "American Gothic," 7.
[196] Farah Jasmine Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?" The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16.

This disregarding of context is not unique to the film. Southern Gothic works often de-contextualize the plantation, utilizing subtext or the language of a vague "haunting" when confronting the deep violence of chattel slavery. In doing so, texts subsequently become rife with tensions and contradictions due to this unwillingness to confront how, as Michael Kreyling argues, "the plantation must be read both as an evasion of history and as the return of the history that it aims to avoid."[197] Therefore, in Southern Gothic tales, the haunted house/castle is the slave plantation, which in turn, becomes a kind of "'safety valve' to vent the unacceptable, or even just the merely unpalatable, aspects of the American national story."[198] As Jay Ellis writes, the South is the "designated gathering point for attitudes that have been banished from 'otherwise proper audiences'," the South (and its characters)"bearing America's historical and societal sins."[199] As a result, the atmosphere of Southern Gothic often erupts into "the Faulknerian syndrome of disease, death, defeat, mutilation, idiocy, and lust [which] continues to evoke in the stories of these writers a shudder once compelled only by the supernatural."[200]

In other words, *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* is very much the Southern Gothic film, but it is specific in its telling in that it takes place during the Cold War. Therefore, reckoning with "American shame" and contending with the South as a site of "national refuse," must be understood in relationship to Cold War liberal projects. In other words, the razing of the Hollis plantation is not merely a moment of land contention in the South, but specifically, Cold War racial management and the development defensive geography.

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[197] Michael Kreyling, "Uncanny Plantations: The Repeating Gothic" in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, ed. Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 234.
[198] Ibid, 76.
[199] Jay Ellis, "On Southern Gothic Literature," in *Critical Insights: Southern Gothic Literature*, ed. Jay Ellis (Ipswich: Salem Press, 2013), xxxii.
[200] Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 475.

Plantation Histories of Hollis House

As noted by Jessica Adams in *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*, *Sweet Charlotte* is a film that occupies a crucial convergence between Southern Gothic and Psycho-biddy horror by setting Charlotte's tale of monstrousness female aging on the plantation. In doing so, *Sweet Charlotte* is a portrayal of whiteness in transition as she writes, "The plantation is a place of warped and stunted, pointedly nonprocreative sexuality—a place of decay, of loss, of obsolescence. Its possibilities have apparently been played out."[201] I argue that posing the plantation as a site of non-reproductive whiteness is crucial to pointing to the Cold War project of staunching the racial violence of the past that inhibit the nation's dominance on a global stage.

While *Sweet Charlotte* was primarily filmed on a sound stage in Hollywood, a few interior and exterior shots were taken on site at the Houmas House in Ascension Parish, a plantation that was once part of the "epi-center of Louisiana's slave-fueled sugar trade" with over 800 slaves on the premises.[202] The house of Jewel Mayhew (Mary Astor) (the wife of John Mayhew) was also filmed on-site at Oak Alley, a nearby sugar plantation that enslaved between 110-120 Black people. Notably, Oak Alley and Houmas House have both been transitioned into popular tourist spots and are currently active plantation museums. As suggested by Alderman, Butler, and Hanna, these plantation museums have "traditionally created and marketed a form of tourism that valorized the wealth and perspectives of the white planter class while ignoring, minimizing, or romanticizing the historical contributions and suffering of the enslaved who made that privileged way of life possible."[203] In other words, by presenting Oak Alley and Houmas House as historical relics to be

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[201] Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 83.
[202] Mike Scott, "Houmas House, a Hollywood-filming favorite, once was an Epicenter of Louisiana's Sugar Trade," NOLA.com, *The Advocate*, August 24, 2021, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/article_4ae83bc2-01fd-11ec-883f-ebc462829e9a.html.
[203] Derek H. Alderman, David L. Butler, Stephen P. Hanna, "Memory, slavery, and plantation museums: the River Road Project," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 11, no. 3 (2016): 210.

immortalized on screen rather than as explicit institutions of chattel slavery, these plantation museums have "symbolically annihilated" the histories and identities of the slave community, effectively "disinheriting African Americans from their own heritage."[204] Both Houmas House and Oak Alley continue to be popular filming sites for TV and film, a fact that Houmas House advertises as a draw for tourism and investment (visitors can even view the well-preserved room Bette Davis stayed in during the shooting of *Sweet Charlotte*.)[205]

A classic Southern plantation with the identifiable markers of "plantation architecture," Houmas House is a significant character in the film. Derry describes the Hollis Mansion as such in his article for *Cinefantastique*:

> The house is again bizarrely stopped in time; the Southern Gentility of 1927 now appears faded, run-down, but unchanged. When Olivia de Havilland first arrives she says, "It's just as I left it." And that was thirty-seven years ago. Ironically, Bette Davis had always wanted to play the archetypal Southern Belle Scarlett O'Hara. Now, in 1964, she managed to do just that—but decades too late: her Charlotte/Scarlet is a pathetic creature to behold; out of place, out of time, she wears clothes out of 1927, and treats even her best friend Velma, the maid, with a particularly Southern noblesse oblige.[206]

It is very much a Gothic plantation, the Hollis House "personifying…*giving face* to an abstract disembodied Other in order to return it to a narrative that disturbs logocentric order, the common reality of things… epistemological incoherence."[207] In other words, the ways Hollis House is put to

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[204] Ibid.
[205] Such films/shows include *Mandingo, All My Children, The Bachelor, The Green Book, The Bachelo*r (Season 21). "Movies Filmed Here," houmashouse.com, Houmas House: Historic House and Estate, July 18, 2022, https://houmashouse.com/movies-filmed-here/.
[206] Derry, "The Horror of Personality," 22.
[207] Kreyling, "Uncanny Plantations," 45.

the screen not only challenges the American Cold War project of linearity, but is itself a Gothic home. "The most dominant location (in *Sweet Charlotte*) is, of course, the house," writes Derry. In his analysis, he offers a reading of how homes work in Aldrich's Gothic films in relationship to the broader Gothic/horror cinema landscape of the time. He writes, "The house is almost always something frightening, something that is descended from the haunted house genre, but whose terrors are always specifically real rather than mystical. It is the house which contains the dead Mrs. Bates in *Psycho*, tin memorabilia in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, and the suggestion of a once thriving South in *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*."[208] Derry goes on to explain, "In the Aldrich films, the house is used very differently from the way it is used in some of the haunted house films. In some haunted house films, a girl is often tormented by nightmares and memories which she cannot exorcise until she returns to the house. In both *Baby Jane* and *Sweet Charlotte*, it is quite clear that Bette Davis cannot exorcise her demons until she goes away from the house. Perversely, in both films Bette Davis wants to stay."[209] In other words, Charlotte is the plantation; she must stay in order to maintain her selfhood and power.

The Haunted Plantation and Postwar Defensive Geographic Development

Sweet Charlotte poses a hypothetical: what happens to the residuals of white supremacy's past as the Cold War remakes American geographies? *Sweet Charlotte* argues they will be destroyed. In the film, the Cold War threatens the Hollis Plantation and its remaining descendant as the Interstate Defensive Project fights to re-absorb this particular site of horrific white supremacist violence.

However, the film's depiction is strikingly different than reality. Postwar Louisiana (alongside the rest of the nation) was deeply embedded in Cold War modernization projects. In 1957,

[208] Derry, "The Horror of Personality,"24.
[209] Ibid, 21.

construction began on Louisiana's "686-mile" portion of the I-10, directly linking it to the "41,000-mile federal interstate highway system linking the country's major cities."[210] Touted as a connective line to the rest of the country (as the Times-Picayune reporter, John Pope, quotes from a 1962 edition of the newspaper: "You will be able to drive from New Orleans to New York without ever seeing a red light"),[211] it has since become one of the most contested spaces in Louisiana.[212] As detailed by Raymond Mohl, this contestation has taken on a few dynamics. As he details, "Freeway opponents…waged a long battle against the… Riverfront Express." The Riverfront Expressway Project was a highway extension which would directly split from the I-10. These "opponents" were specifically "historic preservationists" who ultimately succeeded in "fighting off the Riverfront Expressway plan."[213] However, though these "white New Orleans residents with vested interests were fending off the highway builders, nearby mid-city black communities were not nearly as successful."[214] North Claiborne, an "old and stable black Creole community" was one such community that was not spared as the I-10 was constructed straight through the neighborhood. As Mohl states, "By the 1970s, Interstate-10 in New Orleans rolled through (the) devastated black community, a concrete jungle left in the shadows by a massive elevated highway."[215]

Interstate 10 bisects Ascension Parish; Houmas House (and Oak Alley) lies on the path of I-10 (just a five-minute drive away from the nearest exit.) As detailed in "Visit Antebellum-Era Plantations along Louisiana's River Road,"[216] Houmas House is directly accessible via the I-10.[217] In

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[210] Raymond A. Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt," *Poverty and Race Research Action Council* (2002): 22.
[211] John Pope, "Interstate 10, and New Orleans' love-hate relationship with it, turns 60," NOLA.com, *The Advocate*, February 15, 2017, https://www.nola.com/300/article_64e363c2-2c60-5516-90e0-3c904190e27e.html.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities," 22.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid, 23.
[216] The Louisiana River Road is a river passageway that runs adjacent to the I-10. (The river is around nine to ten minutes away from the closest highway exit.)
[217] Beth D'Addono, "Visit Antebellum-Era Plantations along Louisiana's River Road," 10best.com, USA Today, April 18, 2014, https://www.10best.com/destinations/louisiana/new-orleans/tips/visit-antebellum-era-plantations-along-louisianas-river-road/.

other words, these plantations were not only fully spared from demolition in the face of Cold War development and interstate building. If anything, access to these plantations were boosted, increasing tourism and capital. The irony is while Hollis House (i.e. Houmas House) is ultimately razed over to make room for the new highway in the film, Houmas House was preserved, taking on the title of the "crown jewel" of Louisiana's River Road.[218] If anything, the highway worked to keep the plantations intact, allowing them the opportunity to thrive in today's "post-slavery" world.

This striking difference between film and reality is a brutal reminder that in Cold War projects, plantations and historical properties/sites that carry deep historical violence, similar to Houmas House, were very much believed to be of value, while Black communities were and continue to be seen to be as antithetical to the American state. Their destruction is a "proper" sacrifice in the name of acquiring more land, resources, and power. This reality lends a sense of "implausibility" to *Sweet Charlotte*, which further allows us to critique its representations of white womanhood.

By turning to the site of the highway as a representation of the changes induced by the Cold War, Aldrich ultimately uses it to question the role of Cold War development on postwar formations of white womanhood, and little else. The question remains: if we are to consider the Gothic as a site that is both threatening as well as the threatened, what is to be disposed in *Sweet Charlotte*? Who is the other? Who is that to be protected?

This film is very much about white womanhood and how it has been rendered "the other," regardless of form: whether it be decrepit, ailing, and murderous white womanhood, as represented by Charlotte, or that of the modern and the beautiful albeit deviant and deceitful (as represented by Miriam). These forms of womanhood are still deeply hinged on Cold War gender and racial regimes. Through these women, the US Cold War state entirely relinquishes any kind of responsibility in

[218] "Movies Filmed Here," Houmas House Historic Estates and Garden.

moments of white supremacist racial violence, past, present or future. In other words, the state requires characters like Charlotte: by posing Charlotte as the lonely and crazed former Southern Belle who has deeply benefited from chattel slavery, the policing of Black people during the reconstruction er, and "new" forms of institutionalized oppression and violence towards Black people during the postwar era, the movie is identifying a crucial Cold War mechanism: the need to destroy and quickly pave over seemingly "outdated" and "old-fashioned" racial regimes that threatens to undo the US' global supremacy. What happens when there is *no* reckoning with historical traumas and their ongoing legacies are merely re-absorbed into the state?

Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte **and the Social Order/ Charlotte as a Haunted Ghost**

If the United States is to become the proper nation in face of the Cold War, the rot and the other must be eradicated. But, like any good Gothic tale, the ghosts remain. Charlotte, haunted at the beginning of the film, continues to linger. A classic (Southern) Gothic (anti) heroine, Charlotte indeed is the ghost, as purported by the children, while herself is haunted too. This is a key component of the film: as an individual who herself has been so deeply haunted, it has translated into her manifestation as a seemingly living ghost. On the first night Miriam gets to the plantation, Charlotte suddenly goes into a sudden reverie after dinner, having casually walked into the ballroom: "Miriam, he really isn't here, is he… (*the camera tilts up*) just now, I thought I heard -- sometimes at night when I wake up, it seems as if he really is here (*the camera tilts back down*). Don't turn on the light, it's not real when it's light. It's only real when it's dark. Dark and still."[219]

Suddenly, we see the door creak open and we are presented with the image of a butcher's knife and a severed hand. The viewer, at this point of the film, is equally as confused and unsure as Charlotte. Was it a real hand, a real butcher's knife driven into the wooden doorframe? Later, in the

[219] Aldrich, *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*.

film, we are treated to dark figures walking through the home during a vicious thunderstorm – could that truly have been her lover come back to life, her dreams finally realized? By the end of the film, the viewers are made aware of the fact that it was a scheme concocted by Miriam and the doctor. When gaslighting her cousin, Miriam chooses to emphasize the fact that her dead lover is back from the dead, stalking both Charlotte as well as the plantation. In other words, Miriam chooses to haunt Charlotte – she uses both auditory as well as visual specters to drive Charlotte mad. And to a degree, she succeeds. By the end of the film, Charlotte is a haunted ghost.

As Schnopp-Wyatt asks, "What emerging social order is validated by gothic horror film? One that rejects elitist privilege and social distinctions based on class rather than merit."[220] Indeed, in many gothic horror films from this era (Aldrich's included), the source of rich families and estates' wealth are identified as haunted, both in the sense that the source of their wealth may revealed to be nefarious, or that their fortune is either quickly dwindling or already has, as the once rich and privileged now live amongst the ravages and ruins of either their hubris or cursed lives. As emphasized by Schnopp-Wyatt, "Time and again in Gothic horror film the source of evil is revealed to be the social elite – the rich and privileged. The validated emerging social order is essentially a humanist one in which individuals are judged and granted status by virtue of their actions and innate abilities and one in which traditionally privileged groups are shown to be exploitative sources of suffering grief and death."[221]

Sweet Charlotte challenges this Gothic formation. The ending is seemingly ambiguous, the viewer left wondering how to process what has transpired. Neither the "old-world" order nor the "new" necessarily emerge victorious at the end. Rather, it is much more complicated as Charlotte is punished (her plantation home is taken and entirely rezoned; she is completely alone by the end of

[220] Schnopp-Wyatt, "Bloody Kisses," 55.
[221] Schnopp-Wyatt, "Bloody Kisses," 55.

the film, sent to the institution), while the "new" world, perhaps in part represented by Miriam as well as her scheming doctor lover are murdered by Charlotte, gruesomely squashed by a flower pot. However, Charlotte is seemingly content by the end (her face clad with a proud smile as she is driven away from the plantation for the final time) while it is Miriam and Jewel Mayhew (the wife of the slain man from 1926) who are identified to be the true guilty parties.

In other words, no clear "social order" emerges at the end of *Sweet Charlotte*. Rather, it is Cold War management that prevails; the modern American state is affirmed. Not only will the highway be built, histories of slavery will be neatly contained; the evil women have also been punished as the once-defunct Hollis plantation is rendered productive, once again, for the American postwar state. "Virtue"—in the form of the Cold War America—is what is validated and affirmed, though the ghosts carry on.

Conclusion

Similar to *A Bucket of Blood*, *Hush… Hush Sweet Charlotte* was made in a moment of transition. As Schnopp-Wyatt states, "Gothic horror film erupts at a time when America is in the grip of the civil rights movement, at a time when the horrors of the Holocaust were a mere twelve years in the past. It thrives at a time when class distinctions are becoming readily apparent as the poor and disenfranchised were served up as cannon fodder in Southeast Asia while the privileged evaded military service."[222] Certainly, in a moment in the 1960s wherein these kinds of tensions were erupting, the ultimate ambivalence of *Sweet Charlotte* provides an odd cinematic approach as to how white womanhood was to take shape in the following decades as the US established a stronger foothold in the ongoing Cold War conflict.

[222] Ibid.

According to Williams, Robert Aldrich had requested *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*'s central theme song, "I've Written a Letter to Daddy," as well as the main theme from *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte* to be played at his memorial service. While this perhaps makes sense as these two films were the most significant works of his career, Williams suggests that this choice was much more personal. Aldrich "identified strongly with traumatized family victims who suffered at the hands of both their parents. But he also condemned those siblings and other relatives who continued to torment their victims with authoritarian psychological control mechanisms originating from within the nuclear family."[223] In other words, while Aldrich's sense of "progressiveness" manifests in highly contradictory and problematic ways, it came from somewhere deeply personal. By considering Aldrich's affectively driven relationship to his beloved psycho-biddies, we in part can consider the "why" of *Sweet Charlotte*'s deeply troubling, yet enlightening, approach to postwar Southern white womanhood, the plantation, and Cold War modernity.

[223] Williams, *Body and Soul*, 215.

Chapter Three: The "Darkest Corners of Humanity's Impulses": Excavating Structures of Whiteness in the Vietnam War Horror Film

In an interview regarding the 2009 remake of the 1972 film *The Last House on the Left*, the director of the original 1972 version (and producer of the 2009 remake), Wes Craven, states, "*Last House* is one of the heritage pieces of American horror films."[224] I find this to be an interesting choice of words: if we are to take Craven's usage of the term "heritage" or "heritage film" to refer to films engaging certain structures of nostalgia and film prestige, how might we consider Craven's brutal horror film as one that speaks to a particular kind of nostalgic "heritage" of the American postwar era? Or more specifically, how does it point to the un-doing of said heritage? How does horror work in the broader "heritage" of 1970s film?

In this chapter, I consider how the horror genre functioned during the 1970s as I examine how horror "fit" in the broader "heritage" of Vietnam War cinema. More specifically, I consider the impact of 1970s Cold War geopolitics on the establishment of an American horror film "heritage." The 1970's exhibited a recalibration of whiteness as the US struggled to re-contain racialized subjects fighting for liberation, while simultaneously witnessing a flowering of modern American horror film technology and technique. It is this parallel moment of the "recalibration" of whiteness alongside the renaissance of the American horror film in which this chapter intends to explore.

To do so, I will be examining the ways the Vietnam War is evoked in Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972), Tom Savini's influential special effects, and *The Exorcist* (1973) to analyze how whiteness worked to recalibrate in face of Cold War conflict and violence during the 1970s. I argue that the utilization of the horror genre when depicting the Vietnam War ultimately re-positioned whiteness as the primary structure at risk while simultaneously suturing Vietnam War

[224] "WES CRAVEN INTERVIEW - THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT (2009)," TheScream4themovie, July 23, 2010, video, 0:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sskgtwdQfj8&t=15s.

violence to American horror cinema which in turn has subsequently impacted cinematic practices that continue to proliferate in the industry. Once again, the vulnerable white masculine subject is put center as Vietnam War horror films become a crucial space to understand how white masculinist victimization is part and parcel of the process of white nationalist boundary-drawing.

Wes Craven

As one of the most prolific American horror film directors of the contemporary era, Wes Craven's career spanned 40 years and encompassed a multitude of directing, producing, writing, and acting credits, particularly within the horror genre. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Craven went on to attend Wheaton College for his BA and got an MA in philosophy and writing from John Hopkins University. He briefly taught English as a Humanities professor at Westminster College and eventually turned to directing films in the porn industry.[225] While directing porn, he began working with his lifelong producing partner, Sean S. Cunningham, and through this partnership, he directed his first horror film, *The Last House on the Left,* in 1972. According to John Kenneth Muir, the duo was coming off the success of *Together* (a "mock documentary about sex in America") which in turn lead to Cunningham's investors encouraging the two to make another film.[226] Instead of "an ultra-violent exploitation flick," they wanted a film focused on horror that would revive the "floundering horror genre."[227]

Craven is very much credited as one of the main American horror auteurs emerging from the postwar period; his work is often identifiable by its unique narratives that draw upon "real life" with the intention of making "social commentaries." It is this matter regarding Craven's interest in social commentary in which I want to parse through in terms of whiteness, horror cinema, and the

[225] John Wooley, *Wes Craven: The Man and His Nightmares* (New York: Wiley, 2011), 24.
[226] John Kenneth Muir, *Wes Craven: The Art of Horror* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 11.
[227] Ibid, 11.

Vietnam War. As John Kenneth Muir details in *Wes Craven: The Art of Horror,* "A trademark of Craven's earliest work is that horror erupts full blown from the innate brutality of man, not from an outside monstrosity or supernatural force."[228] Man is the ultimate horror, whether that be in the form of nuclear-ized cannibals (*The Hills Have Eyes*), vigilante murderers (*Nightmare on Elm Street*), or bored suburban teens (the *Scream* series). Craven creates the monstrous subjects in his films by drawing upon contexts of specific times, places, and happenings that provide an "explanation" as to why horror permeates his films in the ways that it does.

For instance, Tony Williams suggests that Craven's films consistently explore the "hypocrisy of the modern American [domesticity]…the 'dark side of middle-class families.'"[229] During an interview at the 1979 Toronto Film Festival, Craven identified how his personal experiences lead to his critique of the American family. He states:

> The family is the best microcosm to work with… it's very much where most of our strong emotions or gut feelings come from… I grew up within a white working-class family that was very religious. There was an enormous amount of secrecy in the general commerce of our getting along… If there was an argument it was immediately denied. If there was feeling, it was repressed… I began to see that as a nation, we were doing the same thing.[230]

[228] Ibid, 2.
[229] Ibid, 5.
[230] Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, the family is what comes under attack (and subsequently attacks) in *Last House.* As a Vietnam War horror film that eviscerates American institutions of the 1970s, *The Last House on the Left* "openly pairs violent familial units with so-called civilized ones only to find there is little difference between them."[231]

How is *Last House*'s interpretation of the so-called "anti-family theme" related to American (horror) films and their shifting evocations of race, gender, sexuality and class during this period? *Last House* is suffused in particularly dark tones; Muir identifying it as a "nihilistic, existential film that afforded no belief in a better world beyond the violent one the characters inhabited."[232] In this chapter, I consider *Last House*'s "nihilistic horror" and violence in relationship to the broader Vietnam War (horror) film genre of the 1970s to contextualize its depictions of "realistic" violence and the subsequent implications upon the registers of whiteness within.

Vietnam War Film

I now turn to locating the Vietnam War horror film within the broader American Vietnam War cinematic tradition. Often graphic in its content and theme, the ethics of the Vietnam War film has come under (rightful) scrutiny. Gilbert Adair poses a crucial question when considering the Vietnam War film: "[It is] not how do you *film* an atrocity, but how do you *invent* one… in a way, of course, this ploy would mirror the whole course of the war – viewed from the American side – toward *escalation*, as the inflation of interests led inexorably to a corresponding inflation of bloodshed"?[233] Adair's question proves especially important when considering how American directors have deeply struggled in reckoning with the racial logics that not only pervade the genre, but the entire war itself.

[231] Wooley, *Wes Craven: The Man and His Nightmares*, 3.
[232] Muir, *Wes Craven: The Art of Horror*, 2.
[233] Gilbert Adair, *Vietnam on Film: From the Green Berets to Apocalypse* (New York: Proteus Publishing Co., Inc, 1981), 37.

