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Sounding Institutional Memories Through the College Marching Band: Nostalgia as Object and
Method of Study

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

MUSIC

by

Katherine Sue Pittman

Committee in charge:

Professor Sarah Hankins, Chair
Professor David Borgo
Professor Amy Cimini

2023

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The thesis of Katherine Sue Pittman is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis Approval Page.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Abstract of the Thesis.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Historical Overview.....	4
Literature and Methodologies.....	9
Nostalgia.....	12
On the Author’s Epistemologies.....	15
Chapter 1: Between Legacy, Tradition, and Identity.....	17
Legacy: “Serve the University with all of your heart”.....	19
Tradition: “Remember who you are and what you represent”.....	27
Nostalgia, Hauntology, and the California Spirit.....	28
Invocation #1: The Sanctity of the Uniform.....	31
Invocation #2: The Sanctity of the Performance.....	36
Identity: “Carry the California Spirit with you always, and impart it to others”.....	42
Chapter 2: Performing and Reforming Merit.....	44
Performing Merit: “Perform to the best of your ability at all times”.....	45
Deficit vs. Needs-based Paradigms in Context: The Uniform.....	47
Deficit vs. Needs-based Paradigms in Context: Alumni Band Day.....	48
Reforming Merit: “Meet and surpass the standards set by your predecessors”.....	50

Craft as Care.....	52
Acts of Care and Member Safety.....	55
Conclusion: Sounding Institutional Memories and Nostalgia as Method.....	57
Appendix.....	63
Bibliography.....	69

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Photo of Bob Warren (clarinet, Newman class of 1961) wearing the Big Ten style uniform during the Cal Band’s annual trip to Los Angeles in 1962	31
Figure 2: Alumni joke about the uniform jacket decision in two concurrent comment threads. Individual commenters are anonymized and labeled by light, dark, and gradient shades	33
Figure 3: Alumni debate about the uniform jacket decision using symbolic and heated language. Individual commenters are anonymized and labeled by square, arrow, and elliptical shapes. These three commenters are not the same as those from Fig. 2	34
Figure 4: Photos of the “Script Cal” (top) and “Full Field Spread” (bottom) on October 22, 2022 from the East and West (respectively) press boxes in California Memorial Stadium. A year after the initial kneeling incident, some members still chose to kneel during the anthem (see 10, 25, and 30 yard lines on the left side of the bottom photo)	39

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Sounding Institutional Memories Through the College Marching Band: Nostalgia as Object and Method of Study

by

Katherine Sue Pittman

Master of Arts in Music

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Sarah Hankins, Chair

The sounds of college marching bands embellish the atmosphere of university rituals as disparate as formal university convocations, fundraiser benefits, and sporting events. University officials, band members, alumni, and other affiliates often frame these contributions through mythologies of tradition and in turn task the band with bearing the identity of the collegiate institution as a whole and stewarding its legacy through performances of tradition. I argue that sounding institutional memories in this way reveals linkages between college bands, their military predecessors, and the formation of the modern neoliberal university. The affective tenor of archival and ethnographic sources simultaneously obscures and mythologizes this relationship

in the institutions' memories, this thesis explores the interpersonal negotiations and structural underpinnings of institutional memories as they manifest within and around the University of California Marching Band (Cal Band), founded in 1891 to serve the flagship Berkeley campus. This research draws from oral histories, material artifacts, social media commentary, and embodied memories that evoke, verify, and dispute institutional memory. I hold this case study of institutional memory alongside theories of nostalgia, hauntology, critical university studies, and disability studies to ground the sonic and affective intangibles in discourses that take seriously the tangible effects of memory on the structures and individuals that govern and discipline students in college bands today.

*Remember who you are and what you represent,
For you now become the proud custodians of the California Spirit.*

This custodianship is your destiny and your special responsibility. Guard it well and perform it proudly for it is your duty to keep the light from the Campanile shining with brightness and clarity for all to see. Generations of Bandsmen are depending on you to guard it well and to make it flourish.