As John Kleinen writes in "Framing the 'Other': A critical review of Vietnam war movies and their representation of Asians and Vietnamese," American films regarding Vietnam were beginning to be released before the US got involved in the war. However, the number increased between 1939 and 1975 as "Western (French, American, and British) movie companies produced more than 150 'Vietnam' related feature films, of which more than half do not deal with the real Vietnam or Indochina, but only refer to the Vietnam experience, American counter-culture, or the return of its veterans."[234] Between 1965 and 1975, approximately 100 Hollywood films were made about the war, the number tripling to about 300 following the end in 1975.[235]

These "eras" as identified by Kleinen correspond with dominant periodizations of the Vietnam War.[236] For instance, Kleinen identifies films such as *China Gate* (1957) and *The Quiet American* (1958) as "striking pre-involvement examples" of "Hollywood's attempts to fit Vietnam into the spectrum of (successful) Cold War commitments undertaken by the US."[237] Post 1975, an era wherein questions regarding the American involvement/invasion of Vietnam began to mount, Vietnam War films shifted once again, as their tones became much more, "black(ly) humorous, ironic, and oblique (with) ambiguous…depictions of war."[238]

Several film scholars have pointed to the role of fabrication and American imperialist fantasies that proliferate throughout American Vietnam War film. As suggested by Frank Wetta, "I refer to the land where Hollywood's soldiers go to fight as 'Vietnam'; 'Vietnam' is an American

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[234] John Kleinen, "Framing 'the Other'. A critical review of Vietnam War Movies and their Representation of Asians and Vietnamese," *Asia Europe Journal* 1 (2003): 441.
[235] Ibid.
[236] As Frank J. Wetta and Stephen J. Curley write, "The war film is identifiable as a genre because individual war films share certain common elements. Thomas Sobchack points to formula plots as the distinctive aspect: the most popular plot involves a group of men, individuals thrown together from disparate backgrounds, who must be welded together to become a well-oiled fighting machine. Barry Keith Grant calls the achievement of a 'common goal', "welded", opposites between order and chaos." (Frank J. Wetta and Stephen J. Curley, *Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War* [New York: Greenwood Press, 1992], 9.)
[237] Kleinen, "Framing 'the Other,'" 442.
[238] Ibid, 444.

invention… it is convenient shorthand for naming a landscape that exists mainly in American imagination and memory. When a Hollywood soldier goes to fight the Viet Cong… he frequently goes to Vietnam, a nation similar to Viet Nam, but without its history. Vietnam is a country torn from its past and future. It exists only as a moment of time… and it ceases to exist once the soldier leaves it behind. If he carries it home in his heart or his mind, he suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and will need curing."[239] Eben J. Muse further explains the difference between the actual nation-state of Vietnam and that of the American imaginary. He writes, "The distinction…is shadowy, since one place is a shadow of the other, and frequently it breaks down as filmmakers break through the darkness…for Hollywood, and America as well, the distinction has been vital. By placing this divisive, destructive war into an imaginary space, the movies have managed to enclose it safely and set it aside. By placing Vietnam outside history, they have removed it from American history's mainstream. They avoided the need to reimagine America's history as one that can incorporate a costly, destructive failure like the Vietnam War."[240] In other words, Vietnam War films and their attempts at political commentary often are constricted by these films' adherence to imperialist figurations.

The 1970s were a crucial period of transition for the Vietnam War film. Specifically, post-1975 Vietnam War films are typically the ones that are most often categorized as war dramas or epics and are notable for their usage of horrific elements in telling stories of wartime moral contradiction and ambiguity. Upheld for their gritty, unflinching approach to the brutalities of the conflict, their emphasis on the "horrors of war" is the very quality that have often led to these films being deemed as anti-war. However, as articulated by Dittmar and Michaud, while these anti-war films were framed as moral, necessary, and "authentic" representations of war, they were still aligned

[239] Wetta and Curley, *Celluloid Wars*, 11.
[240] Eben J. Muse, *The Land of Nam: The Vietnam War in American Film* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), 11.

with the white, male soldiers/subjects and demonized the racialized enemy other.[241] In other words, while these films seemingly condemn violence as committed by the US, they still affirm and uphold structures of white masculinity and the American empire.

As Yen Le Espiritu writes in *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees*, in order to justify American imperialist military violence, like that of the Vietnam War, the American state needs to identify and distinguish the people that are to be defended, destroyed, and "protected."[242] In other words, the state has to provides logic to the human cost; hence, American Vietnam War film hyper-fixates on the wounded soldier/veteran and the precarity of "home" in order to reframe the war into a campaign of defense and subsequently eliminate American culpability in the devastation overseas. Lan Duong writes in "Gender, affect, and landscape: wartime films from Northern and Southern Vietnam," that when "Vietnam War discourse is placed in the cultural and political landscape of the West, it becomes singularly a discourse about the West, its own technological capabilities and "logics of perception."[243] She urges that US Vietnam War film "re-narrates the war as one in which Americans fought each other," which ultimately obscures Cold War geopolitics as well as "the subjectivities of the Vietnamese."[244] Ultimately, she argues that Vietnam War films, bolstered through Western resources (like that of technology and capital) established "a particular [spectacularized] filmic grammar about Vietnam as both war and metaphor."[245]

In face of this, I ask: what does it mean that it is these forms of storytelling that dominate the American national imaginary and memory regarding the Vietnam War? How are forms of structural oppression not only obscured, but entirely invalidated through these forms of filmmaking?

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[241] Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University press, 1990), 89.
[242] Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California, 2014).
[243] Lan Duong, "Gender, affect, and landscape: wartime films from Northern and Southern Vietnam," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2014): 258.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.

How is whiteness, and in particular, white masculinity, being validated? What is the relationship between horror, drama, and film in approaching matters of national violence? And what are the ways Vietnam War horror films are either situated in, complicate, or entirely deviate from these frameworks of understanding race, warfare, and the American Cold War regime?

Horror Films and the Vietnam War

In face of such questions, I now consider the ways Vietnam War horror films overlap, are entangled with, and contradict the war dramas of this time. Arguably, when considering the Vietnam War film, entries from the horror genre are not often considered when referencing this particular filmic tradition. It is this disavowal of the Vietnam War horror film of which I consider in this section.

American horror films are believed to have become grittier and more explicit during the 1970s--the genre became "characterized by more and more intensive depictions of violence, blood and brutality"[246] in order to raise the "ante in terms of their depictions of violence in face of mounting global strife."[247]As Linnie Blake (in *The Wounds of Nations*) and Adam Lowenstein (in *Shocking Representations*) have articulated, it was specifically Cold War violence (particularly in the form of the Vietnam War) that was responsible for this shift, as it was directly imprinted into the genre and impacted makeup techniques, monster and character designs, and the types of stories being told.

The earliest-- and perhaps most well-known-- example of the Vietnam War horror film is George Romero's 1968 *Night of the Living Dead*. The movie follows seven people trying to fight off an onslaught of ravenous zombies in a rural Pennsylvanian farm. By the next morning, only one of the humans, Ben (the group's de-facto leader) survives, as the zombies have been neutralized and

[246] Viktória Prohászková, "The Genre of Horror," *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 2, no.4 (2012): 138.
[247] Eric Prince, *The Horror Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 22.

contained. Emerging from the basement to survey his surroundings, Ben, who is a Black man, is suddenly shot straight in the head by human police forces posed eerily similar to troops overseas, as military aircraft ominously circle above. The credit sequence is overlaid with a photo montage of Ben's lifeless body being dragged to a bonfire to burn alongside the corpses of the zombies.

As Matt Becker writes in "A Point of Little Hope: Hippie Horror Films and the Politics of Ambivalence," "It is because of *The Night of the Living Dead*'s groundbreaking despair and brutality (that has lent) the film (to be)…interpreted for its…radical political meanings."[248] While interpretations of the ending and intentionality of the casting have been widely debated, the gritty, low-budget form of storytelling showcased in the film has come to represent the shifts in the horror genre witnessed during the late 1960s and into the 1970s.[249] As Ben's murder at the hands of the human military force at the end of the film indicates, the war in Vietnam had created the conditions for racialized imperial violence to intermingle with the racial terror already impacting geographies and bodies "domestically." The horror film became one such site in which Americans were taken to task in imagining the ugly, tragic, and horrific consequences of imperial violence. Such dark depictions lent itself to modes of critique.

However, it is not enough to merely see these films as sites of critique: they also exist as moments of exploitation, white supremacy, and unethicality. This particular tension can be seen in other examples of Vietnam War horror films, including: *Blood Freak* (1972), *Deathdream* (also known as *Dead of Night*) (1972), *Forced Entry* (1973), and *The Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983), all of which revolve around a traumatized Vietnam War vet returning home and attempting to acclimate to civilian life to disastrous results.

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[248] Matt Becker, "A Point of Little Hope: Hippie Horror Films and the Politics of Ambivalence," *The Velvet Light Trap* no. 57 (2006), 42.
[249] Eric Hamako, *Race, Oppression and the Zombie: Essays on Cross-Cultural Appropriations of the Caribbean Tradition* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 30.

Horror films, to a degree, disrupt the "integrity" of the project of the Vietnam War film and the affirmations of the American nation often embedded within. While the Vietnam War film is certainly horrific, the horror film often seemingly embraces and delves pleasurably into such moments of violence with little question around matters of morality or ethics. As many of these horror films take place in civilian life, they do not feature the brutalities of war as war is not present, or explicitly absent and *metaphorically* (rather than literally) represented through damaged American homes, landscape, or people. And unsurprisingly, there is no reference to Vietnam or the Vietnamese people, the actual targets of American imperialist and military violence; rather, they are disappeared, so to speak, made to only exist as whispers, nightmares, ghosts. (This is especially the case for the supernatural film, as "realism" is twisted as it becomes entangled with the uncanny and fantastic.) Because of the complicated relationship these horror movies have with cinematic representations of the Vietnam War, broadly speaking, I am not so much as interested in the question of the efficacy of these representations; rather, I trace how whiteness (and other racial subjectivities) are created and presented within these films at the cost of the true violence evoked through the war (that being the imperialist violence inflicted upon Vietnam and the Vietnamese people.)

Films such as *The Last House on the Left* and *The Exorcist* draw a connection to the Vietnam War, but do so in a much more implied or subtextual manner. Hence, in this chapter, I will be primarily excavating these "hidden" contexts and consider the ways the Vietnam War has left its traces upon the American horror film as I argue that these implicit references relate to the ways whiteness is being carved out in the wake of the Vietnam War. I begin with Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* to examine the ways the Vietnam War is evoked through the context of corrupted, innocent, and vengeful whiteness within the 1970s.

Craven's *The Last House on the Left*

Based off Ingrid Bergman's classic, *The Virgin Spring*, *The Last House on the Left* tells the story of seventeen-year-old Mari Collingwood and her friend Phyllis Stone, who venture into the city to attend a concert and are subsequently captured by a group of four escaped convicts when out seeking drugs. The criminals then unknowingly take Mari and Phyllis back towards the woodsy suburbs where Mari is from. In the patch of forest across from Mari's home, the criminals assault the two girls and eventually kill them. Following the murders, the criminals find shelter in the Collingwood's home after their car breaks down. During their stay, her parents come to realize the atrocities that the group has committed, and the final act of the film features the violent vengeance in which the parents inflict upon the members of the gang, as they murder them one by one.

The film was shot in Westport, New York for under $100,000.[250] As low-budget fare, the film starred several "unknowns" including Sandra Peabody (Mari), Lucy Grantham (Phyllis, Mari's friend), Fred Lincoln ('Weasel' Podowski), Jeramie Rain (Sadie), and Marc Sheffler (as Junior). David A. Hess, who played Krug, the leader of the criminals, performed double duty for the film as he not only acted in a main role but also wrote "The Road Leads to Nowhere," the somber theme song that plays throughout the film.[251] *Last House* is notable for its realistic stylizations, as Muir suggests:

> Craven… demonstrated his skill with actors and film technique. He opened the film with crisp cross-cutting, captured the beautiful 'natural' surroundings of a forest and river where all the hideous events would soon take place, and (best of all) knew when *not* to be flashy at all (not with over-the-top 'horror' film lingo [extreme high and low angles, crazy close-ups and Wagnerian music pumping on the soundtrack).[252]

[250] *Celluloid Crime of the Century*, directed by David Gregory (2003; Beverley Hills, CA: Anchor Bay Entertainment), DVD.
[251] David A. Hess was musician and composer prior to acting in *The Last House on the Left*. *Last House* was his first acting role; before it, he had composed Elvis Presley's *All Shook Up* in the 1950s. (Muir, *Wes Craven*, 11.)
[252] Ibid.

While some have credited the emphasis on natural settings due to the small budget, many consider the choice of location crucial to the way the film creates a sense of hyper-realistic and ultra-violent terror. *Last House* is a dramatically polarizing film, as Muir writes, "While reviewing *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, various critics harkened back to the 'unsavory' and 'loathsome' nature of Craven's first directorial effort. For a film that so many reviewers insisting that it was so bad, it certainly struck an emotional chord with them…. If *The Last House on the Left* spawned such powerful feelings, even after many years, how could it be garbage?"[253]

Regardless of how the film is deemed in terms of "taste," I suggest that the film is significant because of the ways intimate entanglements between the different forms of domestic white bodies and the continued extermination of bodies of color both domestically and overseas viciously emerge and manifest within this film, resulting in sensations of the uncomfortable, the claustrophobic, and the revolting. In order to examine such entanglements, I foreground the mechanisms of white supremacy linked to broader Cold War violence that are depicted in this film. More specifically, I focus on the trope of dismemberment as a method of marking boundaries of the empire and staunching the circulation of colonial violence. I also examine the segmentation of deviant and protectable whiteness as a way in which to center the seeming vulnerability of whiteness to be corrupted in face of the Vietnam War.

The Last House on the Left (and the violence within) is oftentimes contextualized as an explicit embodiment of 70's cinema. In *Shocking Representations: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*, Adam Lowenstein writes, "'Only a movie as extreme, confused, and courageous as *Last House* can confront the divisive historical trauma of the Vietnam era along the axes of

[253] Ibid, 12.

political demonology that constitute it."[254] This is further emphasized in *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma, and National Identity*, wherein Linnie Blake suggests that,

> US horror of the 1970s and beyond was often shocking in its viscerality and despairing in its vision of mankind. In this, the genre not only reflected the historical trauma done to Kennedy inaugural idealism by Vietnam and civil strife, but provided a (site where) audience members could strip away the ideological bindings that concealed the nation's psychological wounds and engage with the historically traumatic legacy of what had been done and what continued to be done both in the name of America and freedom.[255]

In other words, *The Last House on the Left* has become so deeply sutured to the decade of its release so much so that its seemingly illogical and inconceivable horror depicted within provided the very logic to the "national trauma" emerging from the failure of the US nation-state, its involvement in the Vietnam War, and its postwar project of global "democracy." Since its release several decades ago, *Last House* has secured its status as a temporally specific and resonant cultural production that has come to be understood as an embodiment of the structures of feeling often attached to the Cold War; i.e., that of despair, terror, and uncertainty.

In the vein of Blake and Lowenstein, I am also interested in analyzing *Last House* through similar frameworks (i.e., reading the film as a site to analyze the feelings, emotions, and affects of the 1970's US as tied to broader racial geopolitics), but I want to urge there remains a necessity to frame US nationalism as white nationalism, and that a broadly determined US "national trauma" will primarily feature a set of feelings, emotions, and affects as dominated and determined by white

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[254] Lowenstein, *Shocking Traumas,* 113.
[255] Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 76.

nationalist politic. In other words, I dissect the universalized forms of "trauma" *Last House* (and the horror genre in general) are presumed to embody. I ask, what are ways we may conceptualize how the processes of imagining and asserting a US "national(ized) trauma" is one deeply related to white supremacist nationalist projects? In order to grapple with such a question, I frame my analysis of the horrific embodiments of violence, death, and terror within Craven's *The Last House on the Left* as tied to white nationalist fear and anxiety of the collapse between the colony (Vietnam) and the metropole (US).

The Last House on the Left and the Blurring of Colonial Zones

As a film released in 1972, *The Last House on the Left* came out just as the Vietnam War was nearing its prescribed "end." According to Linnie Blake, the war was widely considered to be exceedingly brutal by that point and highly visible through media coverage ("US military's saturation bombing, burning, and deforestation of Vietnam became public knowledge via the news media," she writes.)[256] Crackdowns on anti-war and Civil Rights protestors and the continued reveal of American brutality (as evidenced by the My Lai massacre) intensified.[257] Americans became jaded, fearful, and the "hopefulness" that once emerged from the 1960's was now replaced with trepidation and disgust at "the utter degeneration of the American ideal of freedom."[258] But what truly constituted such moments of apprehension, especially if we are to frame the Vietnam War as a mechanism of white supremacist American imperialism? Is it truly only a "fearfulness" emerging from the disappointment in the work of democracy and the American state?

It is here I turn to Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context,* where McClintock suggests that the colonial mechanisms of gendering and racializing the

[256] Ibid, 72.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid, 73.

site of the colony (both the land and the people) is due to the need to create the separation between the colony and the metropole. She writes, "Feminizing the land is a compensatory gesture, disavowing male loss of boundary by reinscribing a ritual excess of boundary, accompanied, all too often, by an excess of military violence."[259] This process of boundary-making, specifically through gender and racial constructs, is crucial for the empire to thrive, as the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized as well as the direction of power and domination is delineated and affirmed. Therefore, I suggest the "offended and affected sensibilities" of Americans following the Vietnam War was not so much a moment of empathy per se, but more so a sense driven by the fear of the boundaries between the colonial zones of the US and Vietnam collapsing. In other words, I argue that we must re-frame the "jadedness"" that emerged out of the 1960s and 1970s as a white nationalist fear that, in the face of failing military campaigns overseas, is terrified of collapsing colonial boundaries.

As McClintock suggests, violence is an indispensable tool in constructing the empire, and it is executed in a way that the violence is spatially and temporally contained, in that, it is reserved for the colony and committed and institutionalized against the colonized by the colonizer. Aime Cesaire further details the processes of subject-making through these moments of colonial violence. Cesaire writes, "And there are those who will never get over not being made in the likeness of God but of the devil, those who believe that being a n— is like being a second-class clerk,[260] detailing the visceral and brutal process of the making of Blackness as one that is in conjunction with construction of untouchable and godly whiteness. Through these boundary-making moments, whiteness is carved out and rendered in need of protection, while the racialized other becomes subject to ongoing violence and death to further preserve the imperial racial codification.

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[259] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 24.
[260] Aime Cesaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 45.

As Cesaire and McClintock's theorizations suggest, these subject-making processes are crucial to the separation of the colony and metropole. However, these processes shift when the violence from the colony begins to "trickle into" the metropole and colonial boundaries are exposed to be porous to the point of disintegration. I argue that to preserve these boundaries and staunch the "contaminants" from the colony, white nationalist colonial projects tag specific forms of violence in the metropole as horrific and terrifying while simultaneously rendering violence in the colony as natural and necessary. In order to assert imperial security and dominance, certain violence in the metropole (U.S.) are not only distanced from the colony but are also rendered as legible problems to be quickly contained and controlled. In doing so, the "vulnerability" of whiteness is emphasized and put center, which in turn, strengthens the need for imperialist control over the colony to further prevent colonial violence in the metropole from manifesting and to keep the two zones apart.

This is undoubtedly a messy process; thus, I ask: how might fear emerge as the empire continues to be threatened to be "engulfed" and the violence remains uncontainable? And what is the significance of horror films dedicated to the depictions of "societal horror" emerging from the crumbling boundaries of the empire? When considering *The Last House on the Left*, it is quite curious to see the ways the un-containability of colonial violence as well as the threats of engulfment and dissolution of the empire are rendered rather explicit. According to Lowenstein, the relationship between the Vietnam War and *The Last House on the Left* has been confirmed by Craven himself. He writes, "Craven claims that the film grew out of his desire to demythologize abstracted Hollywood-style violence, to capture the kind of raw documentary footage from Vietnam that he suspected was being censored in the film and television."[261]

[261] Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representations: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 120.

Relatedly, according Lawrence French, after completion of the *Scream* trilogy… Craven "fulfilled a career-long dream, by directing Meryl Streep in *Music from the Heart* (1999).[262] A striking contrast, Craven has stated that *Music* "shines a light on the best of humanity's impulses," which is in total opposition to his early horror films like *The Last House on the Left* "which explored the last redeeming aspects of humanity's impulses."[263] This question around "mitigating" (national) impulses is further elaborated on by Craven:

> I feel you have to face the worst before you can enjoy the best…that's sort of the way I've lived my life. I think you have to look at the darkest corners and clear all that out and figure out how you'd deal with it both as a person and for me, as a series of characters and project. I needed to vent on the whole subject of violence, and I've done that… A healthy country has cinema of all ills and they're all useful. So many people wouldn't be going to see scary movies if it wasn't doing something for them. People don't go to be damaged; they go because it alleviates something. They talk about some very painful ideas and anxieties people have, and it helps to exorcise that.[264]

As expressed in the ways Craven "justifies" his horror films, he is ultimately suggesting that in terms of *Last House*: 1) the violence in the US and the violence in Vietnam are explicitly connected, 2) we are to understand the inexplicable horror and corrupted souls as portrayed in the film as a direct result of the brutality of the Vietnam War, 3) his viewers have a seeming "ethical" responsibility in watching the film in order to understand the unimaginable violence happening in Vietnam, and that ultimately, 4) the US, as a metropole, holds responsibility for the destruction of the colony. Yet,

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[262] *Music from the Heart* was a significant shift from his typical horror fare. The film, which is about a music teacher working in Harlem, completely pivots thematically and in content in comparison to his other films. (Lawrence French, "Wes Craven Scream 3," *Cinefantastique*, Vol 31 No 10, Feb 2000, 15.)
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.

while Craven's insistence on the relationship between US violence and the Vietnam War may seem to collapse the boundaries between these two zones; what might it mean that his desire in doing so still reproduces imperialist logics as it renders geopolitical violence as coherent and legitimate only when located on a white woman's body?

Dismembering the Other

Because violence is such a vital means of differentiation between the colonizer and the colonized, the horror film acts a contradictory genre as it simultaneously reproduces white supremacist and imperialist logics, while, through its depictions of violence, threatens the boundaries between the two colonial zones. It is this particular contradiction I will be utilizing to analyze the violence as committed within *The Last House on the Left*. After all, as McClintock states, the boundaries of the metropole/ colony was:

> A recurrent doubling in male imperial discourse… may be seen as the simultaneous dread of catastrophic boundary *loss* (implosion)… and attended by an excess of boundary order and fantasies of unlimited power. In this way, the augural scene of discovery becomes a scene of ambivalence, suspended between an imperial megalomania with its fantasy of unstoppable rapine— and a contradictory fear of engulfment, with its fantasy of dismemberment and emasculation.[265]

In other words, imperialist expansion was contradictory. Violence towards the colonized became a form of spectacularized yet controlled and subsequently consumable mode of containment and control. However, this process was/is paradoxical in nature because of how the inflicted violence onto the colony always inevitably circulates back to the metropole and threatens to dismember and

[265] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 26-27.

segment the imperial power.[266] If we were then to consider *Last House* in this particular context, dismemberment as a colonial technology emerges as the primary form of killing and torture inflicted upon certain sites and white bodies within the film. Therefore, I will be utilizing dismemberment and segmentation as analytics in which to interrogate the contradictory work of *The Last House on the Left* to examine paradoxical deployments of white supremacist imperialism that creates the conditions for its very own demise.

Mari as the Murdered Nation

It is no coincidence that Mari Collingwood is very much so rendered a "universalized" figure, the embodiment of the "pure" and "innocent" American nation to be defended at all costs. Therefore, the violence which she is subjected to as a desecrated yet also simultaneously preserved entity becomes a representation of one such way white nationalism attempts to safeguard itself under threat of eradication. Her characterization becomes crucial to understanding how whiteness becomes explicitly segmented within this film. This segmentation is also done through the violent physical dismemberment of the deviant white characters (Phyllis, the four convicts). This difference in the treatment of the various white characters is crucial for Craven to not only stress that whiteness is under threat of corruption due to the violence in Vietnam, but there also exists a responsibility to avenge the nation to keep it whole and to discipline and dismember deviant modalities of whiteness.

The difference between the forms of whiteness is made quite clear from the beginning: the film opens with a tranquil shot of a lake in a forest and a car pulling up to a silver mailbox whimsically etched with the name "Mari"; it is the postman dropping off the mail at the Collingwood's residence. When doing so, he mutters to himself, "Looks like Mari is getting cards

[266] Ibid, 30.

from half of the civilized world! Mari Collingwood…You think she's the only kid to reach the age of seventeen!" He pauses, and then finally reaches the response to his own inquiries- "'Course she is just about the prettiest piece I've ever seen!"[267]

Once the postman is finished delivering the mail, the film cuts to the title card— "The Last House on the Left" in all upper case, bold, red letters—overlaid on the image of frosted shower doors concealing a figure within. It is revealed to be Mari. Her shower is sensuous; the air is steamy, her skin creamy white and enticing, her hands traveling up and down and caressing her body. She is certainly enjoying her shower, and the viewers are allowed access into the seemingly private pleasure. Once finished, she steps out of the shower and wipes down the steam on the mirror, to which her face is finally revealed in full. She truly is as beautiful as the film suggests, and with the soft colors (light blues, brick reds, and browns), lighting, and gentle music that plays through the scene seeming to envelop her naked body, Mari, as well as her beauty, are strongly suggested to be consumable but treasured.[268]

The following scene introduces her mother, Estelle (Cynthia Carr), and father, John (Gaylord St. James), both of whom are cloaked in warm hues of brown, beige, dusky blues, and tan. As her parents banter back and forth, Mari, clothed in a deep red shirt and grey pants, joins her parents. "I want you to be careful, tonight! Your mother tells me the place you are going is in a bad neighborhood," her father says.[269] When Mari runs over to give her father a reassuring kiss, her father startlingly notices the nipples poking through her top. The dialogue between the three is as follows:

John Collingwood: Hey! No bra?
Mari Collingwood: Of course not! Nobody wears them anymore!

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[267] *The Last House on the Left*. directed by Wes Craven, (1972; Boston, MA: Hallmark Releasing), DVD.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

Estelle Collingwood: Nobody except us drill sergeants.
JC: *(gestures Mari's breasts)* Look, Estelle, you can see her nipples as bright as day!
MC: Daddy, don't be so clinical.
JC: It's immodest!
MC: *(rolls eyes)* I'll get some sandpaper.
EC: Look, young lady, when I was your age—
MC: When you were my age, you all wore brassieres that made your tits stick out like torpedoes.
JC: Tits! What's this tits business? It sounds like I'm back in the barracks!
MC: (e*xaggerated*) Alrirrrrght then, mammary glands![270]

It is then revealed that Mari is going to see Bloodlust, a band "who dismantled live chickens in their act" with her friend Phyllis Stone, a girl who is from "the slum" where the concert is being held. "All that blood and violence… I thought you were supposed to be the love generation!" her father responds to her choice in music.[271] "Speaking of which," he trails, and presents a necklace with a pendant the shape of the peace sign.[272] Enthralled, she kisses her parents good-bye, and the sequence ends with Phyllis and Mari traipsing around the surrounding forest, lounging on stone river banks, playing near the stream, and casually speaking of sex, love, and pleasure before they head off to the concert.

As illustrated by these two sequences, Mari switches between being a tantalizing woman, assured adult, and naive teen. In other words, she is beautiful, confident, complex, and *whole*- her full embodied womanhood (as represented by her visible nipples) though provoking, are allowed to persist and thrive. Mari holds the ability to access happiness and validation and is brimming with youthful hope. Not only is she seemingly able to resolve generational conflict (her father offers only peace and love), but also between men and women, as well as the merging of the poor (Phyllis) and

[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.

the rich (the Collingwoods). She is ultimately the ideal formation of a woman and nation united. In presenting Mari as such, Craven is constructing the role of tragedy in the film, as the resonance of the violence— i.e., the act of marking the violence directed towards her beautiful white body as terrifying and subsequently legitimate— is intimately reliant on this characterization, as he then forces us to desecrate this universalized feminine as the movie carries on.

In the direct opposition to the characterization of Mari and her parents (and to a certain degree, Phyllis), the four criminals are rendered as excessive, viciously threatening, and uncontainable. The gang is made up of Krug Stillo, Sadie, Fred "Weasel" Podowski, and Krug's son, Junior, and are described by a radio broadcast to be "escaped murderers, dope pushers, and rapists…responsible for the 1966 triple slayings of one priest and two nuns."[273] The first glimpse of the criminals are starkly different from the way the introduction of the Collingwoods is composed: the frame is dark, grimy, dirty, full of shadows, and composed of blunt cuts of head-on shots of each criminal. The backstory of the four is withheld, as Lowenstein explains in *Shocking*, "In *Last House's* original script, the specification of Krug and Weasel as Vietnam veterans… are notably absent from the finished film."[274] The act of removing these details from the final production are significant, as doing so, Craven ultimately frames the Vietnam War as the primary entity haunting the characters and the violence within the film. It forces the viewer to fill in contextual details as a way to acknowledge the insidious (and seemingly hidden and inarticulateable) ways the trauma of the war has begun to creep in and plant its deadly and rotten roots into the garden that is the white nation.

The characterization of Mari, Phyllis, Estelle, Dr. John Collingwood, Krug, Sadie, and Fred undoubtedly stand as the primary comparative between the different segments of whiteness. Mari,

[273] Ibid.
[274] Lowenstein, *Shocking Representations,* 123.

Phyllis, and her parents are the fearful whiteness that is under threat, while the criminals represent the whiteness as corrupted by geopolitical violence emerging from the US' engulfment in a "losing battle" in controlling and constricting the colony. In other words, Mari can be understood as the nation, the criminals as corrupted subjects threatening the nation in need of discipline and desecration, and her parents as the first line of defense. In fact, the mother is identified as a sergeant, her corseted breasts as torpedoes, and the father a soldier/ medic in the introduction to the film. This differentiation becomes even more clear through violence that is visited upon these eight characters.

Once captured, Mari and friend Phyllis are subjected to torture over a two-day period. Following hours of torture, rape, and assault, Phyllis hatches a plan. Clutching Mari's tear-stained face in her hands, she tells her that she will run away to create a diversion and directs Mari to run home and get help. The plan inevitably fails: Krug, Sadie, and Fred corner Phyllis in a graveyard and take turns viciously stabbing her to death, eventually disemboweling her once she is dead. They return to Mari, who also failed to get away, at whom they toss the dismembered (almost claw-like) hand of Phyllis. As Mari wails in fear and at the shock of realizing that Phyllis is dead, Krug carves out his name on her chest, and then rapes her. It is at this point the movie suddenly takes on this almost inexplicable somberness, wherein Mari vomits, and slowly walks towards the pond; the criminals reluctantly following behind. Krug shoots her four time in the back and she falls into the water, dead.

Following the brutal murders, the four criminals find themselves stranded as their car has broken down. With no other options left, they unwittingly find refuge at Mari's family home. Though still anxiously waiting for their daughter to return, John and Estelle welcome the four strangers. Together, they all have dinner as tensions rise. The four criminals eventually make the realization that they are in Mari's home and Jr., unable to contain his guilt, accidentally reveals Mari's

peace-pendant necklace, of which he is wearing, to Estelle. She soon discovers blood-soaked clothes in their bags and overhears the four speaking of the crime and Mari's body in the lake. John and Estelle run to find her body. Heartbroken and enraged upon doing so, Mari's parents decide to kill the four.

That night, the vigilante justice is dealt out by the Collingwoods as such: Fred is lured into the woods by Mrs. Collingwood. She performs fellatio, and at the most vulnerable moment, bites off his penis and leaves him bleeding to death. Krug manipulates Jr. to shoot himself, and Sadie's throat is slit by Mrs. Collingwood beside the backyard pool. Krug is run through by a revving chainsaw by Mr. Collingwood. Quite noticeably, all the criminals, aside from the redeemable Jr. who, throughout the course of the film, demonstrated the most guilt and unwillingness in committing the murders, are dismembered.

The last shot of the film appears to affirm the overall grimness of the movie, but what sort of structures of feeling are we truly left with at the end of the film? The parents are despairingly somber, and the sheriff, who enters the home following the killings, slowly takes the chainsaw out of the hands of John Collingwood. The viewers, Collingwoods, and sheriff recognize that these killings are merely tragic modes of retributive violence that ultimately do nothing in bringing Mari back. As John Kenneth Muir suggests, "Unlike the Tores in *The Virgin Spring*, the Collingwoods are not enlightened. In the finale by the existence of God or an awareness of divine method. They are left totally isolated in a shattered living room filled only with the blood of villains. The camera does not swoop heavenward to give the impression God is watching because in Craven's film, God is dead."[275] The end is crushing; "the final frame of *The Last House on the Left*, that of the broken Collingwoods presiding over a fractured castle, is considered the film's destination."[276]

[275] Muir, *Wes Craven*, 48.
[276] Ibid.

I want to suggest that such melancholy and mourning is necessary in order to allow Mari and her body to remain intact (and Phyllis, as a lesser woman, the rightfully dismembered victim). Should the Collingwoods have taken pleasure in the killing of their daughter's murderers, whiteness would have been undermined as the violence against the four criminals would be rendered as superfluous, sadistic, and twisted. By manipulating Mari's tale to be simultaneously tragic, triumphant, and a cautionary one espousing the consequences of a global war, Craven ultimately affirms whiteness through the appropriation of violence against people of color. Despite wanting to bring a sense of domestic reality to the violence overseas, *Last House* ignores the larger implications of Western imperialism and white supremacy and instead favors discourses regarding the question of what could happen to whiteness rather than what has and continues to be violently implicated on to colonized bodies of color. The real need, it appears, is to staunch the increasing vulnerability of whiteness.

Vietnam War Horror Films and the Production of Whiteness

Since its release, *The Last House on the Left* continues to be replicated and reproduced. Not only has it continued to influence horror filmmaking technique, but it inspired an entire subset of horror films featuring the invasion of maniac killers (particularly upon isolated family units) as well as the aforementioned remake in 2009. I ask: how might Mari's body remain complete through these reproductions? Do the boundaries of the nation become fortified through such replications or does the unwieldy transference of "white trauma" in face of Vietnam War violence only serve to undo itself as it becomes brought into different colonial and imperial contexts? What happens when whiteness can no longer keep up with itself? What happens should Mari's body continue to disintegrate beyond the scope of this film?

Crucially, this direct impact of the Vietnam War on American horror cinema is not merely contained to this film: one other such example is through the practice of special effects and makeup in the horror film industry. Tom Savini is a renowned makeup artist in the horror film industry. Born in Pittsburgh in 1946, Savini was inspired by Lon Chaney, Sr. (and specifically Chaney's film *Man of a Thousand Faces*) to begin dabbling into makeup and special effects. In 1965, Savini served in the Vietnam War as a combat photographer. Following his time in Vietnam, Savini attended Carnegie Mellon University, entering the University's acting and directing program. He was first established as a special effects artist through his work on George Romero's *Martin* in 1978. He then went on to work on *Dawn of the Dead*, *Friday the 13th*, *Maniac, The Burning, The Prowler, Creepshow,* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. Savini has also acted and directed in several horror films in the last few decades.

Savini has been rather upfront about the ways his time in combat deeply impacts his work in the horror film industry. He explains in a 2002 interview with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*:

> My job was to shoot images of damage to machines and to people. Through my lens, I saw some hideous [stuff]. To cope with it, I guess I tried to think of it as special effects. Now, as an artist, I just think of creating the effect within the limitations we have to deal with.[277]

He elaborated on these ideas in a recent interview with *Revolver* magazine, stating that his specialty, of which distinguishes his art from others, is his keen ability to emulate reality, whether it be viscera, violence, or brutalized bodies.

[277] John Hayes, "Savini's a Scream," A&E, *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, October 11, 2002, http://old.post-gazette.com/ae/20021011savinip5.asp.

> Vietnam was a lesson in anatomy for me. I was
> the only makeup artist who had seen the real thing,
> and that certainly affects my works. Most artists
> don't know, and I've seen this in the movies,
> they'll go to a crime scene the next day and
> the blood is red. That never happens! That blood in
> 24 hours turns kind of a burnt amber brown. To me,
> my effects had to be anatomically correct…
> it gives people a feeling of something
> they've not seen, and that's what you need there.[278]

However, this realism came at a cost to Tom. As he continues:

> I felt a safety behind the camera. I'm looking
> at horrible stuff, and my job was to photograph it.
> It did affect me, not as bad as the guys on the front lines,
> but I came home and I was an emotionless
> zombie for a year and a half…so yeah, Vietnam
> had that kind of effect on me and rendered me
> emotionless, but it taught me so much as far
> as my effects. They have a reputation for realism
> that comes from that experience. If the stuff
> I create doesn't give me the same feeling I
> got when I saw the real stuff, then the fake stuff
> isn't real enough, you know what I mean? [Laughs] [279]

As Savini suggests, it was seeing and witnessing the death and destruction of Vietnamese people, particularly through the lens of the camera, that inspired, so to speak, Savini to develop a particular style of realism. Because of this, he is often credited for having changed the way special effects were done in the horror genre, as it was his work that provided the films the look of a viscerality (unparalleled by earlier films) that was lauded by both audience and people in the industry. His work

[278] Kelsey Chapstick, "Tom Savini on Corey Taylor's New Mask, Joy of Scaring People, Life as 'Sex Machine,'" *Revolver*, June 11, 2019, https://www.revolvermag.com/culture/tom-savini-corey-taylors-new-mask-joy-scaring-people-life-sex-machine.
[279] Ibid.

not only helped to establish makeup and special effects application standards, but the monsters that he has created continue to inspire the way that monsters and villains look today. Furthermore, he opened a special effects training program, "Tom Savini's Special Make-Up Effects Program," in Pittsburgh in 2000. Many of the students have since gone on to not only work in the horror film industry, but also toy industries (McFarlane Toys), dental labs (Burman Industries), prosthetic labs (Touch Bionics Living Skin), museums (Smithsonian Institute), as well as large movie blockbusters including the 2019's *Avengers: Endgame*.[280]

What might it mean that the standards of gore and bodily violence in the American horror film industry was built and hinged upon the violence directly experienced by a combat photographer during the Vietnam War? In many ways, Savini took to the industry at a particularly good time, as his approach to makeup and special effects appear to have fulfilled this seeming desire for realistic representations of eviscerated, damaged, and deranged bodies. While Blake credits Savini (alongside other industry greats) with having "pioneered a generically specific filmic lexicon which set out to expose the historically specific traumas engendered by the militaristic authoritarianism that had underscored American life from the accession of Kennedy to the resignation of Nixon,"[281] I argue that the hyper-presence and hyper-invisibilization of the murdered, Vietnamese subjects that shapes the American imaginary of death, destruction, and horror is particularly troubling. It is specifically the corpse of the Vietnamese victim, the mangled body, that lives on—not entirely as justifications or admonishments of war, but more so presences that are contained in order to allow whiteness to proliferate.

Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo writes in "History Interrupted: Life after Material death in South Vietnamese and Diasporic Works of Fiction" that the utilization of "spectral elements [the occult,

[280] "Tom Savini's Special Make- Up Effect," Douglas Education Center, accessed December 17, 2019, https://www.dec.edu/ts/.
[281] Blake, *Wounds of Nations*, 73.

magic, ghosts, and dreams as existing side by side with material depictions]"[282] in cultural works reflects the haunted and "spectral" condition of global capitalism in its current neoliberal iteration.[283] She suggests that due to the disintegration of centralized modes of production as a result of the need to invisiblize the very processes of production and conditions of labor has "ascribed its products a phantom corporeality."[284] This blurry relationship between the material and its inevitable mode of immaterial spectrality has produced a condition of haunted forms of subject-making, particularly as Nguyen-Vo cites Jean and John Comaroff, the "(post) modern person is a subject made with objects."[285]

In other words, Nguyen-Vo identifies the very process wherein white subject-making becomes haunted by whiteness itself, due to ways it contributes to its own undoing through incomplete attempts at self-preservation. As white nationalism implicates itself through increasingly de-centralized capitalistic modes of consumption and production, insistence and dependence on colonial violence and the enforced separation between itself as a colonizer and those it colonizes, haunted and surplus affect, feeling, and emotion inevitably emerges. Therefore, the role of haunted and surplus feeling as attached to whiteness-making complicates our understanding of the horror film. As a genre that actively divulges the spectrality of white power through its representations of excess and extreme violence, terror, and supernatural, horror genre may appear as anomalous in a capitalistic and a white nationalist structure. However, horror films are also such a clear example of a shameless capitalistic endeavor, in the sense that a vast amount of horror movies are made on a low budget and produce high returns through exploitative means. In some ways, films like that of

[282] Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, "History Interrupted," 2.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid, 5.
[285] Ibid, 32.

Last House should not exist in the sense that it acts as a repository and representation of the surplus and excessive white feeling (i.e., the horrific, terror-inducing, disgusting, aberrant, and deviant), and in a capitalistic system, surplus is both a haunted as well as an "unproductive" site of labor, pleasure, pain, desire, consumption, and being.[286] Yet, they persist.

White Nationalist Transfer and Vietnam War Horror

As one of the few horror films to hold the designations of being an Academy Award Best Picture nominee, a highest grossing film, and on many accounts, and often credited as the scariest of all time, William Friedkin's 1972 *The Exorcist*'s central focus is on the succumbing of a young girl, Reagan MacNeil (Linda Blair), to demonic possession in a time of postwar global insecurity. The exorcism is conducted by two local priests (Jason Miller and Max von Sydow) called in by Reagan's single mother, Chris MacNeil (Ellen Burstyn). The ancient demon Pazuzu fights and fiercely rebukes all such efforts, and consequently forces Reagan's body to perform a multitude of deviant, demonic feats like that of head rotations, projectile vomiting, masturbation with a wooden cross, and levitation. The battle between the priests, the demon, and Reagan's soul culminates with both priests dead and Reagan ultimately relinquished of her demonic possession.

The film was an adaptation of William Blatty's 1971 novel, *The Exorcist*, which itself was inspired by a case of demonic possession in 1949 in Washington DC. By re-situating an instance of the merging of the mortal, the demonic, and the divine from the 1950's to the 1970's, William Friedkin (the director of the film) identified that this horrific tale of demonic possession somehow resonated with the tensions and anxieties of the period. The relationship between the terrifying violence of the possession and the equally unruly and uncontrollable Cold War violence spilling onto

[286] Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, "History Interrupted: Life after Material Death in South Vietnamese and Diasporic Fiction," Journal of Vietnamese Studies 3, no. 1 (2008): 3.

American soil and into American homes is perhaps what gives the film its sense of immense gravitas and horror. While the question of American national security haunts from the fringes of the original book and film (whether it emerges through Chris MacNeil's acting portrayals of anti-Vietnam War protests[287], epigraphs elucidating the workings of the FBI and the incomprehensible evils of Communism, or Blatty's supposed connections to the CIA), such anxieties have seemingly continued to preoccupy Friedkin, who in 2013, was featured in an interview with *Fade In* magazine listing his "Favorite Films of All Time." Detailing his admiration of the film *The Birth of a Nation*, he states:

> It's much put down today because it really is a justification of the KKK. And, y'know, in the politically correct society, in which we live, you can't make a film that justifies the KKK. And it shows that what happened after the Civil War in the Restoration Period there was a lot of black crime. And the rise of the Klu Klux Klan… came about because there was a lot of rapes and pillaging done by the newly freed slaves. But putting aside the subject matter, its a great film and it changed the way American films are made.[288]

Friedkin's attempts at defending the racist film and the KKK explicitly identifies formations of white fears and their effect on American institutions and structures. In doing so, he is not only suturing the relationship between film making, nation-making, and national narrative making, but is identifying a legible American archive or network of sense, feeling, and emotion that transmits from one movie and rubs off another. Not only did *The Birth of a Nation* inspire Friedkin's technique as a

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[287] This emerges (explicitly) in the film, Reagan's mother is an actress, and is shooting a film that features a Vietnam War antiwar protest on a college campus. The violence of the war become deeply embedded within the MacNeil household, as it not only becomes the source of Chris' income, but occupies a vast amount of Chris' time, which condemns an "improperly" supervised Reagan to become possessed. In the context of the film, the dissolution of the family and its susceptibility to demonic possession in a time of global insecurity suggests that American institutions (like that of whiteness) had become irreversibly and horrifically vulnerable in the postwar era.

[288] "William Friedkin's Favorite Films of all Time," *Fade In Magazine*, June 12, 2013, video, 6:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-APzEjrklc.

director, but it also informed the ways in which he understands structures of whiteness and its relationship to the cinematic arts.

Similar to *Last House*, *The Exorcist* has since been held as an industry standard. Credited as one of the films that kicked off the sub-genre of the exorcism film, it has inspired a whole host of horror movies (*The Omen*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose, Audrey Rose, Abby*). What are the implications of a cinematic genealogy that emerges from a horror movie that is explicitly informed by a white supremacist film? How do structures of whiteness travel, and how might we track such movement cinematically? And if horror films draw upon deep-set networks of feelings, from what contexts do they emerge, and how do senses of horror, terror, and fright shift from film to film, between different creators, different cultural forms, and consumers?

It is these very complexities that allow horror cinema to exist alongside the continued disavowal of the genre. I suggest that the disavowal of horror is tied to structure of gender, race, sexuality, and class, and how they circulate discourses of incompatibility, nonsense, refusal, resistance, while also embodying some of the most problematic, simplistic, reductive, troubling, and hateful representations of marginalized people (in a multitude of different contexts) cinematically. Broadly speaking, not only is horror a genre reliant on an economy of feeling that is centered around discourses of fear, disgust, shock, and horror, it is also productive in capturing these mechanisms of whiteness and white nationalism due to the ways it occupies a site of contradiction. As illustrated by *Last House*, horror movies are culpable in unabashedly centering white fear and pose white people at the highest risk for eradication in face of colonial violence, but in doing so, hold the potential to undo the very same white supremacist logic that informs such depictions by allowing these invisibilized fears and deviances to come through to the surface and further dissolve the boundaries between its colonizer status and the colonized. It is here I want to return to Craven's words: to think of *The Last House on the Left* and other Vietnam War horror films as heritage films is quite apt,

in that these cinematic sites certainly conceptualize heritage in a particularly American way: contradictory and directly tied to the white nationalism. Ultimately, this is a highly confusing cinematic site, and I believe the heart of its mess lies within proximity to the continued untangling of haunted white nationalist/ supremacist feeling.

Chapter Four: Keeping it in the Family: Carceral Horror and the 1980s Suburb

In Stephen Rubin's 1981 article "Blooms of Darkness" penned for the *Washington Post*, he writes of a very particular reader response to VC Andrews' 1979 novel *Flowers in the Attic*:

> William Belk, one of the American hostages kept in captivity for 444 days in Iran, has reported that he read *Flowers (in the Attic*) four times and recommends it to anyone who wants to experience the emotional aspect of solitary confinement. 'If you read it you can understand our plight a little better and what we felt like in Iran,' Belk has said, much to the pleasure of the author. One needn't possess a degree in psychology to glean that V.C. Andrews is a hostage of sorts herself, a prisoner living vicariously through her writing.[289]

Flowers in the Attic tells the story of the four Dollanganger children, who, upon their return to their family's estate (the Foxworth mansion), are subjected to three years of captivity in their grandmother's attic. The novel details the siblings' confinement in the attic, as the children struggle to contend with the torture and abuse suffered at the hands of their grandmother, their mother's abandonment, and the uncovering of sordid family secrets. *Flowers* is fascinated with the life of the elite and the darkness of generational wealth in America. In face of this context, what accounted for the sense of connection felt so deeply by an American hostage of the Iran crisis reading *Flowers*? Furthermore, what other kinds of carceral logics undergirds Andrew's story?

Due to the book's massive popularity (which was perhaps attributable to its dark Gothic tones and emphasis on taboo subject matters), studios moved forward in producing a horror film adaptation of *Flowers*. Wes Craven was initially attached to the project; however, this was not meant

[289] Stephen Rubin, "Blooms of Darkness," *The Washington Post*, (Washington, D.C., U.S.), September 20, 1981.

to be. As John Kenneth Muir argues, despite Craven being "especially suited" for this project due to his interest in the "non-normativity" of American families," his script was eventually passed up, reportedly due to its heavy emphasis on violence and incest.[290] The focus on domestic/suburban horror shaped his other films released during the 1980s (i.e., *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Invitation to Hell*), but it is the thematic parallels between *Flowers* and Craven's 1991 film, *The People Under the Stairs* that are especially notable. Like *Flowers*, *People Under the Stairs* details, through the language of the horror film, the depravity of wealth acquisition in the United States, as the film features the Robesons, a pair of ruthless landlords (and possibly sibling-couple) who not only mistreat and exploit their working-class tenants of color, but have also taken to imprisoning humans (turned cannibalistic monsters) in their basement. Like *Flowers,* captivity and imprisonment is at the heart of *People*'s suburban domestic horror.

These narratives of "carceral horror," so to speak, draw upon a long cinematic lineage: American horror has always had a fixation on the secretly imprisoned, the trapped, the hidden. However, rarely are these evocations of carcerality explicitly connected to the broader context and histories of the American prison system; rather, imprisonment becomes a trope of terror, a manifestation of individual deviance. While horror films situate incarceration as inherently inhumane and prison a site of deplorability and unspeakable violence, these films require the de-contextualization of these representations of carcerality in order to maintain their sense of horror.

Therefore, I use this chapter to (re)contextualize American carceral horror films of the 1980s and early 1990s. As decades situated in the era of the rapid growth of mass incarceration, or as Jonathan Simon describes it, the emergence of the "warehouse prison and the carceral-state political

[290] While the incest plot point was actually central to *Flowers* (and the broader series as a whole), the final version of *Flowers in the Attic*, directed by Jeffrey Bloom, completely removed any overt depictions of incest as well as cut down on violence. (Muir, *The Art of Horror*, 23.)

order,"[291] I examine the different ways in which *Flowers* and *People* de-contextualizes representations of imprisonment while simultaneously affirming these systems' connections to white supremacy, land ownership and development, and white generational wealth.

In this chapter, I examine the carceral structures of whiteness as depicted in American horror films of the 1980s and early 1990s. By analyzing how captivity is embedded into the white household as depicted in Jeffrey Bloom's 1987 *Flowers in the Attic* and Wes Craven's 1991 *The People Under the Stairs*, I consider how the United States protected whiteness and contained racial difference during this time by developing suburban spaces organized through carceral logics.[292] Examining Craven and Bloom's works to consider the spatial politics of 80's/90s whiteness, I examine *Flowers in the Attic* and *The People Under the Stairs* to map out how, through the emphasis of white investment and structures of disciplinary morality, incarceration became sutured to the structure of the postwar suburbs during the late Cold War period.

Carceral Horror

We can situate *Flowers* and *People* within the broader cinematic tradition of carceral horror, or films that tell some kind of narrative regarding incarceration, imprisonment, and captivity. Carceral horror is a broad and undefined term: such films can often be very literal in their interpretations, as they situate state prisons/jails as sites of depravity, inhumanity, monstrousness, either in terms of the entities in power running the prison, or the prisoner themselves. Examples include *The Platform* (2019), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Last Shift* (2014), *30 Days of Night* (2007); we can also consider the category of "women in prison," a subgenre of exploitation film that picked up in popularity during

[291] Jonathan Simon, "Rise of the Carceral States," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2007): 476.
[292] As the urban was facing rapid "renewal" (through the mass destruction of POC communities) alongside the construction of white suburb, much of the physical, human, and spectral residuals of such (re)development acted as the narrative basis for these horror films.

the postwar era. Carceral horror can also be told more figuratively or metaphorically, wherein these films are either focused on examining carceral logics of the everyday (outside of literal prisons/jails) or exploring horrific acts of imprisonment and incarceration in spaces that are seemingly not "intended" for human captivity. *The Old Dark House* (1932), *The Black Phone* (2022), *Us* (2019), *Jane Eyre* (1996, 2011), *Fresh* (2022), *House by the Cemetery* (1981), and of course, *Flowers in the Attic* (1987) and *The People Under the Stairs* (1991) are examples of this type of carceral horror.

Like any subgenre, carceral horror film differs dramatically in political and cinematic intention. However, as evidenced by *Flowers* and *People*, one particular aspect of the genre that I find requires closer scrutiny is the way in which the genre fully de-contextualizes and de-structuralizes their analyses and/or depictions of carcerality. Rather than situating their narratives within a broader context of the American carceral system as a form of racial management and violence, the films present the violence as committed by deviant, entirely unfeeling monstrous villains. It is the evil prison warden, the corrupt cop, the "psychopath" in the neighborhood that are responsible in shaping and enacting these structures of terror rather than a long-established system and structure predicated on white supremacy, settler colonialism, anti-blackness and impacted by broader geopolitics like the Cold War. In many ways, carceral horror is very much like the subgenres discussed in previous chapters: it works to divorce the structural analysis from its stories of horror. Therefore, I use this chapter as an intervention to consider the context of the 1980s American carceral system, and its relationship to whiteness, the Cold War, and the American postwar suburb.

The 1980s Carceral State and the Cold War

As examples of carceral horror films, *People* and *Flower* strikes quite close to the logics at the center of 1980s/early 90s American carceral systems. As prison scholars argue, it was in the 1970s when there was a shift towards punitive "warehouse prisons" to accommodate for rapidly increasing rates

of incarceration. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests in *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, this shift was in large part a punitive response to increasing economic crises, deprivation of the welfare state, the stripping away of social resources (as she describes, "The social structure as a whole began to come apart because of the raw, numerical threat to white supremacy represented by unorganized, but densely concentrated…people of color"),[293] and the establishment of "tough on crime/drugs" policies enacted by Nixon and Reagan. Gilmore also crucially notes that activists involved in liberation movements were also heavily criminalized and imprisoned during this time.

Jonathan Simons argues that the mobilization of "fear" was/is crucial to upholding of such structures in that it urges the public to believe in "safety" (and subsequently, punishable criminality) as the foremost concern of American households; this desire for "safety" becoming ever more urgent following the aforementioned dismantlement of social resources and safety nets. As Simons states:

> Like property taxes, fear of crime affects people in their very sense of belonging to a specific community through their home… the carceral state presupposes pervasive public fear of downward mobility associated with strong mistrust of government (particularly by those who already attained) the middle-class lifestyle promoted by the New Deal state.[294]

In face of these glaring structural failures indicating the government's inability to care for its constituents, the prison "represented a rescue float tossed to politicians; a unique public good capable of escaping the (collapse) of New Deal-type social policies."[295] In other words, "prison serves as a "public good" directly aimed at insecurity, though the cost of such a "public good" is deadly high.[296]

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[293] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 42.
[294] Simons, "Rise of the Carceral," 493.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.

Ultimately, prisons act as a site to relieve white fear. Impenetrable systems built to seemingly guarantee white well-being, prison emerged as a tool for the American state in racial management. Simon goes on to emphasize that the "warehouse prison" style of mass incarceration relieved this fear of systemic failure, as it "contributed to the political order and legitimacy of the carceral state simply with respect to its capacity to contain…thus, incapacitation – the function of prisons to diminish crime by keeping likely offenders locked up – has increasingly become the dominant rationale for punishment… as it minimizes the exposure of the state to failure."[297] And though the prison system is obviously not impervious to failure, and that it itself struggles in "governing adequately or eliminating permanently" its carceral subjects as well as contributing to high costs due to "an aging prison population" and increasing "economic losses due to a heavily criminalized underclass," prison, incarceration, and captivity continues to function as a prime form of guarding whiteness from itself and any outside threats.[298]

The expanding carceral state of the 1980s was also explicitly connected to broader Cold War militarisms and hyper-defense landscapes characteristic of the postwar era. As Stuart Schrader argues, techniques of modern policing and incarceration were carved out in face of the Cold War. In response to Soviet accusations of American racism, police "reform" became a key platform for Americans to prove their dominance in the implementation of "democratic" states and structures. Schrader goes on to explain that establishing a consensus around reform proved difficult, though it was the CIA officials cautioning against the Soviet Union's communist practices of having a "centralized governing hierarchy" that took precedence.[299] In response, it was determined that American police needed to be "technically adept, flush with cash and insulated from political

[297] Ibid, 494.
[298] Ibid, 495.
[299] Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 40.

machinations."[300] This had devastating consequences as the police became increasingly well-funded, privatized, and decentralized. The police, as tied to the prison-industrial complex, remained free from blame as corrupt "individual" cops were held "responsible" for any problems that emerged, fueling the massive growth of an entirely un-checked, white supremacist structure fixated on inhumane and unflinching punishment to emphasize the US' ability in "benevolently" dominating over the Cold War global landscape.

Notably, it is through this context in which I locate my analysis of *Flowers* and *People's* depictions of carcerality. These films were released during a moment wherein whiteness and the white suburb were being bolstered through the investment into "warehouse prisons" and the embedment of mass carceral logics across the landscape of the United States. While not explicit in their critique of the prison state, *Flowers* and *People*'s depictions of a suburban household chained to the prison structure is striking in the ways in which it insists on the vulnerability and ruthlessness of postwar whiteness.

The Horror of the American Postwar Suburbs

Through its narrative focus on imprisonment, *Flowers* and *People* locate the intersections of carcerality, whiteness, and Cold War geopolitics onto the site of the suburb. Hence, to unpack the logics of horror in these films, I first turn to the to the broader horrors that undergird the structure of the suburbs and the subgenre of suburban gothic/horror. While the suburb has existed globally and long before the postwar area, the suburbs that took shape during the Cold War period enacted a white settler carcerality in order to uphold Cold War global dominance. Hence, it is the American postwar suburb that is suffused with horror and central to whiteness. This is in large part due to the

[300] Ibid.

nature of its emergence as a structure born from the horrors of WWII and as a crucial domestic mechanism that fueled American growth and power during the Cold War.[301]

As Dianne Harris suggests in *Little White House*, in efforts of establishing a postwar settler regime that would create new form of domesticities that would bolster postwar economies and protect the interests of white nationalist familial structures, the postwar suburb was born. The suburb was presented both as a "bourgeois utopia" (xi) and a space in which the accumulation of white property interests could be pursued far away from the threats of Blackness. In other words, the suburb was presented as a site of aspiration wherein one could access proper postwar white subjecthood and new forms of white domesticities. During the postwar era, suburbs were, as Harris argues, "presented as empty and poignant ciphers for whiteness, affluence, belonging, and a sense of permanent stability."[302] As a site that insists upon white settler safety, the suburb satisfied the strong desire to "enact strong boundaries as owning a house was the surest way to cement one's (and one's family's) inclusion in the nation."[303]

Unsurprisingly, the suburbs are an unsettling site: simultaneously held up as the ultimate symbol of postwar America, as Harris writes, "between 1945 and 1960, a pervasive iconography of white, middle-class domesticity circulated widely in various media and became instantiated in millions of new homes across the United States," it has also since become situated as a deeply vexed space. As Elizabeth Ewen and Rosalyn Baxandall argue in *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*,

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[301] Notably, horror entertainment, like all forms of entertainment, began to shift as the nuclear family-suburban home became the idealized family formation. As TV was established as a main entertainment source, several kinds of horror TV programming emerged. Horror radio broadcasts were also quite popular. Interestingly, while horror comics had been quite popular in early decades, it was in 1954 where the courts ruled and recommended that the comic industry change its horror content, resulting in horror comics to be censored. Furthermore, it is also during this time that in these television programming as well as literature and comics where the horror is set in a suburban home (or feature suburban residents). One such example would be Alfred Hitchcocks' television series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Alfred Hitchcock Hour*. Amongst the 361 episodes, many of the episodes are set in non-descript American suburban towns. The suburbs, in other words, has not only been a primary setting for American horror since the 1950s but also one of the prime target audiences.

[302] Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 1.

[303] Ibid, 15.

"The suburbs have become synonymous with an empty, anticivic, spiritually dead, dysfunctional society that is slowly enveloping the world. Even cities are becoming suburbanized."[304]

Because the suburb has been made to hold all of these tensions, it has also consequently become a recognizable site of American horror. Suburban Gothic, a term that has been used to describe suburban horror, is a subgenre that emerged alongside the growth of the actual suburb itself. As stated by Bernice M. Murphy, Suburban Gothic is derived from the "subgenre of the wider American Gothic tradition which dramatizes anxieties arising from the mass urbanization of the United States and usually features suburban settings, preoccupations and protagonists… in particular, [it features] the very real fears of insularity, conformity loss of individual identity, and depersonalization."[305] Pioneered by the likes of authors Richard Matheson, Ira Levin, and Shirley Jackson, suburban gothic has been a long standing American cultural tradition that continues on into today's cinematic and literary landscape. The suburb, a troubled entity, can barely contain that of which lingers beneath; a tension that has undoubtedly been noted in Suburban Gothic cultural productions.

In other words, Suburban Gothic (and by extension, the subgenre of suburban horror) is a cultural manifestation that emerged from the postwar moment. Therefore, matters that are typically the site of haunting in Gothic tales -- land, possession, property, and family—take on a particular Cold War meaning. As argued in "Identical Boxes Spread like Gangrene: Defining the Suburban Gothic," Murphy identifies the suburbs as one of the most conflicted spaces of postwar America; such contestations manifesting through the "adapt(ion) or reconfigure(ation) of traditional Gothic

[304] Elizabeth Ewen and Rosalyn Baxandall, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xxi.
[305] Bernie M. Murphy," Identical Boxes Spreading like Gangrene": Defining the Suburban Gothic" in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. Charles L. Crow (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014), 318.

tropes -- the invasion narrative, the imprisoned heroine, the haunted, the doppelganger, the return of the repressed—in order to reflect specifically the twentieth and twenty-first century."[306]

Murphy also identifies key components of suburban gothic, that being, the haunted suburban home, wherein "featured protagonists who have made the mistake of thinking that just because their house is relatively new, they are safe from any intrusion of any kind of vengeful supernatural force."[307] Note the centrality of "the fear of safety" to the genre: in many ways, suburban gothic is fully primed to be analyzed through carceral logics. Murphy continues:

> As is so often the case in the American Gothic more generally, the complacent homeowner learns the hard way that one should never forget the history of the land upon which a house is built, nor the fact that the people in the house also have a history. In the Suburban Gothic, housing developments are erected upon rural cemeteries and Indian burial grounds, obese housewives drown in concrete in their own basements, demons dabbled with as children return to terrorize one in the present, and bodies/ body parts are found in crawlspaces, closets… in other words, the niggling awareness that America itself is built upon land stolen from the rightful original inhabitants resurfaces with renewed ferocity.[308]

When considering the Suburban Gothic and Murphy's theorizations, it is crucial to situate these tropes, anxieties, tensions, and "fears of safety" that permeate the genre within the context of understanding the postwar suburbs as a white nationalist formation that hinges on anti-blackness, capitalist accumulation, and settler colonialism. In other words, it is specifically the contestation over domestic and global property (like that of the suburb) that becomes central to Cold War anxiety and white nationalist horror. Subsequently, suburban horror is useful in tracking postwar whiteness alongside the shifting meanings of land and property during the postwar era.

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[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid, 324.
[308] Ibid, 325.

The suburbs are haunted, and this is depicted quite literally in horror film. For instance, the trope of the doomed "modern" white home, dwelling, business, school and community built on top of "Indian burial ground(s)" (classic examples include: *The Amityville Horror* [1979], *Scalps* [1983], *Poltergeist* [1982], *The Shining* [1980]) has been well-documented in horror scholarship. However, rarely is a settler colonialist critique engaged, rather; these films often work to situate settler innocence and spectacularize indigenous genocide. This hyper-fixiation on the "indigenous ghost" draws upon a long tradition of settler formations in American literate. Writing about the figure of the "uncanny native" in early American literature, Renee Bergland states in *The National Uncanny*, "Motifs of dispossession recur again and again in early American descriptions of Native Americans"[309] functioning both as "a technique of removal" and "as constant reminders of the fragility of national identity."[310] This, in large point, comes from the fact that "land ownership may be the source of the nation's deepest guilt" and "ownership itself —that is to say property—is a concept that haunts the American national mythos, repressed and erased."[311]

This tension that emerges between suppressing the uncanny Native American while allowing the figure to recur emerges from "guilt over the dispossession of Indians and fear of their departed spirits…functioning as perverse sources of pleasure and pride," as this is believed to be "a successful appropriation of the American spirit."[312] So much so that this facilitates the "simultaneous acknowledgement of American horror and celebrate the American triumph."[313] In this vein, the white suburban house and home become a centralized site of horror – and triumph!-- through the suburban gothic/horror genre due to the obsession over "safety" and "protection," as senses directly emergent from white settler violence, pervade the space.

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[309] Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 2.
[310] Ibid, 4-5.
[311] Ibid, 9.
[312] Ibid,18.
[313] Ibid, 6.

In *Flowers* and *People*, the suburban white desire for "safety" becomes even more precarious as this desire is revealed to be particularly carceral in nature. This carcerality emerges rather explicitly through the different depictions of suburban architecture and design in each film. In *Flowers*, the family estate (the Foxworth mansion) is lush and sprawling. However, it is also deeply menacing, as the grounds are fiercely protected: staff patrol all hours of the day, vicious guard dogs are on alert, and the mansion itself is armored in authoritative architecture. Locked, barred windows, lethally pointy gables and isolated from its neighbors (surrounded by thick pine trees), one cannot help but wonder if this is all for keeping the threat out or contained within.[314]

The Foxworth estate is not the only "suburban" site featured in the film. *Flowers* begins with the once-happy Dollangangers residing in a typical, middle class, 1950s suburban home in Philadelphia. The family, nicknamed the Dresden dolls, consists of patriarch Christopher (Marshall Colt), his wife Corrine (Victoria Tennant), and their children Christopher (Jeb Stuart Adams), Cathy (Kristy Swanson), and two five-year-old twins, Carrie (Lindsay Parker) and Cory (Ben Ganger). As the opening to the first chapter states, "Just because we were all blond, flaxen haired, with fair complexions… Jim Johnston, Daddy's best friend, pinned on us a nickname, 'the Dresden dolls.' He said we looked like those fancy porcelain people who grace whatnot shelves and fireplace mantels. Soon everyone in our neighborhood was calling us the Dresden dolls."[315] The family's moniker directly references the family's uniform striking blond, blue eyed looks; Andrews positions the Dollangangers as the idealized white suburban ideal but quickly works to tear down the façade.[316] Coming home from a work trip, Christopher dies in a car accident, leaving Corrine with her four

[314] The exteriors of the mansion were filmed at Castle Hill on the Crane Estate in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Ipswich is a older suburb about 45 minutes away from Boston.
[315] V.C. Andrews, *Flowers in the Attic* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979), 8.
[316] This striking uniform beauty of the family is eventually revealed to be a result of incest, as Chris and Corrine were uncle and niece/ half-brother, half-sister. Dresden, of course, is in reference to the German city and particularly the German dolls (referred to as Dresden dolls). Andrews is not subtle in spinning her narrative of Gothic rot and deviances; the white, Aryan ideal as embodied by the family only attainable through incest. Like *People*, *Flowers in the Attic* centers a kind of whiteness that easily crumbles once the family is no longer able to buy into the structure.

children as the perfect suburban life the family once knew unravels. Unable to pay off the debts (seemingly accrued through Corrine's unchecked, "indulgent" postwar housewife spending), the home is foreclosed, their belongings repossessed. With nowhere else to go, Corrine is forced to bring her children to her family's estate and submit to having her children imprisoned in the attic. Ultimately, Corrine abandons the children and plots their demise (ultimately poisoning cookies the children are meant to eat) in attempts to rebuild her elite status, re-born as a proper member of the Foxworth family. A crucial detail emerges through the depiction of both the Dollanganger and Foxworth homes: to achieve white wealth in the postwar era, a carceral logic must be enacted to "protect" the family from supposed threats. And though these threats are often posed as explicitly external, the true threat is coming from within.

As for the Robesons, their home is a dark Victorian built like a maze, from which escape is almost impossible. Similar to the Foxworth estate, the Robeson's home is a fortress and full of defensive architecture: self-locking doors, vicious guard dogs, trick stairs that turn into a slide leading down to the basement, surveillance cameras, alarms. "Daddy" Robeson even has tactical gear (in the form of a gimp costume) which he dons when locked in the final battle with Fool, the main character of the film. The Robesons are heavily armed, and the home is isolated. It is a dark, foreboding space that is made even more horrific when the viewers realize that the Robeson's designed their space in the fashion of a dilapidated 1950s home that literally functions as a prison.[317] While it is unclear how exactly the Robesons "acquired" their prisoners, it is hinted that the eponymous "people under the stairs" may have been children that were adopted and deemed "poorly" behaved, and therefore, in need of perpetual imprisonment.

[317] This is indicated by set and costume design: though Victorian on the outside, the interiors are covered in 1950s floral patterns; the kitchen includes a kitchenette, "Mommy" and "Daddy" Robeson twisted versions of the 1950s perfect suburban couple.

Carceral Logics of the Suburbs

As evidenced by their architecture and design, the Foxworth and Robeson homes are carceral spaces, impenetrable fortresses. In many ways, the defensive geographies as exhibited by both the Robesons and the Foxworths strongly mirror the carceral ethos of the American suburbs in non-cinematic contexts. In Lisa Guenther's "Dwelling in Carceral Spaces," she writes of the "relationship between prisons designed to lock people in and suburban fortresses designed to lock people out," as she explains that gated community act as an extension of a "structural counterpart to the prison in a neoliberal carceral state."[318] These gated communities arise due to "the terror of safety" and the intense need for the prevention of structural failure.[319] She argues that the relentless pursuit of safety (at all costs) and failure prevention leads to home ownership acting as a form "slow violence," a process that is "slow and relentless" wherein "life chances are unequally distributed, and entire populations are displaced, worn down, and exhausted."[320] Most importantly, especially in regard to these two films, Guenther argues: "the slow violence of homeowner citizenship" manifests in multiple kinds of geographies, including "gates and walls designed to expand the territory of possessive dwelling…the landscape of prisons, jails, and detention centers… that remain hidden."[321] In other words, American suburbs are necropolitical spaces clinging to carceral geographies in order to survive. The relationship between the suburbs and prison is naturalized, as Guenther argues: "the slow violence of homeowner citizenship is a key component of the carceral state, even or especially if it is habitually coded as an investment in safety, prosperity, and innocence… this violence is so

[318] Lisa Guenther, "Dwelling in Carceral Space," *Levinas Studies* 12 (2018): 60.
[319] Though, it is important to note that Guenther points out that many of these attempts at securing safety and protection from failure do not actually work (for instance, gates do little in keeping "crime" and violence out of the home.)
[320] Guenther, "Dwelling in Carceral Space," 66.
[321] Guenther also highlights the various geographies/practices of the suburb as particularly carceral: "zero tolerance policies that fuel the school-to-prison pipeline, quality-of-life ordinances that criminalize homelessness, stop-and-frisk policing practices that normalize and legitimize racial profiling, and the moral panic around domestic sex trafficking, which targets immigrants and people of color." (Ibid, 65.)

normalized and naturalized that it's as difficult to image a world without securitized dwellings as it is to imagine a world without prisons."[322] In other words, the American suburb has been rendered reliant upon carceral systems in order to exist.

The suburban "wall" has been theorized as a very particular device of building up the carcerality of the suburbs. As detailed by Mary Gail Snyder and Ed Blakely in *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*, "Americans are electing to live behind walls with active security mechanisms to prevent intrusion into their private domains. Americans of all classes are forting up, attempting to secure the value of their houses, reduce or escape form the impact of crime, and find neighbors who share their sense of the good life."[323] This fixation on anti-black formations of safety, property, and privacy are also inherently tied to settler colonialism, as detailed by Harris: the fence, while undoubtedly linked to the "English ethos of enclosure and its concomitant ties to the rise of industrial capitalism," it also a "frontier ideal," or a belief that "depended on a fundamental tension between the romantic myth of an open and unclaimed (and therefore unfenced) landscape and the realities of territory claimed through violent acts of imperialism."[324]

In face of this, as films that produce "exaggerated" and horrific interpretations of such spaces, might there be room for disruption in these films (or at least provide the ability in identifying the connections between white nationalist affect, property, and carcerality?) After all, the horror genre (especially suburban horror) often focuses on identifying failure. The suburban horror film is often cited to have begun with *The Bad Seed* (1956), continuing on with such entries including *Macabre* (1958), *Blood Feast* (1963), *Homicidal* (1961), and *Picture Mommy Dead* (1966). Early entries such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *Fiend Without a Face* (1958), and *It Came from Outer Space*

[322] Ibid, 66.
[323] Mary Gail Snyder and Ed Blakley, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 2.
[324] Harris, *Little White Houses*, 303.

(1953) took on a sci-fi angle as they featured small towns invaded by outside alien forces. The films from the 1950s and 1960s often approached the suburbs as under attack rather than the suburbs themselves as a site of horror. The failure of the suburb (or the failure of the promise of the suburb) and the inherent danger of the space became a narrative focus in the mid-1970s, with such releases including *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and *Carrie* (1976).[325] In such films, the suburbs take on similar look, feeling, and haunted-ness as described by Murphy. In other words, they are all spaces designed to ensure "safety," but inevitably fail in doing so as the discourse of "safety" is revealed to be a patriarchal, white supremacist, and imperialist mechanism of control.

The horror-driven failures of these haunted, cursed, and terrorized cinematic suburbs are made even clearer when considering that their narratives will never find closure. It is in the late 1970s and into the 1980s when "the sequel" gained massive popularity within the film industry.[326] Classic horror film franchises emerge in this decade (examples: *Halloween* [11 sequels, 2 remakes], *The Nightmare on Elm Street* [8 sequels, 1 remake], *Friday the 13th* [11 sequels, 1 reboot], *Sleepaway Camp* [5 sequels], *Hellraiser* [10 films], *The Evil Dead* [4 films, 1 TV series], *Poltergeist* [3 films, 1 remake], and *Creepshow* [3 films, 1 TV series].) Much work has been done in Horror Studies regarding the significance of the horror franchise and sequel-ization in terms of its metaphorical meaning and

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[325] Interestingly, this is made quite clear in the 1980s nostalgia wave that has taken hold of the late 2010's in terms of horror cinema and TV streaming shows. Much of these films/ TV shows specifically are set in the suburbs; this just shows how much 1980s horror cinema became aesthetically linked to the suburb. Examples of this can be found in horror TV series and movies: *Stranger Things*, *Summer of '84, the Fear Street* trilogy*, Paranormal Activity 3, The House of the Devil.*

[326] By the 1980's, the American horror film industry took yet another turn with the advent of VHS (video home system). Much like the rest of the film industry, VHS (having beat out Betamax for dominance over the home media market) deeply impacted the cinematic mechanics, themes, and content that proliferated in 80's horror films. The genre flourished in the VHS market, particularly as the critically panned or box office failure (a fate of which many horror films were resigned to) would often find new life with VHS. As the consumption of horror films increased through the "home rental" industry (one in which was focused on consumer choice and private viewing), the horror film was further integrated into households, accounting for unprecedented levels of intimacy between horror cinema, the horrors within, and the American subject. This "privatization" of watching horror film was not the only shift in the industry, as the 1980s also witnessed the birth of a few notable horror trends, including the rise of body horror (T*he Fly [1986], Videodrome [1983], Evil Dead [*1981]) and the proliferation of the slasher (*Prom Night [1980], My Bloody Valentine [1981], Silent Night, Deadly Night [1984]*). (John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1980s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007.)

industry practicality, but in terms of this project, I argue that the structure of the "horror franchise," or horror sequel, is key to insisting on the lingering failure of the American suburb. For many an American home, there is no sense of resolution. Threats always loom as the US has no way of "properly" containing the threat of the other. As Bergland argues, "(early) American writing invokes the ghostly uncanny Native American obsessively;"[327] American horror films, particularly of the Suburban Gothic kind, are no different.

American Horror and the Failure of the Carceral White Suburb

1980s (and early 90s) horror films captured the affective contradictions of the American suburb. On one hand, the suburb had become a key symbol of Cold War America through which the country imagined itself as well as a primary site in which boundaries of whiteness, white nationalism, postwar carceral logics and the exploitation of bodies of color were determined. One need only turn to studies including Michelle Nickerson's *Mothers of Conservativism: Women and the Postwar Right* and Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* to examine the prominence of the suburbs and suburbanites in suturing white nationalist politic and affect to the Cold War "fight." As McGirr and Nickerson argue, conservative suburban mothers mobilized against Cold War liberalisms, i.e., the "predatory interventionist state," as a way of staunching the threat of communism.[328] Bolstered by their "housewife" status and postwar iterations of "Republican motherhood," they were "armed with a strong collective sense where they and their local crusades…successfully overpowered…and forced their priorities onto the larger movement."[329] On the other hand, the suburb cannot contain (nor sustainably maintain) the white supremacist, settler

[327] Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 5.
[328] Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), xiii.
[329] Ibid.

colonialist, and anti-black violence, logics, and legacies that continue to shape the space of the suburb.

This is where the horror film intervenes as it identifies the inherent failures in investing in the contradictory site of the suburb. While the economic precariousness of the postwar American suburb perhaps didn't fully manifest "explicitly" until, arguably, the 2007 housing crash, I argue turning to sites such as Wes Craven's *The People Under the Stairs* or Andrews'/ Bloom's *Flowers in the Attic* to examine how the precarious-ness of the suburbs, in large part due to their reliance on carceral logics, reveals just how early on this failure was established. In other words, *People* and *Flowers* revel in failure, though a specific kind of failure: white failure. We can perhaps turn to these films in critiquing the emergence of the violence of American suburbs as both films end with the take down of a wealthy estate, exposed for their fraudulent, violent, and monstrous behaviors. The suburban home is shown to be uninhabitable and unsustainable, a system fully predicated on violence.

Deemed as an entry in Craven's suburban horror, *The People Under the Stairs* is his twelfth film, coming in after such hits including *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), and *The Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). While *People* is not Craven's first foray (nor his last) into "suburban horror," *The People Under the Stairs* is distinct in that it specifically focuses on the carceral violence of the suburban home. By exploring the ways in which working class, Black characters disrupt the process of violent and white investment into such logics, Craven makes gestures towards re-considering the stakes of white ownership in the US.

As evidenced by Craven's other films, such as *The Last House on the Left* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, *The People Under the Stairs* is also a film born from broader geopolitical tensions; one in which whiteness is both under threat *and* threatening. Interestingly, there is a very specific "domestic" influence as well: like *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The People Under the Stairs* was supposedly to have been

inspired by true events. Reportedly, Craven read of a case in the Los Angeles area (Santa Monica) wherein two black individuals who had broken into a home inadvertently lead police to discover two children locked up and hidden away.[330] In the October 1991 edition of horror magazine, *Fangoria*, Craven had stated that "the tale excited with his fascination 'the idea of prisoners meeting and pooling their skills to escape.'"[331] What might it mean that Craven was drawn to the idea of "prisoners meeting and pooling their skills"? I find it notable that Craven utilizes the language of incarceration to describe the relationship between the intruders and those imprisoned within. In doing so, he evokes a particularly critical suburban horror concept, in that it is the white suburban home that is the danger *itself* in all that it represents: a site that exploits resources, labor, bodies of color, and requires imprisonment of the other to be sustained.

The People Under the Stairs tells the story of the young black boy, Poindexter Williams (Brandon Quintin Adams), who is referred to his tarot deck-derived (albeit cruel) nickname, Fool, throughout the film. Fool, his sister (Kelly Jo Minter), and his sick mother reside in an apartment in a poor LA neighborhood (referred to as "the ghetto"), and soon receive news that they are to be evicted in three days by their landlords, the Robesons. In order to find a new dwelling as well as pay for his mother's cancer treatments, Fool accompanies his sister's boyfriend Leroy (Ving Rhames) and Leroy's partner Spencer (Jeremy Roberts) to break into the Robeson's suburban home, a shoddy and old Gothic home situated in a nearby suburb of Los Angeles. The boys are in search of gold coins and treasures that are rumored to be hidden somewhere in the home.[332] The three eventually make their way into the Robesons' dwelling when they soon discover that that they have

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[330] Brian J Robb, *Screams and Nightmare: The Films of Wes Craven* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2000), 61.
[331] Marc Shapiro, "Craven Images," *Fangoria*, January 1992, 9.
[332] The home used as the Robeson home is located in the West Adams neighborhood of Los Angeles. Details can be found at this real estate listing: https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/2215-S-Harvard-Blvd_Los-Angeles_CA_90018_M14414-39185#photo2. (Timothy Rawles, "Real 'People Under the Stairs' House For Sale, Take a Tour," iHorror.com, April 16, 2020, https://ihorror.com/real-people-under-the-stairs-house-for-sale-take-a-tour/.)

unintentionally stepped into a house of horrors. Fool soon finds wailing, pale creatures locked up in the basement alongside Spencer's dead body.

Panicked, Fool and Leroy attempt to flee but ultimately are tracked down by the patriarch of the household, referred to as "Daddy." Leroy is shot and killed by Daddy, while Fool flees into the home. He meets Alice (A.J. Langer), a young girl who tells Fool the situation upon which he has found himself: "Mommy" (Wendy Robie) and "Daddy" (Everett McGill) Robeson have locked several children in the basement (many of whom have seemingly lost the facilities of being human, resorting to cannibalism), and she is the one child that has remained "above." With the assistance of Alice and an escaped "basement person" named Roach (Sean Whalen), who also provides Fool a few gold coins, Fool is chased throughout the home by Mommy and Daddy, makes his way to an attic window, and is able to escape and return to his home. Fool speaks to the local doctor (Bill Cobbs), who not only tells Fool that gold coins are authentic and can pay off his family's debt, but also the truth of the Robeson household: the Robesons are not a married couple and are actually brother and sister who come from a long line of greedy, incestuous individuals who got their start in the mortuary business and then transitioned into real estate.

The film culminates when Fool returns to the Robeson's to save Alice. He first calls the police to request a wellness check, which proves to be a total failure (the police are wholly useless in this film: they buy into the Robeson's façade and leave, apologizing for the disruption [this is the second time in which police who have been called to the home fail to recognize the situation.]) Fool, anticipating the failure, breaks in, initiating a showdown where he eventually frees the people under the stairs and Alice (who in turn kill the murderous "Mommy"), blows up the home, resulting in the death of "Daddy." The hoarded treasures that were locked down in the basement are blown up into the sky, sprinkling down on to the streets. A group of disgruntled tenants lead by Fool's sister and

Doc protesting at the Robeson's home celebrate the demise of the Robeson as well as the return of the hoarded resources and capital back to the community.

Thematically, *Flowers in the Attic* is very much aligned with *People Under the Stairs* as it also portrays white wealth directly linked to carceral violence. Released in 1987, the film, adapted from Andrews' book, tells the "sordid" tale of the Dollanganger family (Cathy, Chris, and twins Cory and Carrie) who return with their mother, Corrine, back to their family home (Foxworth Hall) following the death of their father. Upon the arrival of the massive estate, they meet their chilling and cold grandmother, Olivia, for the first time and are quickly ushered into the attic. Corrine urges the children to stay in the attic as she patches things up with her estranged parents in order to restore her rightful inheritance. The four children agree to do so, assuming their stay will be temporary.

What is meant to be a few days turns into three years, wherein the children are starved, beaten, tortured, locked up by their grandmother, a rigid, authoritative, cruel, and devout Christian (often mobilizing religion against the children.) As the violence and abuse escalate and the children's patience wear thin, and they begin to break out of the room and explore the mansion. The children eventually make some dark realizations: their parents were uncle and niece (later revealed to be half brother and sister in Andrews' later books); this relationship is what resulted in Corrine's disinheritance and their grandmother's hatred toward the children. During their imprisonment in the attic, Cathy and Chris are forced to take on the parental roles, caring for their twin siblings while simultaneously caring for each other. At one point, Cathy and Chris attempt to escape, fearing that their ongoing imprisonment would result in their deaths. However, they are eventually thwarted by the brutal and difficult to traverse (gothic) architecture and vicious guard dogs.

Corrine eventually abandons her children, having re-acclimated to the Foxworth lifestyle (and wealth) and intends to start over with a new husband. In preparation for her marriage, Corrine poisons a batch of powdered donuts that are delivered to the children, which results in the death of

young Cory. As Carrie also begins to fall ill, Cathy and Chris frantically decide that it is time to escape. In the book, the siblings abscond from the mansion, undetected, but in the 1987 film adaptation, the children confront Corrine during her wedding, which results in Corrine falling to her death off the second story of the mansion's balcony.

The Horrors of White Investment

White investment, particularly in the site of the suburb, is a primary way in which the structure of the postwar suburb took shape. In *People*, this took on another specific layer as Robesons are both prison profiteers and landlords. They build their private prison in order to fund their purchases of land. Likewise, the Foxworths, plagued by generations of familial violence and abuse, resort to imprisonment as a way of purging and disinheriting family secrets and excess. Ultimately, in *People* and *Flowers*, land acquisition and investment are tied to the upholding of whiteness and the American suburb and strengthening of the carceral structure that bolster both the Robeson and Foxworth household.

In *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,* George Lipsitz writes of the various ways in which legal, economic, and other structural policies have (and continue to) affirm white supremacy and directly privilege white people and whiteness. In other words, he conceptualizes structural racism (as a contrast from individualized form) as a system of whiteness that is premised on value, investment, and possession. In doing so, he not only situates racial formations within the matter of capitalistic exploitative practice, but also attaches the capitalistic tenant of asset acquisition to the mechanisms of whiteness. He writes,

> I use the adjective *possessive* to stress the relationship between whiteness and asset accumulation in our society, to connect attitudes to interests, to demonstrate that that white supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential, and snarling contempt and more a system for

> protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility. Whiteness is invested in, like property, but it also means of accumulating property and keeping it from others.[333]

In other words, whiteness works like the practice of economic possession, investment, and asset acquisition, in that it is directly reliant on the taking of all resources, capital, space, and time, while leaving non-white people to remain exploited, continuously laboring, and unprotected; all of which is not only affirmed by the state but acts as the very structure of which the state centers and privileges. By posing whiteness as a structure of (racial) accumulation, investment, as well as an ideological formation, Lipsitz points to how whiteness functions as a logic that informs the ongoing racial regimes in which, as Lipsitz would suggest, white subjects must continue to buy into.

In other words, *The People Under the Stairs* make the connection between carcerality, whiteness, property, and investment, as the film provides a cinematic mapping of the interweaving of these particular logics in creating conditions of horror. In order to examine the spatial dynamics of white investment in this film, I first turn to the material (in this case, property) that is being invested in. Similar to Houmas House in *Hush…Hush Sweet Charlotte*, the filming location of *People* carries its own histories of racial violence and displacement that undergirds the film.

According to the article, "Real 'People Under the Stairs' House For Sale, Take a Tour," *People* was filmed at the Thomas W. Philips Residence, a historic home located in West Adams, [334] reportedly one of the "first suburbs of Los Angeles."[335] According to Hadley Meares, writing for *LA Curbed*, the home was once owned by Butterfly McQueen, a prolific Black actress active on

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[333] Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment*, (viii)
[334] Timothy Rawles, "Real 'People Under the Stairs' House For Sale, Take a Tour," iHorror.com, April 16, 2020, https://ihorror.com/real-people-under-the-stairs-house-for-sale-take-a-tour/.
[335] Conan Nolan, "The Rich History of West Adams, Once a Predominantly Black Suburb," NBC Los Angeles, Feburary 12, 2016, https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/the-rich-history-west-adams-once-predominantly-black-suburb/2021167/#:~:text=West%20Adams%20is%20Los%20Angeles,Figueroa%20west%20toward%20Crenshaw%20Boulevard.

Broadway, film, and TV during the 1930s and into the 1980s.[336] As reported in the article, the land upon which the home itself resided was heavily contested; its owner (McQueen) was involved in fighting for Black residents in West Adams.[337] An ongoingly disputed area of Los Angeles, it was in 1945, "when white homeowners tried to push the black population out of West Adams by demanding the enforcement of racially restrictive property-ownership covenants."[338] In response, "McQueen's neighbor and Oscar-winning costar Hattie McDaniel led the coalition that fought them in court and won."[339]

According to Meares, while LA was getting carved up by racial covenants in the 1910s and the 1920s, the West Adams properties were beginning to be sold to Black people, which in turn facilitated West Adams (known as Sugar Hill at the time) to become a hub of the LA Black community.[340] In 1945, eight white residents of Sugar Hill sued in order to get the Black residents evicted, which in turn culminated into the "Sugar Hill" case, which ultimately ruled in favor of the Black residents and resulted in the case establishing a precedence of rulings, including the Fair Housing Act of 1968.[341] Unfortunately, West Adams continued to be a site of contestation. In 1963, the Santa Monica freeway was built through Sugar Hill, which in turn destroyed many of the Black-owned properties. Consequently, Black residents began to move away from the area, as living as Black in LA remained tenuous, particularly with the growth of the neoliberal multicultural carceral state.

People opens with the tenuousness of being Black in Los Angeles as it starts in the derelict urban center of LA: the film opens on a close up of a deck of tarot cards being read upon a young

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[336] Hadley Meares, "The thrill of Sugar Hill," *Los Angeles Curbed*, February 22, 2018, https://la.curbed.com/2018/2/22/16979700/west-adams-history-segregation-housing-covenants.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid.

boy's 13th birthday. Through the reading, the viewers are introduced to the character of Fool and his family: his sister, a sex worker, appears to be in an abusive relationship with a career thief and his mother is ill with cancer. Fool's goals of becoming a doctor are laughed off by his sister's boyfriend. As the tarot deck suggests in the beginning, Fool's world is not just determined by fate, but by the broader institutions and structure seemingly out of his control. The ghetto is posed as a site of systemic death, hopelessness and criminality, which is made evident through the layout of the apartment (small, dirty, cluttered) and the neighborhood (also somewhat small, dirty, and cluttered). Leering people abound, the colors are muted and gray, danger is both within and beyond the boundaries of the apartment.

Following the opening scene, the viewers are transported to one of the many reasons for the poor condition of Fool's neighborhood: the Robeson's (home.) Hence, the Robesons are the primary source of horror (the home, the main set piece) in *People*. Craven makes the specific choice of establishing the home as a former mortuary not only for plot purposes, but to also emphasize the ways the Robesons invest: beginning with the mortuary and transitioning into property ownership, death permeates their business practices and homemaking habits. In other words, the Robeson's home is a prison that hoards, profits, and relies on death. With imprisoned un-dead like creatures, acid baths, chains, and a cremation incinerator situated right alongside piles of gold coins, certificates of stocks and bonds, and stacks upon stacks of cash hidden away in the basement, imprisonment, wealth acquisition, and property ownership become one in the same as they intermingle in the dark basement, making up the Robeson's foundation. Through this, the film reveals a key method in which they "invest," that being, hoarding. By hoarding bodies, money, resources, and capital, they manage deviance and death right alongside their finances. In other words, Craven is pointing to a certain logic of whiteness; in that it is directly reliant upon the ongoing death, imprisonment, and destruction of marginalized bodies to sustain accumulation.

Flowers was shot on location at Castle Hill on the Crane Estate in Ipswich, Massachusetts. As expressed by the estate's website, the land upon which the mansion rests is the land of the Agawam people.[342] As website details, Masconomet, the sagamore of the tribe, had "entered into an alliance with the settlers of Ipswich in 1632"; the territory eventually incorporated in 1694.[343] The land that was to become the Crane Estate was eventually purchased by and capitalized upon by Richard T. Crane, Jr, a "Chicago industrialist," who then built the Great House, a "59-room Stuart-style mansion designed by architect David Adler;" the entire estate totaling to 3,500 acres.[344]

To briefly trace histories of white investment as tied to Castle Hill/ the Crane estate, Crane's business, R.T. Crane and Bro (also known as Crane Co.) "sold and manufactured brass goods and plumbing supplies."[345] Through his business, Crane "developed much" of the "industrializing" Midwest [ultimately spreading across the country], providing equipment to such large public projects including the Cook County courthouse and the Joliet state prison in Illinois.[346] The company was eventually sold in 1959 to Thomas M. Evans who was responsible in turning Crane Co. into a global conglomerate.[347] One of its major segments, known as Crane Aerospace & Electronics, has been heavily involved in the development of both aerospace and defense technology since the 1960s.[348] Clearly, the history of the Crane Estate is indicative of the violence that undergirds land ownership and development in this country: the land stolen via early white settlement, it was eventually developed into a sprawling estate on account of ongoing settler colonialist and military industrial

[342] "Castle Hill on the Crane Estate Ipswich," The Trustees, accessed on January 20, 2021, https://thetrustees.org/place/castle-hill-on-the-crane-estate/.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.
[345] "Crane Co.," Encyclopedia of Chicago, accessed on January 30, 2021. http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2633.html.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid.
[348] "About Crane A&E," Crane Aerospace & Electronics, accessed on May 7, 2022, https://www.craneae.com/company/about-crane-ae.

capitalist investment. Currently run by a board of trustees that "understands the value of land preservation," Castle Hill is a popular tourist destination and filming location to this day.

As a film that tells the tale of a corrupt, generationally wealthy white family, the setting of Castle Hill is quite apt. Inheritance, investment, and the protection of white suburban interest is at the heart of the film and the major motivator of the horror. Corrine brings her children back to the Foxworth mansion, willingly submitting to their imprisonment, and ultimately death, so she may be able to guarantee and ensure her own inheritance and place in the Foxworth fortune. Likewise, her mother, Olivia Foxworth, is fully disgruntled and disgusted by the Dollangangers, and determined to never allow the four children to inherit privilege, power, and capital through the estate. Fully invested in protecting and controlling the family name and wealth from the incestuous secret that is the Dollanganger children, Olivia doubles down on her reign of carcerality. The children hinge their hopes of release and freedom on the belief in the possibility of inheritance, "Mother came home… to win back her Father's love… so he'll make her part of his will again," declares Chris, fully trusting his mother's plan.[349] This belief, that their incarceration will be "worth it" and literally pay off functions as a mantra of survival for the children. It isn't until Cathy and Chris find their grandfather's will during one of their secret excursions that they discover, "If it's ever proven that mom had children from her first marriage, even after he's dead, she'll be disinherited."[350] In other words, their mother had known all along that her children could "never be found" and that she "never meant for [the children] to leave that attic."[351] Their hopes are fully crushed, and the remaining children (Cory is dead at this point) crash their mother's wedding, watch her fall to her untimely death, and leave with their lives intact, but fully disinherited from the family.

[349] *Flowers in the Attic*, directed by Jeffrey Bloom (1987; Atlanta, GA: New World Picture), DVD.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid.

Moral Panic and the White (Suburban) Family

Though his script for *Flowers* was ultimately rejected, Andrew's influence clearly stuck with Wes Craven: both *People* and *Flowers* are dark Gothic fairy tales of sorts that are set in Gothic suburban, upper class, elite homes steeped in illicitness. There is a carceral logic at the center of each story: pale, emaciated, undead human secrets are tucked away in the depths of the home, either up in the attic or down below in the basement. Wealthy, corrupt, old money families are duplicitous, liars solely concerned in the growth of their own family and estates. These suburban dwellings are sites of ongoing violence, raising the question of what it means to live and thrive in a postwar America. The adherence to arbitrarily determined religious and moral beliefs are *crucial* to survival in these households, though crossing the lines is almost inevitable and spells death and/or imprisonment. Whiteness and wealth are guarded fiercely. Death lingers and mingles with sex, pleasure, and power, ruling each household. [352]

The People Under the Stairs acts as a very explicit, grotesque, and darkly humorous satire of the image of the American suburban home. It certainly is a haunted home – the taglines of the film, "In every neighborhood there is one house that adults whisper about and children cross the street to avoid. Now, Wes Craven, creator of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* takes you inside...," leans heavily on sensationalism, but in some ways, is not a "unique" way in describing the horrors of the American suburban neighborhood.[353] By designing the Robeson's dwelling as a twisted interpretation of the "perfect postwar American suburban home" (through the inclusion of "horrific" versions of the nuclear family, the family dog, middle class landowners, the set hair-dos, floral dresses), I suggest

[352] According to E.D. Huntley, while *Flowers* examines the wealthy Foxworth family, Andrews herself grew up working class. Displaying an interest in "fairy tales, science fiction and fantasy, and boy's adventure stories," Andrews was also particularly drawn to the horror genre (especially the Gothic), already interested in writing her own fantastical stories by a young age. Andrew often comes under scrutiny in writing such explicitly illicit tales, but I argue that much of Andrew was doing was reframing the Gothic tales of her youth, drawn to the "romantically" salacious nature of these tales. (E.D. Huntley, *V.C. Andrews: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 2.
[353] *People Under the Stairs*, directed Wes Craven (1991; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures), DVD.

that Craven is also considering the ways in which structures of family and morality become mobilized through the carceral logics of the suburb, particularly during the Cold War era.

Fans, scholars, and viewers of the film consistently read the Robesons as twisted embodiments of the white conservative right, and in particular, of Ronald and Nancy Reagan. According to Lea Anderson, writing for *Fangoria*, Wendy Robie (the actress who played Mommy) described her and Everett McGill's (Daddy) characters as having "a guise of morality…. they show a very normal, very conservative face to the world. But when they go back inside the house and their masks come off, we see them for what they are: crazed, control-hungry, murderous monsters."[354] Craven concurred with Robie's analysis of her character. He states, "The house, with all its claustrophobic spaces and hiding places, stands for civilization run amuck. The generations that have lived in it have gotten more and more crazy until the present one is totally locked into madness."[355] Notably, Craven specifically connects the home to that of generational "evil," crucially making the connection between morality, conservativism, and the emergence of "madness." To provide a bit more specificity to his description, madness in the film takes the form of whiteness and suburban incarceration.

Similarly, the character of Olivia Foxworth, the authoritarian and rigid grandmother in *Flowers*, enacts a similarly contradictory moral structure upon Cathy, Chris, Carrie, and Cory as she build up the conditions of carcerality in the Foxworth mansion. Olivia is devoutly religious, utilizing the language of sin to create an environment of fear, terror, and deference. This is particularly evident when she exposes the incestuous secret of their parents' relationship almost immediately upon their arrival. Beginning her tirade by threatening the children with God's surveillance -- "Remember, God sees everything. God will see whatever evil you do behind my back. And he will

[354] Lea Anderson, "Speak Evil: Celebrating 30 Years of The People Under the Stairs," *Fangoria*, November 1, 2021, https://www.fangoria.com/original/speak-evil-celebrating-30-years-of-the-people-under-the-stairs/.
[355] Shapiro, "Craven Images," 9.

punish you for it!"[356] -- she quickly disparages the children in an act of dehumanization, as she reveals:

> Your mother has come home after seventeen years
> to repent for her sins and for her crimes, not only
> against your grandfather and me, but against God.
> Your mother's marriage was unholy, a sacrilege.
> An abomination in the eyes of the Lord. She did not fall
> from grace, she leapt into the arms of a man whose
> veins pulsed with the same blood as hers. Not a
> stranger, but her own uncle. And you, the
> children, are the devil's spawn! Evil from the
> moment of conception![357]

Olivia fully intends to destroy the children, both mentally, and eventually, physically. In order to enact total control over the children, Olivia demands full obedience from the children and at any perceived slights, she doubles down on her abuse and torture. Throughout the film, Olivia beats the children, withholds their food, verbally abuses and psychologically tortures the four siblings, and in perhaps one of the most infamous scenes in the films, cuts Cathy's beloved long blonde hair (in the book, she tars it.) Notably, this punishment comes after her witnessing Cathy and Christopher together in the bathroom while Cathy is bathing. Horrified at what she believes to be are transgressive behaviors and also fearful of the cycle of incest in the family, Olivia resorts to punitive punishment.

While the critique of morality has been a horror mainstay, *People* and *Flower*'s horrific depictions of structures of American suburban morality takes on a specific Cold War, 1980s meaning. As Gillian Harkins writes,

> In the Reagan years, these struggles over family and sexuality

[356] Bloom, *Flowers in the Attic.*
[357] Bloom, *Flowers in the Attic.*

> as zones of self-determination were retrenched into new norms of familial and sexual conduct. The slogan 'family values' called for a return to heteronormative sexual and marital relations: private relations that would provide moral guidance once assigned to the state. This retrenchment was achieved largely through the use of moral panics, predominantly focused on the threat of black underclass… illegal immigrants… and child sex predators.[358]

In other words, these state-dictated "moral" discourses further increased rates of incarceration as it "refocused state protection on white middle-class families and state policing on racially criminalized others"[359] In attempts to win big in face of the Cold War, both abroad and domestically, Reagan made a massive push towards privatization, blurring the boundaries of the public and the private as "national moral values" were identified, used to further shape white nationalist standards to be adhered to, and further criminalize marginalized communities of color. "I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit," Reagan stated in his farewell address, to which he provides a solution: "more attention (paid) to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual."[360] *People* and *Flowers* certainly takes up this task as they "reveal" a horrific "history" of the US in which "civic ritual" are mere tools for those in power.

Ultimately, *People* horrifically parodies the 1980s structures of morality and family; the Robesons are no doubt a deviant family. Their status is somewhat ambiguous: are they siblings? Are they lovers? Both? Notably, Mommy, played by Wendy Robie, and Daddy, played by Everett McGill, had worked together portraying another dysfunctional couple on the small screen: Big Ed and Nadine Hurley on David Lynch's cult classic *Twin Peaks*, a late 80's/early 90's show that also

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[358] Gillian Harkins, *Everybody's Family Romance Reading Incest in Neoliberal America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xvi.
[359] Ibid, xvi.
[360] "Farewell Address to the Nation," *Ronald Reagan Library Presidential Library & Museum*. National Archives, accessed January 13, 2022, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/farewell-address-nation.

subscribed to a darkly humorous (and somewhat horrific) interpretation of white American suburban communities.[361] Curiously, incest is also plot point in *Flowers*, though to an even more significant degree.

While Andrew's original text centers on Cathy and Chris falling in love and pursuing an incestuous relationship, the film adaptation of *Flowers* did away with this storyline as well as toned down the violence of the novel. However, the implications are still present. Something particularly notable about the trope of incest in *Flowers* is that throughout the film and book series, incest is held up to be a secret family practice, passed down from generation to generation, almost cyclical in nature. In the film, it is implied there is a potentially unhealthy relationship between Corrine and her father, of which fuels jealously between Corrine and Olivia. Similarly, this pattern also emerges between Cathy and her dead father, Christopher, likewise creating tension between Corrine and Cathy. The next books in the series (*Petals on the Wind*, *If There Be Thorns*, *Seeds of Yesterday*) are dedicated in documenting Cathy and Chris' secret relationship in the years after their captivity and the tragedy that always seems to follow.

Incest, Whiteness, and the 80s Cold War

Although incest takes on a much bigger role in *Flowers*, its evocation in both narratives is nevertheless puzzling to some (and in particular, the modern reader/viewer.) Some clarity may be provided when considering the late Cold War period in which *Flowers* and *People* were released. As Gillian Harkins, the prominence of incest as a trope in national headlines from the late 1970s and into the 1990s was a way in which to evoke a "de-contextualized" discourse around family in a neoliberal multicultural moment, as she explains: "incest narratives created a world in which readers

[361] Reportedly, Craven had seen Robie and McGill on *Twin Peaks*. Drawn to their performance of the quirky yet tragically paired duo, "Big" Ed Hurley and Nadine Hurley, respectively, Craven went on to cast them as "Mommy" and "Daddy," a similarly odd and deviant, albeit much more horrific, couple. (Robb, *Screams and Nightmare: The Films of Wes Craven,* 61.)

could first be shocked… then soothed by its resolution through traumatic testimony… incest narratives were implicitly understood as a continuation of the national family romance tradition."[362] Jane Caputi's "Unthinkable Fathering: Connecting Incest and Nuclearism" also suggests that there is a troubling overlap in the language evoked in reference to Cold War nuclear annihilation and incestuous abuse.[363] I draw upon both films to suggest that incest as a trope was ultimately used (particularly on a metaphorical level) to aid in formulating a conservative imaginary regarding the family structure of the postwar era (specifically the 1980s). Like other "morality panic" discourses at the time, Caputi and Harkins suggest that incest and other stories of sex abuse become popular discourses to talk about American homes in the era of 1980s multiculturalisms in order disavow other forms of structural injustices, as it directly played into carceral logics of the suburban "terror of safety" (i.e., in a moment in which sex abuse is seemingly rampant, the suburbs needs to increase its fortifications as well as increase the rates of mass incarceration.) However, I do find that especially in its fictional form, it was also used as a way to represent the violence of "keeping it in the family"; "it" being fortunes, capital, resources, bloodlines, and racial purity, i.e., an ironic form of perverse investment: while the Robesons preach about the failing moral standards of the city and Olivia Foxworth about the sinful nature of her kin, they, themselves, in reality, are the "most" deviant of them all. While Andrew's take on incest is much more "romantic" in nature and utilized to tell a tragic tale of star-crossed lovers, Craven's *People* utilizes incest not only as a way to elicit horror and disgust, but also to describe the extreme and violent responses to the shifting racial dynamics of the decade (in that the villains turned to incest in face of a multicultural future).

However, though the usage of incest within their narratives locates these films in broader 1980s discourses regarding the Cold War suburb and American carcerality, I argue that they also

[362] Harkins, *Everybody's Family Romance*, 3.
[363] Jane Caputi, "Unthinkable Fathering: Connecting Incest and Nuclearism," *Hypatia* 9, No. 2 (1994).

work to *individualize* the violence of these households. By utilizing incest as a primary site of horror within the film, it produces a distancing effect. In other words, in order to create "hyper-monsters" or hyper-corrupt villains that ultimately bear no indication of broader structural issues, these films turn towards incest, something so deeply taboo that only the most "deranged" could possibly engage. In utilizing the trope of incest in these ways, *People* and *Flowers* ultimately obscure the broader racialized caraceral violence that was ripping through and creating mass destruction of Black and brown communities at this time.

But in finetuning our analysis of these films, I turn to the comparison between these two films because I argue that through genre storytelling, these films point to coded mechanisms in which white family values, standards, and expectations were implicated, violently, upon American domesticities. Furthermore, I argue by tracing the similarities of the Foxworth and Robeson households allows us to highlight how the structures of family and discourses around morality were crucial in solidifying white investment in adherence to carceral logics during the Cold War era, and not just on an individual, case by case basis. Rather, it worked as a foundation for the American white (suburban) home broadly.

Conclusion

In October 2020, it was reported that Jordan Peele, through his company Monkeypaw Productions, is set to produce an upcoming remake of *The People Under the Stairs.*[364] *People* has been heralded by Peele himself as classic "social horror," a term that has been readily applied to Peele's own films *Get Out* and to a somewhat lesser extent, *Us*. Likewise, *Flowers in the Attic* was also remade in the 2010s.

[364] Monkeypaw Productions was also involved in the 2020 remake of *Candyman*, another horrific take on the early 90s housing crisis in relationship to legacies of racial exploitation. (James White, "Jordan Peele Producing Remake of the People Under the Stairs," *Empire*, January 11, 2020, https://www.empireonline.com/movies/news/jordan-peele-people-under-the-stairs-remake/.)

In 2014, Lifetime released a remake of the film directed by Deborah Chow. V.C. Andrews properties are now a mainstay on the channel, as they have gone on to release adaptations of the entire Dollanganger series (*Petals on the Wind*, *If There be Thorns*, *Seed of Yesterday*) as well as adaptations of other books by Andrews.

Remaking *The People Under the Stairs* thirty years after its original release in a post 9/11 US steeped in a COVID pandemic/recession/climate change/ white supremacist crisis, the film will undoubtedly take on a dramatic, yet layered, meaning. I find that Peele's intentions in remaking Craven's film reveal two key details: 1) although *People* is a very specific to its time, its themes regarding the inherent violence of white possession, investment, property ownership and its relationship to carceral logics continues to resonate with Peele's present and 2) the circulation of horror films, and in particular these social horrors (in many way, cultural artifacts of the Cold War period) do much in challenging the dominant ways the Cold War is spatialized and temporalized. The ways *People* resonates with Peele indicates how the conflicts and the violence of the Cold War period are ongoing, exacerbated by the conditions that have emerged today (if not taking on an even more severe meaning.)

As for *Flowers*? As evidenced by its affiliation with Lifetime, Andrew's work is still very much well-loved for its salaciousness that made it so popular when it first came out in the 1970s. Recent adaptations lean heavily into the cult status of the series, cheekily embracing its dramatic Gothic overtones. While it certainly is not lauded in the same ways as *People*, *Flowers* relies heavily on its associations with the suburban: not only does Lifetime, as a channel, cater towards a suburban demographic, the depictions of home, property, and in particular, whiteness are central to these Andrews' adaptations. In this way, *Flowers* (and the broader Andrews' properties) continues to offer an odd glimpse into the strange collision of Gothic nostalgia for American eras past, 1980s pulp

horror storytelling techniques, and the 2020's demand in cult "trashy" TV. What ends up emerging is clumsy, yet revealing, in terms of its portrayals of deviant whiteness.

Flowers and *People* resonate differently in the "post" Cold War era, hence, I ask: by examining the 1980s/ 1990s suburban horror film, what is the role of horror in unraveling the logics of carceral suburban whiteness? In the case of *The People Under the Stairs* and *Flowers in the Attic*, I argue that the horror film is the most useful when it revels in its contradictions. A mapping of the American suburban home through the logic of horror allows for us to consider the kinds of violent structures that emerge from its settler colonialist and anti-black logics.

Conclusion

Whenever I reveal that my research is on the horror genre, I always expect the inevitable response: "Horror films!?!?! Why??" (The tone varies.) Whatever may be the reason for the surprise (a genuine sense of unexpectedness, the feeling that horror is incongruent with the projects of Asian American Studies, Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, the belief that horror is academically "inviable," or a personal dislike/intense fear of the genre), the person will receive some form of my typical (and somewhat sheepish) response: I conduct this work from the perspective of a super fan of horror, and I do so in order to provide myself a logic through which I can traverse this genre. What I typically do not share is that this project is deeply personal, and it is through horror that I am also attempting to carve out the meanings of Cold War illegibilities that have permeated my life. Growing up with immigrant parents from Taiwan in the 1990s, I lived in the shadow of the Cold War, and much of that "shadow" was articulated through the language of horror.

While the presence of the Cold War always lingered in the household, we never really acknowledged "it." Hence, I began to unknowingly navigate the Cold War (and its afterlife) through the deeply embodied experience of the horrific and horror films. As a child, I consumed and mitigated horror/horrific cinema in two primary ways: 1) as an inarticulable sense of discomfort: when catching "forbidden" glimpses of various films and documentaries my parents watched about the postwar period (Ken Burns' *The Vietnam War*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Deer Hunter*), an unexplainable, unshakeable, and overwhelming mix of what could perhaps be articulated as dread, disgust, and confusion would come over me, and 2) as an intense, embodied fear, so much so that anything horror related would burn into me an instant memory, remaining in my body for years (Chucky the doll, anybody? I have yet to revisit that series). While the Cold War and the horror genre were

entirely different entities, their connection was "something" I could just feel and that, as a child, I knew I was not meant to fully understand.

As I got older, this extreme fear of the genre gave way to intense fascination. Indulging my appetite for 1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s horror properties, whether that be in the form of film, TV, or books, I began to quickly develop a deep connection to the genre: there was something about embracing the turbulent period of my parent's youth through these retro, campy, refined, and occasionally scary shows and films (*Vertigo*, *Psycho*, *Wait Until Dark*, *The Birds*, *Alfred Hitchcock Hour, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, Twilight Zone, Thriller, Munster Family, Night Gallery*) that proved satisfying. From then on, I was hooked on horror; the Cold War and the genre forever inextricably linked. Eventually, as an MA student in the Asian American Studies program at UCLA, I (unsurprisingly) chose to study Asian American horror films. It was during this period that I was also introduced to the field of Critical Cold War Studies. The major theoretical claims of the field, i.e., the emphasis on the destabilization of dominant Cold War knowledges, resonated with the ways in which I studied horror films: how could the many tensions, contradictions, and excesses of horror be productive in disrupting (rather than upholding) these official ways of Cold War knowing? Having begun asking this question early in my graduate school career, it has continued to inform my dissertational work on whiteness and Cold War American horror films.

My dissertation argues that horror is a genre that is reliant on an economy of feeling that is centered around discourses of fear, disgust, shock, and horror, and is strikingly productive in doing such work because it occupies a site of contradiction. As my research specifically investigates, horror movies unabashedly center white fear and oftentimes pose white people as the most vulnerable and at the highest risk for eradication. But in doing so, they hold the potential to undo the very same white supremacist logic that informs such depictions by allowing these invisibilized fears and

deviances to exist alongside contrasting discourses around whiteness. In other words, horror films, I argue, are deeply vexed spaces.

The project is not finished: I conduct my dissertational research to provide a robust foundation to formulating an Asian American feminist horror analytic that reckons with structures of Cold War state-sanctioned humanity. What this entails, I envision, is that I will conduct an interrogation of the Asian American cultural landscapes in the afterlives of the Cold War to further unravel the horrific ways postwar formations of state-sanctioned humanity have been weaponized against and appropriated by Asian American subjects. I aim to challenge the investments in which the Asian American community have made in upholding a multitude of structures of power, including white supremacy, capitalist accumulation, and the American empire (investments that, undoubtedly, have roots in the Cold War period). This project functions as a personal reckoning of my own investments as I consider the question of how horror may emphasize the contradictions that shape my diaspora and community.

Ultimately, the ways I've understood and theorized the horror genre, horror film, and the Cold War as distinctly intertwined entities has subsequently informed the way I conceptualize war, empire, personhood, and Asian American subjectivity. Horror has always been a primary way in which I have mitigated my Asian American-ness both within and beyond the academy. Hence, I take my dissertation, a project of gathering and examining the racial contexts of American horror film and apply it to the envisioning of an Asian American feminist horror framework. What follows is the beginning stages of this conceptualization.

Sitting down one evening with my college roommates, bored, we tuned into the one of the most anticipated TV shows of 2011: *American Horror Story: Murder House*. While horror television

programming had long existed before *AHS,* its depictions of viscerality, violence, and intensity was at a level unparalleled at the time. And for a budding horror afficionado, *AHS felt* revolutionary. My roommates and I were not at all prepared for the experience, as our senses were immediately assailed by the first low, staticky throbs of the opening theme. Hearts pounding, palms sweaty and bodies tense, we watched on, bearing horrified witness to the Harmon family being thrust into a slick, claustrophobic body horror nightmare, unwittingly becoming Murder House's next victims. I had nightmares for weeks after that first episode. The show had certainly gotten under my skin: to this day, that first watch remains a distinct (TV) memory.

Eleven seasons in, *AHS* no longer has quite the same hold over me as much as the first couple of seasons did, but the series was pivotal not only in terms of its impact on the course of American horror TV programming, but also my personal interest in the genre. Often credited as the one of the first horror prestige TV shows of the 2010s, *AHS* "proved" that horror could be told through the use of sleek and sophisticated narrative and filmmaking techniques that only worked to intensify the experiences of horror, on a mainstream scale. But besides demonstrating new levels (at least to me) from which horror could be produced, the show felt particularly striking for another reason: one can indeed use horror in narrating the story of a nation, and if done well, viewers would step away and perceive fractures that they possible did not see before.

With the rise of prestige TV also came the influx of film and TV projects featuring Asian American narratives, talent, and production in the last decade. As a (fairly) rabid consumer of pop culture, navigating Asian American media in the face of an ever-expanding cultural landscape in the midst of an increasingly tenuous and vicious political landscape made me wonder: could horror be used effectively in probing the complexities of Asian American subjecthood? Only a few Asian American media productions have turned to the horror genre: one notable example being AMC's anthology series *The Terror*. A TV series dedicated to the telling of historical horror, the second

season, titled *The Terror: Infamy*, centers on an incarcerated Japanese American family during WWII. Released on August 12th, 2019, *Infamy* begins with Chester Nakayama (Derek Mio) and his Japanese American fishing family residing on Terminal Island, California on the eve of the issuing of Executive Order 9066. By the end of the second episode, the Nakayamas have been sent to the fictional incarceration camp, Colinas de Oro. Once there, a mysterious shapeshifting spirit, or bakemono, starts to wreak havoc on the camp; the Nakayamas bearing witness as their fellow camp residents are terrorized and hunted down.

By the end of the season, the viewer learns the identity of the spirit: she is Yuko Tanabe (Kiki Sukezne), Chester's disgruntled birth mother. Once a secretly pregnant picture bride betrothed to a Japanese man residing on Terminal Island, she was cast out upon her arrival to America when the pregnancy was discovered. Months later, after having left her twin boys at a church, Yuko was tricked by her ancestor's yurei into jumping off a nearby bridge to her death and transforming into a bakemono.[365] Chester eventually learns the truth of his brother and birth mother and convinces Yuko to let go of her need for vengeance. This effectively restores Yuko to her happiest state, pregnant with twins and about to journey to the U.S.[366] With that, Chester defeats the curse and frees his community from the haunting.

The season ends several years after their release from camp with the friends and family of the Nakayamas gathering to celebrate Obon. A Japanese holiday observed to commemorate the dead, it is a warm reunion, albeit sobering and not without its scars (as Chester's beatnik friend (Miki Ishikawa) puts it, "[I have] bad memories. I hate that when I come back to see my people, it gives me nightmares.")[367] The final scene features the group releasing small paper lanterns down a nearby

[365] *Yurei* is a Japanese term that means spirit or ghost.
[366] This does beg the question: a ghost remaining pregnant for eternity? Perhaps that is more a punishment than an act of mercy.
[367] *The Terror: Infamy*, season 2, episode 10, "Into the Afterlife," directed by Frederick E.O. Toye, written by Max Borenstein, Alexander Woo, Naomi Iizuka, Steven Hanna, aired on October 14, 2019, on Hulu, 43:31.

river in a quiet moment of mixed emotions. The camera holds on the shot for just a moment more; Nina Simone's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" plays as the episode fades out into the season's end credits.

The Terror: Infamy is notable for being the first American horror TV series to focus on a historical Asian American storyline. Its mixed reception, particularly in response to the conclusion of the season, reveals just how difficult it is to undertake such a project. *Infamy* has been credited as especially "personal" for Japanese Americans,[368] a "true American Horror Story,"[369] that is "the most politically relevant show on television."[370] But for some, the show is "an uneven historical horror"[371] and "unwieldy."[372] Nancy Matsumoto, writing for *The Atlantic*, states, "As a historical drama*, The Terror: Infamy* got a lot right, and as a Japanese American, I was gratified to see this painful era captured in a production anchored by Asian Americans. By the end, I felt enormous relief that the yūrei was banished; the trauma of the internment, though, is a far more difficult demon to exorcise."[373] The reviewers' reservations towards the series points to the uneasiness in turning to the horror genre to depict community histories and unresolved traumas.

I recall when I first heard whisperings of *Infamy*: it happened to be a professor of Asian American documentary at UCLA who broke the news, telling me there was a "horror show set during the time of Japanese American incarceration that was coming out" and I might be interested, given my fascination with and research on horror films. We agreed this certainly felt unprecedented–

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[368] Jen Yamato, "For Japanese Americans, 'The Terror' is Personal,'" *The Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2019-08-09/japanese-internment-the-terror-infamy-amc.
[369] Katie Cooper, "'The Terror: Infamy' Revisits a True American Horror Story," *The Los Angeles Times,* August 30, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2019-08-29/the-terror-infamy-revisits-a-true-american-horror-story
[370] Jeva Lange, "*The Terror: Infamy* is the Most Politically Relevant Show on Television," *The Week*, August 13, 2019, https://theweek.com/articles/858481/terror-infamy-most-politically-relevant-show-television.
[371] Nina Li Coomes, "The Uneven Historical Horror of *The Terror: Infamy*," *The Atlantic*, September 2, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/09/terror-infamy-amc-historical-horror/597175/.
[372] Danette Chavez, "*The Terror: Infamy* is Haunting, Unwieldy, and One of the Most Relevant Shows of the Year," *The AV Club*, August 9, 2019, https://tv.avclub.com/the-terror-infamy-is-haunting-unwieldy-and-one-of-th-1837107363.
[373] Nancy Matsumoto, "Two Ways of Looking at *The Terror: Infamy*'s Finale," *The Atlantic*, October 16, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/10/two-ways-looking-terror-infamy-finale/600058/.

a primetime television dedicated to exploration of Japanese American incarceration? And through a horror lens? What a moment in Asian American media! – but there was also an almost immediate sense of skepticism. Questioning the efficacy of horror in telling these fraught histories, the recklessness of horror never felt so troubling. In face of this, I questioned: what are the ethics of utilizing horror in interpreting diaspora and its related violence? Is there an inherent dissonance between the genre and community memory? And might this dissonance be critical to an ethical telling of Asian American (hi)stories?

For *Infamy*, these questions take on further significance when considering that the season ends at the start of the postwar era, a period that would bring about devastating shifts in the geopolitical positioning of Asian people. Often cited as the moment that ushered in an unprecedent number of Asian immigrants into the United States through the 1965 Immigration Act, it is also when American configurations of race, civil rights, immigration, and democracy morphed in favor of strengthening the U.S.' position as a postwar superpower and "leader" of the "free world." And like most geopolitical struggles, America's push to legitimize the "superiority of the American political system" was configured on bodies of color, one such being Asian Americans.[374] Exploited as racial pivots in the Cold War, Asian Americans and the broader diaspora were living "proof" of US' democratic regimes of "benevolence," human embodiments used in justifying the establishment of the violent US global order that emerged out of the Cold War period.

Much of my work both within and outside of the academy has been dedicated to asking what toll does this Cold War "positioning" take on the Asian American diaspora? Horror, as a deeply contradictory and embodied site, is useful to consider these often invsibilized postwar contexts of our communities. Hence, I now turn to these re-envisionings to examine how Asian

[374] Cindy I-Fen Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America: Democracy and Race during the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 4.

American horror has been shaped by the ways the Asian/American subject has been sutured to structures born of Cold War American imperialist violence. I examine several contemporary works of horror that reimagine the postwar Asian American subject, including AMC's *The Terror: Infamy*, FX's *American Horror Story: Roanoke*, HBO's *Lovecraft Country*, and the music video for singer-songwriter Mitski's song "Happy." I consider what it means to reckon with, refuse, and reimagine state-sanctioned Cold War structures of humanity in the hopes of conceiving alternative forms of coalitional existence. Ultimately, I conceptualize a politics of accountability to grapple with the Asian American community and the simultaneity of violence it both experiences and commits as a diasporic entity deeply sutured to the violence of the Cold War positioned within the white supremacist, settler colonialist, and imperialist American state.

Liberal Humanity, Cold War America, and the Asian American Subject

By the end of *Infamy*, the remaining Nakayamas have survived the mass destruction of their community, though the question lingers: what remains in the wake of seemingly banished sins, both familial and national in nature? Such unknowns permeate the Obon reunion; the matter of "moving on" is addressed in a brief exchange between a young man, Genzo (Yuta Takenaka), and Chester's grandfather, Nobuhiro Yamato (George Takei). The dialogue is as follows:

> Genzo: Yamato-san! It's Genzo.
> Yamato-san: Ah, little Genzo. Look at you. Where were you?
> Genzo: Manzanar. My whole family. You?
> Yamato-san: Colinas de Oro, but now I am in Hawaii with my great nephew. Everybody there, Japanese.
> Genzo: We went to Indiana. No one there is Japanese but that's where a farm took us in.[375]

[375] "Into the Afterlife," 42:32-43:01.

The conversation between Genzo and Yamato-san makes reference to key points in Japanese American history, specifically: 1) the incarceration and release of Japanese Americans from the camps, 2) the intentional dispersal of the JA community during the resettlement process, 3) the "re-integration" of Japanese Americans in communities across the U.S., and 4) the growth of the Japanese American settler colonial presence in Hawaii that has since manifested in political, economic, and social dominance on the island.[376]

The conditions of resettlement remain somewhat uninterrogated in the show, as evidenced by the way Yamato-san's casual statement, "everybody there (in Hawaii is) Japanese,"[377] is played off as an "insider" joke that ultimately serves as a violent disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty in Hawaii. Upon release from the camps, Japanese Americans needed to opt into legible (and seemingly protected) forms of Asian American personhood, which required upholding and adhering to imperialist, settler, and white supremacist logics. Having already established a substantial settler presence before the war, the growth of the Japanese American community in Hawai'i after WWII was facilitated as Japanese Americans returned back to Hawai'i only to re-occupy the land. As Candace Fujikane writes:

> Ethnic histories written about Asians in Hawai'i demonstrate an investment in the ideal of American democracy that is ideologically at odds with indigenous critiques of U.S. colonialism. These historical accounts…do not address the roles of Asians in an American colonial system. Instead, they recount Asian histories of oppression and resistance in Hawai'i, erecting a multicultural ethnic studies framework that ends up reproducing the colonial claims made in white settler historiography.

[376] Candace Fujikane, "Introduction: Asian Settler Colonialism in U.S. Colony of Hawai'i," in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life n Hawai'i*, ed. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 5-6.
[377] "Into the Afterlife," 42:32-43:01

In other words, "everybody" in Hawai'i is certainly not Japanese, despite what Yamato-san may claim. Rather than examining the ways in which the horror persists as postwar JA resettlement was inherently tied to the settler colonization of Hawai'i, *Infamy*, instead, aims to provide the characters relief framing re-settlement as a necessary moment of rehabilitation and community reprieve. It is creative choices like these that lends to the sense of unease that emerges by the end of the series (the "difficult demons to exorcise" so to speak) as viewers are made to ask: what does it mean for the Nakayamas that their rehabilitation is fully chained to the settler logics of postwar racial rehabilitation, the same logics that produced their eviction in the first place?

Infamy resolves carceral and imperialist violence by reading the postwar period as a seemingly "natural" moment of community formation through state absorption. This was made particularly clear in an interview with the *The A.V. Club*, wherein *Infamy*'s showrunner, Alexander Woo, explained that the show "deployed horror… (to help viewers) understand the feeling of what it's like to be in the skin of these people, and…to understand the plight of what it feels like to be an American but not have America want you."[378] Through his work on *Infamy*, Woo does indeed identify the postwar era as a turning point for the Japanese American (and broadly Asian American) community, but he utilizes the horror genre to reframe this history as a plea for state inclusion and to position Asian Americans as legible American subjects. With such an ethos, the show ultimately adopts a liberal interpretation of the period and fails to grapple with the violent mechanisms used in shaping bodies of color during this time.

Upon finishing the series, I felt a sense of unfulfillment: in some ways, the horror felt misdirected, the analysis of the American state unclear, and the interpretation of Japanese American history troubling. The show is rife with unresolved tension, failing to answer many of the questions

[378] Danette Chavez, "The Terror Showrunner on Internment Season: 'There Will Always Be Another Group'," *AV Club*, August 14, 2019, https://www.avclub.com/the-terror-showrunner-on-internment-season-there-will-1837170919.

posed at the start of the season. However, I was nevertheless intrigued, as there was indeed some kind of murky logic directing how race and horror was mobilized in the show. Inspired by my watch of *Infamy*, I began to turn towards other Asian American horror productions that re-envisions the postwar period as a way to critique how these productions were navigating Cold War racial politics. More specifically, I examine how structures of humanity were evoked (and politically mobilized) in these productions.

While my project of examining the figure of the human in these horror reimaginings of the postwar period is primarily framed through critical Cold War Studies scholarship, it is crucial to acknowledge that my work (as well as the scholars of whom I am in conversation with) draw directly from the work of Black Studies scholars who deconstruct the liberal figuration of the human. As Sylvia Wynter, Alexander Weheliye, Christina Sharpe, Hortense Spillers, and Zakiyyah Jackson have critically argued, the structure of the human is explicitly chained to white supremacy and is itself an inherently disciplinary and exclusionary construct used in producing the anti-black conditions of society fully contingent upon the death and the dehumanization of Black people. Subsequently, liberation can only come from the disinvestment and rejection of these liberal formations of humanity.[379]

In this vein, I aim to take on the project of Kandice Chuh, in which she envisions an "illiberal humanity," or a framework "directed toward the protection and flourishing of people and ways of being and knowing and…inhabiting the planet that liberal humanism, wrought through the defining structures of modernity, tries so hard to extinguish."[380] In other words, I draw upon the

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[379] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, No. 3 (2003), 257-337; Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Pap's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, No. 2 (1987), 64-81; Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
[380] Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities 'After Man'* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.)

"generation and proliferation of imaginaries disidentified from the ideologies and logics of liberalism" that are instead "derived… from attention to the entangled histories of and ongoing connection among the impoverishment of peoples and worlds, enslaved and gendered labor that does not demand for inclusion or absorption into state structure."[381]

To do so, I begin by identifying (and contextualizing) "humanity" as a structure of power enacted by the U.S. state during the Cold War period when processing the figure of people of color, and in particular, the Asian/American. As elucidated on by Christine Hong, Josephine Nock-Hee Park, Monica Kim, and Susie Woo,[382] the concept of "humanity" (in all of its iterations: humanitarianism, the humane, the human) was a crucial mechanism that the U.S. used to disavow its status as a force of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and imperialism in order to establish dominance during the Cold War. A concept hinged on "the universalism of rights, liberty, justice (and other such) geohistorical politics of knowledge," (state-sanctioned) humanity was a postwar fabrication that held material consequence.[383] In other words, I use the term "humanity" to refer to a process in which people were made and un-made as humans by an American Cold War regime bent on establishing a "benevolent" global supremacy. In this era, "humanity" became synonymous with liberal policy, political allyship, and protectable proxy status, all of which were enacted in the name of upholding its imperial, white supremacist, and settler status. State-sanctioned humanity was not about justice. Instead, access to this American structure of humanity was conditional and contingent upon adherence to U.S. empire and its violence.

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[381] Ibid.
[382] Please refer to Christine Hong's *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific*, Josephine Nock-Hee Park's *Cold War Friendships: Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature*, Monica Kim's *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History*, and Susie Woo's *Framed by War: Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of U.S. Empire*.
[383] Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, 20.

I recognize that humanity is a crucial and delicate concept when considering communities of color and their continued subjection to dehumanizing forms of state violence. I do not write of humanity to deny its salience. Rather, as Wynters, Weheliye, Sharpe, and Jackson argue, I urge that humanity is itself a structure of power that continues to be deployed as a disciplining measure against marginalized people. Particularly for Asian Americans, humanity was not only a parameter utilized in determining who was protectable in the eyes of the state, but it also become a structure that was (and is) appropriated by Asian American communities for entry into the U.S. empire. Furthermore, I turn to the complexities of the term "humanity" because of its significance in horror film. Horror films literalizes the process of the un-making and making of humans by putting fictional monsters on screen. In other words, this genre becomes a crucial place in considering the politics of humanity as well as imagining alternative modes of being that do not reify state structures.

The concept of "humanity" witnessed dramatic shifts during the Cold War era. As suggested by Jodi Melamed, following WWII, the U.S. pivoted to an "official policy of 'antiracisms,'" which "functioned as a unifying discourse of U.S. state, society and global ascendancy and as a material force for postwar global capitalist expansion."[384] These official humanity-focused "antiracisms" were applicable in both domestic and global contexts. Therefore, America's stances on antiracist policy towards Asian/Americans were directly influenced by the fact that much of Asia was deemed proxy territory in the Cold War fight against the USSR. As Josephine Nock-Hee Park puts it, the proxy was "governed by metaphors of alliance,"[385] wherein a sense of geo-political "friendship" was adopted.[386] Christina Klein has also written about the adherence to a Cold War sentimentalism as a way to foster a liberal understanding and kinship towards the allies of the U.S., or at least, those

[384] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1.
[385] Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships: Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.)
[386] Ibid.

believed to be victims of the Communist USSR.[387] The establishment of these official antiracisms and these senses of friendship and sentimentality towards the postwar Asian subject were also crucial in facilitating the U.S. to emphasize their power to transform.[388] In a seeming act of reflexivity, the U.S. disavowed its racist past by embracing a new liberal, antiracist state, and by doing so, was able to morph former "enemies" into intimately connected allies.[389] For instance, Yoneyama suggests that the United States utilized Japan as an example of a "racially rehabilitated…biopolitical space of American governmentality."[390] This ability to reform the once un-redeemable Asian and bring them to the level of human spoke to the testament of American Cold War power and democracy.[391] This notion of "racial rehabilitation" directly translated into the reconfiguring of the postwar Asian American subject.[392]

The postwar Asian American took on many different forms: war bride, refugee, model minority, orphan, naturalized citizen. Similar to their "counterparts" overseas, once Asian Americans were properly rehabilitated, they were granted conditional integration and access to humanity.[393] These Asian American "successes" were touted as a Cold War win for the U.S., and further justified Cold War violence. Ultimately, it was during the postwar era in which the relationship between the Asian American and liberal structures of humanity was conceived. Having been allowed access into American structures of humanity, Asian Americans themselves were sutured to the violence of the American state. As Yoneyama suggests, "Asian/Americans, as the agent-subjects of U.S. state apparatuses, tend to secure their nationalized status by underwriting America's Cold War myth of liberation and rehabilitation vis-à-vis Asia."[394] In other words, the Asian American subject's need in

[387] Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 35.
[388] Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships*.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, 33.
[391] Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships*.
[392] Ibid.
[393] Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships*.
[394] Ibid., 173.

"securing their social and political legitimacy" directly fed back into upholding ongoing legacies of American imperial violence.[395] This process is detailed by Sylvia Wynter, as she states, during the postwar sixties, "With all incoming new nonwhite/non-Black groups…coming to claim "normal" North American identity," did so by "putting…visible distance between themselves and the Black population group."[396] In other words, as Asian Americans turned towards state-sanctioned humanity and structures of whiteness, they rejected Blackness. Black people in the "post-sixties social hierarchy," once again, came "to be placed at the bottommost place of that hierarchy."[397]

I do not want to suggest that Asian Americans are necessarily considered humans in the eyes of the American state (nor do I think it is as clear as a distinction as that). However, I do believe that the access to state structures of humanity has been made much more widely available for Asian Americans, particularly as it was on the backs of Asian Americans in which Cold War liberal humanity was forged, a structure that in turn was used in "necessary" death, destruction, and exploitation of marginalized bodies of color on a domestic and global scale. In other words, the ways in which humanity and the human have been mobilized against and wielded by the community has resulted in the emergence of particular kind of "horror" that marks the conditions of Asian diasporic existence. The reasons that Asians arrive to the U.S. are horrific (as migration is specifically tied to American imperialist exploitation and expansion), the conditions of living in a white supremacist settler society in which they "inherit" are also horrific, and the ways in which their continued existences contribute to the American settler state's ongoing exploitation and brutalization of Black, Brown and Indigenous bodies are also undoubtedly horrific. Therefore, it may be in spaces of horror where we can grapple with the consequences of these relationships to postwar structures as well as the conditional access to state-sanctioned humanity.

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[395] Cindy I-Fen Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America*, 3.
[396] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 261-262.
[397] Ibid.

Horror as a genre does not necessarily rebuke the project of American empire, but I find it a generative space because of the ways the genre is wholly concerned with representations, themes, and stories regarding non-humanity. Therefore, I turn toward an Asian American feminist horror politic to examine how such representations of non-humanity, whether it be in the form of monstrosity, hauntings, curses, or the "return" of the repressed, can do the work of recognizing the postwar origins of American liberal humanity and the ways it shaped Asian American diasporic subjecthood. To do so, I will first briefly trace a genealogy of Asian entities within the American horror cinematic tradition to consider how Asian subjects were intimately linked to both discourses of horror and humanity as forged during the Cold War period. Ironically, these films do not adopt any sense of sentimentality or benevolence towards the Asians they are portraying – rather, these representations can be quite crude and explicitly racist. However, I do find that turning to this history is helpful in reading the ways horror film has been intertwined in the project of postwar racial formations.

Asian/Americans and American Horror Film

The relationship between Asian/Americans and American cinematic horror is rather fraught. Broadly speaking, in American horror film, the "essence" of "the Asian" takes on a multitude of forms (the racialized monster, the colonized subject, the postwar project, the curious Oriental, the unknowable horde) that gives shape to some of the ghastliest of whispers, nightmares, and imagery

put to screen. Beginning with evil,[398] scheming geniuses (in the form of Fu Manchu),[399] Asians have since been evoked as horrifying creatures from faraway, mystical Asian jungles,[400] malicious hauntings,[401] demonic ornaments,[402] and lingering spirits (particularly during the Asian horror remake boom of the 2000s wherein the once Asian characters were rendered white).[403]

However, the ghosts, monsters, and other cursed, cinematic figures in which Asians occupied took on a particular geopolitical meaning during the postwar era: these representations posed Asians both as perils to domestic America as well as the very battlegrounds upon which the boundaries of the American empire were being carved. As evidenced in American films such as *Cult of the Cobr*a (1955), *The Black Sleep* (1956), *Man Beast* (1956) as well as British and Italian entries including *The Stranglers of Bombay* (1959) and *Atomic Age Vampire* (1960), these postwar films situated the cinematic horror as emerging from former colonies and ongoing sites of war violence.[404] In other

[398] It is crucial that conversations regarding Asian bodies in American horror cinema include early horror monsters such as Dracula (and the vampire figure broadly) and the mummy. They are clear examples of how horror and orientalist discourses intersect in the creation of racialized monsters. However, while it is important to consider these figures, I do not want to collapse them in the category of "Asian"; rather, I want to put forth their importance when discussing Orientalized entities and the American horror imaginary while maintaining the specificity of the character. I believe that these distinctions are also important when discussing the figure of the zombie. While the zombie was first evoked in early American horror films as horrific and (mindless) Black monsters brought forth by voodoo and other forms of magic, the zombie re-emerged in the post 9/11 period oftentimes as brown bodies (particularly Arab and South Asian) (re)marked as inhuman, zombified, terrorist hoards.

[399] A character created by Sax Rohmer, an English novelist, the first film that featured Fu Manchu was *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1929).

[400] Examples include: *King Kong* (1933), *Beast of Borneo* (1934), *Obeah!* (1935).

[401] This is evident in such films like *The Forest* (2016), *The Grudge* (2004), and *The House Where Evil Dwells* (1982).

[402] Such examples include: the wishing box of *Wish Upon* (2017), the pleasure box of *Hellraiser* (1987), the wishing paw of the *Monkey's Paw* (in several of its iterations), and the Tibetan *Book of Dead* in films like *The Undead* (1957) and *The House of Seven Corpses* (1974).

[403] This is the case in such films including: *The Ring* (2002), *The Eye* (2008)*, One Missed Call* (2008), and *The Uninvited* (2009).

[404] It is also in this postwar era in which we see the usage of Pacific Islanders and the Pacific Islands as sites of horror. Such examples include: *Weird Woman* (1944), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), *From Hell it Came* (1957), *Voodoo Island* (1957), and *Horrors of Spider Island* (1960). Similar to the figures of the mummy and Dracula, this paper does not want to collapse Pacific Islanders into the category of Asian American. However, I wanted to include these films in order to acknowledge that it was also during this time that Pacific Islanders were increasingly brought into America's language of horror. Furthermore, several of these films unintentionally point to the relationship between Asia and the Pacific Islands, as these cinematic horrors "emerging" from the Pacific Islands are in large part due to Asian imperialism and war-making, alongside that of the American.

words, the Asian figures in postwar horror films were residual, irreconcilable monsters threatening the U.S.' project of forging new structures of humanity in the midst of a global Cold War.[405]

In the face of this cinematic history, I examine the work (acting, directing, writing, or editing) done by Asian Americans in the genre. I do not intend to provide a precise definition of Asian American horror. Rather, I look to these productions as a collective archive to examine how the figure of the Asian American manifests and what this can mean for the interpretations of their histories, presents, and futures. In each of these productions, I contend with Asian Americans and their contemporary investments in state-sanctioned humanity. However, I also turn to horror, a genre that focuses on difference, nonsense, the uncanny, the repressed, and the contradictory, to renegotiate the broader American cultural imagination, reckon with residence on stolen land, and reject the U.S. empire and the violence committed in its name. Horror insists on the impossibilities and dissonances in our coming and being here, and it is my hope that we might be able to untangle some of the constraints that bind us to the state through such an investigation.

Asian American Feminist Horror

Feminist horror is a major component of horror (film) studies and broader horror-fan discourse. While the meaning of feminist horror varies, it often describes a viewing practice and sub-genre that aims to challenge gendered institutions by identifying how misogyny permeates society and conceptualize survival in face of such conditions. The term has also been applied to the work done

[405] The entity of the horrific postwar Asian took on yet another dimension during the 1970s and 1980s when the U.S. was in the wake of its involvement in the Vietnam War. Reportedly, many in the American horror film industry were "troubled" by the war and the U.S. society in which it was serving, so much so that the political ethos that drove horror filmmakers, aesthetics and intensity of violence on screen, narrative themes, and makeup styles and application changed dramatically. These horror films embodied the uneasy relationship between the directors, the horror genre, the film industry, the many people and communities of color that were destroyed through the war, and the land upon which this Cold War violence wreaked havoc.

by nonbinary and woman-identified people;[406] many of these films explore the horrors of patriarchy and the way women push back, often with their own forms of horrific action.

While I am interested in interrogating gender and gendered systems on and beyond the screen, I specifically turn to a feminist framework to consider the entangled nature of Asian American horror. Rather than utilizing gender as the primary axis of analysis, I want to expand the concept of feminist horror to consider the intersections of race, class, sexuality, oppression, empire, freedom, humanity, and the monstrous. Furthermore, my use of a feminist framework is a form of reckoning, a way of conceptualizing accountability, and re-imagining our histories, present, and futures. In the vein of Sylvia Wynter and Candice Chuh, this project attempts to envision a politic that works towards disavowing structures of humanity and instead, reads horror in a non-incorporative manner (though, the question remains: is this even possible?)

My theorizations draw heavily upon the work of Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan and their 2017 anthology, *Asian American Feminisms and Woman of Color Politics*. For my analysis, I center Asian American feminism to evoke "cross-racial feminist coalition" that "historically emerge(d) at the intersection of the 1960s U.S. civil rights, antiwar, gay and women's liberation movements."[407] In other words, I turn to these well-established practices of coalition building to think through a politics of difference that works through limitation. By framing my reading of horror in this way, I aim to evoke a "critical consciousness of the multiple valences of power that we occupy and/or resist."[408] I reckon with the simultaneity of the violence that informs the arrival of Asian bodies to the U.S. with the violence that emerges from our continued existences on stolen

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[406] Examples of feminist horror films include: *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Jennifer's Body* (2009), *The Witch* (2015), *The Love Witch* (2016), *The Stepford Wives* (1975), and *Alien* (1979).
[407] Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan, "Introduction," in *Asian American Feminisms and Woman of Color Politics*, ed. Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 17.
[408] Lynn Fujiwara, "Multiplicity, Women of Color Politics, and an Asian American Feminist Praxis," in *Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Politics* ed. Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 261.

land. And in order to interrogate the conditions of the diaspora and how our existences have taken shape and contribute to the continued decimation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities and uphold other forms of American state violence, I look towards horror to envision ways in which to refuse modes of humanity as offered by the states and re-imagine coalitional existences.

I use Asian American feminist horror to ask: what are the conditions of entry into American structures of humanity? What are the stakes of asking to belong or be part of this nation? How can refusal be imagined? How might the Asian American diaspora contend with its legacy, or as Christine Hong suggests, reckon with the "price" of "biopolitical inclusion and territorial absorption within the securitized contours of U.S. military empire… and alignment, participation, and complicity with the U.S. military?"[409] To grapple with such questions, I examine *American Horror Story, Lovecraft Countr*y, and the music video for Mitski's "Happy" as a way to reckon with, potentially refuse, and reimagine the relationship between the Asian American subject and the postwar U.S. empire.

In many ways, the horror productions in which I am examining fail, to a certain degree. The contradictions of buying into regimes of Cold War-established humanity, or the process of struggling with the "seductions of incorporation" (as Chuh articulates), are difficult to resist.[410] After all, who would really opt out of humanity, knowing full well just how deadly doing so would be? Still, I argue that in horror may we find space the ability to dis-invest from humanity to examine and embrace the limitations that may emerge. As Fujiwara and Roshanravan suggest, Asian American feminism must "confront and negotiate limits… the limits of our own perspectives, knowledges, and locations in relation to the heterogeneous communities of struggle to whom we seek

[409] Christine Hong, *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 9.
[410] Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*, 3.

accountability."[411] Similarly, an Asian American feminist approach to horror should also reckon with its boundaries.

"They Never Had a Chance": Settler Logics of Postwar Asian Migration

Returning back to *American Horror Story*, Ryan Murphy's long running horror anthological series on FX, the show featured the "lost colony" of Roanoke in its sixth season,[412] aptly titled, *American Horror Story: Roanoke*. The season follows Matt (Dominic Banks/ Cuba Gooding Jr.) and Shelley Miller (Lily Rabe/ Sarah Paulson), a couple from Los Angeles who move into a colonial farmhouse in the woods of North Carolina. The house is supernaturally hostile to their new inhabitants: the Millers are almost immediately assailed by a host of terrifying demons and specters, including the axe-wielding Piggy Man (Marti Matulis), bloodthirsty undead colonists, a mysterious and seductive witch, a pair of murderous nurses, and a family of rapidly crawling ghosts.

The Millers are later informed by Dr. Cunningham (Denis O'Hare), a local professor who researches the farmhouse, about the nature of the haunting. He reveals the farmhouse is built on the land of the lost colony of Roanoke, and that the spirits of the missing colonists of Roanoke, led by a woman named the Butcher, rise from the grave every blood moon to procure living sacrifices. One such sacrifice was the Chen family (Miya Cech, Hahn Cho, Megan Truong, Becky Wu). Viewers are first introduced to the family through a flashback, recounted by Dr. Cunningham: in 1973, the Chen family immigrated from Taiwan and settled into the farmhouse "with the thought of living the American dream. Full immersion, they adopted American names, spoke only English in the

411 Fujiwara and Roshanravan, "Introduction," 32.

412 An early (if not the earliest) unsolved American mystery, the "lost colony of Roanoke" refers to an English settlement established in 1587 in modern day North Carolina. As resources dwindled, the settlement's governor, John White, sailed back to England to retrieve supplies. Upon his return, he discovered the site entirely vacated. It is said that the only clue left behind was the word "Croatoan" carved into a post; none of the settlers were ever found. Many theories abound regarding what happened. Perhaps it is the way the mystery is a particularly creepy tale of the seeming "dangers" of settlement that continues to inspire fascination.

house."[413] His narration acts as a voiceover to footage of the Chen family, who are first shown eating TV dinners while watching the Partridge family perform "I Can Feel Your Heartbeat,"[414] the TV illuminating the otherwise dark room. Their dinner is suddenly interrupted by a loud thud from upstairs. When they investigate, they discover wild boars swarming the second floor. "They were immigrants, and nobody told them the history of the house. They didn't have a clue what hit them," details Cunningham, as he explains that despite the Chen's effort in combating the cursed spirits on the property (by "praying to their ancestors"), they were still "no match" for the Butcher. [415] The Chens are eventually brutally murdered and transformed into a family of ghosts forever tethered to the land and farmhouse. "I guess they never had a chance…but you do,"[416] warns Cunningham.

The villains of the season, The Butcher (Kathy Bates) and the witch Scathach (Lady Gaga), are depicted to have become evil due to puritanical misogyny.[417] However, by emphasizing the violence of early American patriarchy, the series fails in acknowledging Scathach and the Butcher's direct hand in contributing to the genocide of Indigenous people and the theft of the land, Indigenous magic, and cultural practice. In fact it is The Butcher, with the encouragement of Scathach, who is responsible in creating the haunting, as she was the one who poisoned the Roanoke colonists, cursing their souls to be forever trapped, thereby establishing the eternal settler occupation and exploitation of the territory. "This land is mine! This land will always be mine, and I

[413] *American Horror Story*, season 6, episode 4, "Chapter 4," directed by Marita Grabiak, written by Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, John J. Gray, Crystal Liu, Todd Kubrak, Joshua Green, aired on October 5, 2016, on Hulu, 6:14-8:56.
[414] The song was first performed on *The Partridge Family* in the episode "Mom Drops Out" (January 8, 1971). The same clip is then used in the episode "A Partridge by Any Other Name" (which aired on March 12, 1971).
[415] Ibid.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Their stories are as follows: Scathach, a young English woman from the 14th century, was set to be executed when she is discovered as a stowaway on a ship bound for the U.S. (her womanhood blamed for the tumultuous trip over); she runs away and becomes an ancient witch of the forest. The Butcher, also known as Thomasin White, was the wife of the governor of the Roanoke colony. After his departure back to England, she takes over, but is betrayed by her son and fellow colonists who disagree with her decisions (her son also intends to strengthen the Christian values of the settlement), and is cast out of the colony. She eventually joins forces with Scathach, returns back to her colony, poisons them all, and sacrifices herself to forever bind herself to the ancient witch.

shall consecrate my holy right to it with thy blood!"[418] she claims throughout the series, a statement that works both as a personal justification and a threat; it goes uncontested during the duration of the show. While *AHS: Roanoke* leaves much to be desired in terms of critiquing early colonial Indigenous genocide and the violence of land dispossession, it does pose a crucial question: how does the postwar Asian body "fit" in the legacy that is American horror and horrific imaginings of American settler violence?

In several ways, the story of the Chen family functions as a somewhat literal critique of the American Dream and Cold War migration. The Chens are part of the postwar migration from Asia brought on by the 1965 Immigration Act, a legislative moment that promised much, but, as in the case of the Chens, did not deliver. The "full immersion" into American domesticity in which the Chens have opted for resulted in a wretched household. When the Chen's are first introduced, they are miserable, faces drawn. The colors in the frame are washed out, the lighting dim, their TV dinners unappetizing, their conversation strained, even the Partridges turn menacing. By the time the supernatural terror begins, it feels like it is just another symptom of a failed system in which the Chens have unwittingly found themselves; "they never had a chance,"[419] after all. The Chen's tragic ignorance points to the precarity of migration and American citizenship: even if the Chens had not made the unfortunate decision to move into the farmhouse, their immigration status inevitably rendered them complicit in American state violence as they, regardless of intention, became occupiers of colonized land. In this way, Cunningham identifies a very particular condition of (postwar) diaspora.

In *AHS: Roanoke*, "humanitarian" Cold War immigration legislation proves to be deadly. Once the Chens are eventually murdered by the Butcher and the undead colonists, they are cursed

[418] "Chapter 4,"10:05.
[419] Ibid, 8:03.

into transforming into J-Horror style onryos, fully clad with long, stringy black hair, deathly white faces, creaking joints, inhuman flexibility, and skittering tendencies.[420] For the Chens, access to the American Dream, citizenship, and promises of humanity cost them their lives, and sutured them to a blood-soaked stolen land, bound to forever uphold settler violence as dictated by cycles of the blood moon.

Refusing Love: Cold War Monstrosities and Horrific Geographies

Developed by Misha Green, *Lovecraft Country* is a 2020 HBO horror series that tells the story of Atticus (Tic) Freeman (Jonathan Majors), a young, black Korean War veteran who travels to the fictional Ardham, Massachusetts in search of his missing father. Once there, Atticus discovers he is the descendant of Titus Braithewhite, the slave-owning founder of a magic-based cult known as Sons of Adam. As the last living blood relation, the cult wants to sacrifice Tic in order to complete an immortality ritual. While Tic is able to escape, the fight over the right to use magic quickly ensues as other hostile descendants and cult members pursue Tic, his friends, and family.

Lovecraft Country re-imagines the geography of postwar America as a landscape marred by ongoing legacies of white supremacy and geopolitical violence and infused with corrupted old magic. *Lovecraft* poses the American state as the primary site of the show's horror, and the protagonists are forced to grapple with its far-reaching tentacles and the unruly contradictions that lie at its heart. In this world, magic, monsters, and the occult are very real and act as manifestations of broader structures of power that can be wielded as mechanisms of either oppression or liberation.[421] These complexities are fully embodied in the character of Ji-Ah (Jamie Chung). Introduced as the

[420] A ghost in Japanese folklore, one specifically that carries a grudge. The *onryo* has been made famous through J-Horror/Asian Horror film; the image has become quite familiar to most movie going audiences.
[421] The true consequences of doing so are yet to be revealed; answers are to perhaps be addressed in the following seasons.

mysterious receiver of Tic's long-distance call to South Korea in the first episode, she picks up, only to say: "Yeoboseyo? Tic? Is that you? You went home…you shouldn't have."[422] The tension continues to rise as viewers are treated to Tic's magic-induced hallucination wherein he fights and strangles an Asian woman dressed in army fatigues. It is not until the flashback episode, titled "Meet Me in Daegu," where the voice and nightmare are finally connected: it is a young Korean nurse named Ji-Ah, who seems to have the power to somehow predict Tic's future.

"Meet Me in Daegu" begins in 1949 in Daegu, South Korea: Ji-Ah is revealed to be a gumiho, or a mystical Korean creature known as a nine-tailed fox spirit.[423] The gumiho was summoned by a Korean woman, Soon-Hee (Cindy Chang), to kill her sexually abusive husband. Possessing Soon-Hee's daughter Ji-Ah, the gumiho is then tasked with killing and absorbing 100 more souls in order to restore Ji-Ah back to her human form. Ji-Ah is at 99 when she comes upon an injured Tic at the army hospital and decides to make him her 100th victim, for it was he who was responsible for capturing, torturing, and murdering her best friend, a fellow nurse and accused Communist spy. However, Ji-Ah ends up falling in love, though the affair ends after an unfortunate encounter between the two. While having sex with Tic for the first time, Ji-Ah's nine furry tails uncontrollably extend and attach to Tic. While this action almost unintentionally kills him, Ji-Ah is able to glimpse into the future and become privy to Tic's untimely death at the hands of the Braithewhites. He flees, leaving her devastated. She seeks aid from a shaman in interpreting her vision, to which the shaman responds, "You have not even become one with the darkness yet. You will see countless deaths before your journey is done."[424] The shaman's words prove true: Ji-Ah

[422] *Lovecraft Country*, season 1, episode 1, "Sundown," directed by Yann Demange, written by Misha Green, Matt Ruff, Shannon Houston, Wes Taylor, Kevin Lau, aired on August 16, 2020, on HBO, 45:32.
[423] In Korean folklore, the *gumiho* is a supernatural entity who typically takes on the form of a beautiful woman with the intent of luring in unsuspecting victims to consume their heart and/or liver for energy.
[424] *Lovecraft Country*, season 1, episode 6, "Meet Me in Daegu," directed by Helen Shaver, written by Misha Green, Kevin Lau, Matt Ruff, Shannon Houston, Wes Taylor, aired on September 20, 2020, on HBO, 48:23.

eventually journeys to the U.S. to join forces with Tic, his friends, and family in the final battle against the cult members. Tic does end up losing his life, but Ji-Ah is able to use her tails to absorb his remaining life force and aid his lover, Leti (Jurnee Smollett), in binding the Braithewhites and all white people henceforth from using magic.

While Ji-Ah is one of the few magical creatures in the show to be given a human form, she is not granted humanity. Though by the end of the season, this is by choice. Not only does she choose to remain a gumiho, stop killing at 99 souls, spare Tic, and retain her memories, she willingly becomes "one with the darkness," a state in which she will remain a monster, to form coalition and defeat white supremacist magic. Her decision holds extra weight when considering Ji-Ah's initial desire was to find love and become human. This is exemplified by her fervent consumption of Judy Garland musicals, including *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), *Easter Parade* (1948) and *Summer Stock* (1950). As noted by Jamie Chung,[425] Ji-Ah is drawn to these films because these cinematic spectacles teach her the ways of humans. Ji-Ah identifies love as the primary trait of being human, and subsequently adopts Garland's brand of normative American (middle-class, white, and imperialist) love and intimacy to navigate her world (even clumsily quoting *The Pirate* [1948] during a speed-dating event).[426] But the MGM movie musical ultimately fails her. Tic rejects Ji-Ah once her monstrousness is revealed, denying their intimacy ever happened ("Our shit… wasn't real,"[427] he tells her when she arrives in Chicago, though he refers to her as family upon a later moment of reflection). In the face of this, Ji-Ah forges her own form of existence. Rather than buying into a violent form of love and

[425] Richard Newby, "'Lovecraft Country': Jamie Chung Breaks Down That Powerful Origin Story," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 25, 2020, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/lovecaft-country-jamie-chung-breaks-down-that-powerful-origin-story.
[426] The line she recites is: "Underneath this prim exterior, there are depths of emotion, romantic longings."
[427] *Lovecraft Country*, season 1, episode 6, "Jig-a-Bobo," directed by Misha Green, written by Misha Green, Ihuoma Ofordire, Matt Ruff, Shannon Houston, Wes Taylor, Kevin Lau, aired on October 4, 2020, on HBO, 23:41.

humanity, she builds coalitional power, strength, and healing. It is the "connection," her "intertwined destiny" with Tic, his family, and community that comes foremost.[428]

Lovecraft Country struggles in imagining a just alternative of a postwar past. The war violence that drew Tic and Ji-Ah together, for instance, are left unaddressed, as the ongoing legacies of the Korean War are somewhat silently absorbed into the narrative. Un-reconciled violence becomes a particularly pressing issue when considering the entirely senseless murder of the character Yahima Maraokoti (Monique Candelaria), a Two-Spirit Arawakan guide and speaker of the language in which the cult's magic is based on, at the hands of Montrose (Michael Kenneth Williams), Tic's father. This killing did not go over well with viewers, which prompted showrunner Misha Green to deem Maraokoti's death a "failed choice" on her part. [429] It certainly was a failure as Maraokoti's murder was both a narrative inconsistency and disturbing demonstration of what freedom and justice meant in the scope of the show. As forging new existences comes at the cost of Indigenous and nonbinary subjects, Lovecraft reproduces transphobic settler logics of genocidal disposability, and should not be considered an alternative form of life, of humanity, and it itself, in part, should be refused.

Lingering Ends: Asian American Feminist Horror and the Act of Reckoning, Rejecting, and Re-Imagining

Released at the end of my first year of my PhD program, "Happy," the first track off Japanese American singer-songwriter Mitski's fourth album, *Puberty 2* details the resigned pain of a romance with a fickle lover. The music video directed by Maegan Houang, [430] a director based in Los

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[428] Tic points out their connection and sense of intertwined destinies to Ji-Ah in the last episode of the season. *Lovecraft Country*, season 1, episode 10, "Full Circle," directed Nelson McCormick, written by Misha Green, Ihuoma Ofordire, Matt Ruff, Shannon Houston, Wes Taylor, Kevin Lau, aired on October 18, 2020, on HBO, 48:23.
[429] Misha Green (@MishaGreen), "I wanted to show the uncomfortable truth that oppressed folks can also be oppressors. But I didn't examine or unpack the moment/portrayal of Yahima as thoroughly as I should have," Tweet, October 12, 2020, https://twitter.com/MishaGreen/status/1315595162140069889?s=20.
[430] Notably, Mitski is a mixed race Japanese American singer. The director, Meagan Houang, is a mixed race Chinese American filmmaker. Lisa Maley, the actress who played Elanor, is also mixed race Asian American.

Angeles,[431] opens on a young Asian woman, Eleanor (Lisa Maley), tear streaked and driving through a dark, stormy night.[432] The video flashes back, and we learn that Eleanor is the wife of a young, white WWII veteran and seemingly living in postwar domestic bliss. The relationship begins to crumble as Eleanor suspects infidelity. Late one night, she discovers the truth of her suspicions: her husband is a serial killer. Walking in on him during the act, they scuffle, and she plunges an axe into his head. The music video ends as it began: on a medium close-up of Eleanor fleeing into the dark, rainy night.[433]

A fitting accompaniment to the song (one that features Mitski's mournful crooning, a lonely tenor sax, and a throbbing and clanging bassline), the music video is shot in the style of a film noir: smoky frames, high-contrast lighting, shadowed faces, deep jewel tones and midcentury neutrals suffusing the mise-en-scène. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the music video is influenced by several films.[434] Hitchock's *Vertigo* (1958) and Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) are visually and thematically referenced, though it is Douglas Sirk's technicolor melodrama of domestic strife, *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), that is the most explicit inspiration.[435] While Houang draws upon Sirk's iconography to design her postwar domestic space (with such props including a reflective TV set, a spilt tea-set, a red handbag with the inscription "To my Blue-Eyed Cookie"),[436] the way that Sirk captures the delicate violation of fragile postwar boundaries that proves to be the most useful tool for Houang in interrogating the conditions of being an Asian American woman in the postwar era.

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[431] "About," Maegan Houang, accessed October 30, 2020, http://maeganhouang.com/pages/about.
[432] She is named in the treatment, though her name is never explicitly mentioned in the video. The treatment can be found here: https://www.wedirectmusicvideos.com/individual-treatments/mitski-happy-directed-by-maegan-houang. Maegan Houang, "Mitski- 'Happy'| Directed By Maegan Houang," accessed October 25, 2020, https://www.wedirectmusicvideos.com/individual-treatments/mitski-happy-directed-by-maegan-houang.
[433] Mitski, "Happy," May 23, 2016, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJ0O2vDT0VE.
[434] As noted in the treatment.
[435] A melodramatic "woman's picture," *All That Heaven Allows* follows an upper-class widow who falls in love with a younger, working-class man, and depicts the fallout from her community, family, and friends that ensues.
[436] While the TV and tea-set are direct references to Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows*, the embroidered inscription, "Blue-Eyed Cookie," is pulled from Sirk's 1947 suspense film, *Lured,* in which the moniker "Blue-Eyes" is used to lure one of the serial killer's victim.

For Eleanor, her entire existence is horrific. Sutured to an American life carved out by war, she is forced to realize that her husband's infidelities and murderous tendencies do not merely indicate his dissatisfaction towards the relationship, but specifically toward her racialized, gendered, and classed self. By the end, all that she knows further collapses once she realizes that love, intimacy, and murder have become one in the same in this household; the trappings of postwar American bliss she once treasured prove to be nothing more than products of violent death (the tokens that she had associated with his affair -- locks of blond hair, a pearl bracelet, a red clutch -- all now tinged with literal and figurative blood.) His murder is significant: it is in that very moment in which Houang combines the subversiveness of Cold War cinema with horror elements to create her own postwar Asian subject, one who refuses humanity and attachment to postwar domesticity, recognizing that her survival is contingent on doing so.

The video ends on a slow fade: Eleanor driving off into the rainy darkness, alone yet perhaps unburdened in some ways, the viewers are unsure of her fate, and as evidenced by her tear-streaked face, neither is she.[437] This lack of narrative closure evokes a sense of lingering – a refusal of an end – that allows us to grapple with the ways Asian diaspora is simultaneously haunted by the violence done upon us as well as how our existences and legacies have been made to be complicit in upholding the American empire.

Conclusion

[437] Interestingly, Mitski's songs have been unofficially utilized in projects that re-imagined postwar Asian America. One such example can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQvYVd3_6no. In this fanmade video, Mitski's "Your Best American Girl" (2016) is paired with footage from the U.S. Army's 1952 film, "Japanese Bride in America." The video captures the disquiet and creeping dissonance of the archival footage through Mitski's lyrics, most notably: "Your mother wouldn't approve of how my mother raised me/ But I do, I finally do/ And you're an all-American boy/I guess I couldn't help trying to be the best American girl/ Your mother wouldn't approve of how my mother raised me/But I do, I do," the fan vid imagines the unspoken intimate and geopolitical tensions that permeated the featured household.

I began the project of excavating Asian American horror as an MA student in the UCLA Asian American Studies program, and in many ways, it was not an easy task. While Asian Americans have used horror as a genre to tell community stories, it felt like there was an inherent dissonance. When I spoke to Asian Americans in the media industry, my inquiries regarding Asian American horror were often dismissed: why, as a community, do we need horror?, I was consistently questioned. Since then, the American media landscape has shifted in dramatic ways: within just a few years, not only has horror been used more explicitly in projects of racial critique, but the figure of the Asian American has also emerged (a return of the repressed of sorts, perhaps?) through such narratives in somewhat surprising ways. Though differing in their political intentions, I argue that these projects of Asian American horror must be engaged with critically.

Therefore, if we were to reconsider Alexander Woo and *Infamy* through an Asian American feminist horror politic, I would urge that deployments of horror, particularly when re-imagining histories of diasporas, should re-assess ways it tells stories, especially if the stories find themselves emphasizing the "plight of what it feels like to be an American but not have America want you."[438] Rather than employing horror as a form of inclusionary discourse, the genre should be used to reconfigure conceptions of humanity, responsibility, accountability, justice, and liberation. This can come in the form of a reckoning, an "emancipation of the human from liberalism's grasp,"[439] or a "refusal," as Jodi Kim states, of the conditions of humanity put forth by the American state, whether it be in the form of horrific spectral lingering, monstrous fusing, or non-resolute detachment.[440]

I read horror alongside the Asian American to take on the project of destabilizing Cold War knowledges. As Jodi Kim argues, such a project begins with identifying the Cold War as an epistemology specifically invested in the work of "geopolitical structuring, ideological writing, and a

[438] Chavez, "The Terror Showrunner on Internment Season."
[439] Chuh, 4.
[440] Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 6.

cultural imagining."[441] In doing so, we can challenge formations of Asian American-ness premised upon Cold War multiculturalisms and refuse state legibility and imagine non-incorporative and alternative modes of being. Furthermore, we work to recognize the violence of Cold War imperial legacies to reimagine coalitional ties that have been rendered fraught, particularly in the wake of the Cold War. In other words, I argue that the Cold War, as a significant entity to have shaped the formation of Asian America, must be destabilized. Horror may be one such place to imagine forms of accountability, trouble the hegemonies of the Cold War and re-imagine a historical, present, and future coalitional existence. As Mitski sings in "Happy," "When you go, take this heart, I'll make no more use of it when there's no more you."[442] Indeed, we reject this heart riddled with conditions. Take this heart, as we have no use for it; we shall carve out our own.

[441] Ibid, 11.
[442] Mitski, "Happy."

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