Introduction

These words that I had just delivered floated through the September evening air as the sun set before me just beyond the Golden Gate Bridge. I nodded to signal that the soon-to-be-initiated continue onward to their next stop along the Silent Walk, a ritual that marks the successful completion of a recruited Cal Band member's first home football game. It was a somewhat serendipitous moment that I happened to be in Berkeley, California for the weekend of Silent Walk after volunteering at the game the day before. The moment was made even luckier that I was asked at the last minute to fill in as one of the Cal Band alumni delivering one of the five speeches of the evening (an excerpt of which serves as this paper's epigraph). I would be lying if I said that I didn't find myself overwhelmed with waves of sentimentality standing at the foot of UC Berkeley's Sather Tower, overlooking the San Francisco Bay, listening to the carillon above play distilled school song melodies, and reading aloud the history of an organization I had given so much of my time and energy to when I was an undergraduate on the campus. A sense of pride for the Band struck me during each of the two deliveries of the speech: pride for the true first year members who took a chance on the Band during its first season since activities shut down in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; pride for the second year members who stuck with the Band through a year of remote practices and performances and came back because they trusted how it would play out on the field; and pride for the student leadership

persevering through it all to lead the Band toward a real marching season after a year and a half of absence.¹

In that moment, I spoke on behalf of the Band's institutional memory, playing my role in a ritual designed to remind the Band of its *raison d'être*. I performed precisely the "custodianship of the California Spirit" that I was asking of these new members—and it felt good. Yet, the longer I dwelled in my personal echo chamber of self-importance, the more I came to question what exactly it was I had breathed back into existence. Who is invoked by the Band's charge to remember and represent? What is meant by the *California Spirit* that must be guarded and performed? At the point of origin of the Silent Walk tradition in 1959, women were not even permitted to participate in the Band—and would not be until 1973 when Title IX mandated it. This charge was not written for me. How does one reconcile the seemingly well-intentioned symbolic gesture of this charge with patterns of exclusion, violence, and exploitation endemic not only to college marching bands but also the very state-building projects that founded the University of California and consolidated the power of the state of California?

This thesis will explore the historical details that address the questions I have laid out thus far, but it also dares to sit with the discomfort of the nostalgic's wake-up call and propose a way forward beyond paralysis and heated generational conflict. The scope of this work extends beyond the confines of my own personal experience as an alumnus of the Band, and even beyond the histories and duties of the Band as a whole. Concerns and questions raised in the discussion of the Cal Band's complicated role in commemorating the University—and a particular idealization of the University at that—call us to think on a larger political scale at which

¹ The naming and capitalization norms of this thesis adhere to the following: 1) college bands and universities will be lowercase when referred to in the general sense; 2) the Band and the University will be uppercase when referring specifically to the Cal Band and the University of California; 3) members of the Cal Band will primarily be referred to as Band members in the author's prose, but they will occasionally be called Bandsmen (singular: Bandsman) when quoting another speaker or referring to their words; 4) when named, alumni will be accompanied by their "Newman Class" (i.e. their first year in the Band).

commemorative practices and rituals ought to be brought into question. When engaging in a ritual of celebration and commemoration, at what point should we pause and recognize what it is that we're commemorating in the first place? The University of California often regards itself as a public good and an institution of equity and moral righteousness, yet this image borders on hypocrisy when a mere 14.5% of freshman applications are accepted (22% of transfer applications), and the demographics of the campus population (including undergraduate and graduate students, tenured faculty and adjunct lectures, and staff) does not adequately represent the diversity of the state which it claims to serve as a public institution.^{2 3} What does it mean to commemorate an institution that perpetuates this discrepancy even as it claims to remedy it?

The underlying contradictions woven into the origins and history of the University of California Marching Band closely resemble the University in this way—more closely than feels comfortable to admit. The very language of the charge I vocalized shepherds new members into the realm of elitism, bestowing access and privilege as a “destiny and special responsibility.” At the same time, this language, the Silent Walk ritual, and the Band’s conscripted duty to the University is rich with an affective draw that Berkeley students—many of whom lead intensely competitive and individualistic academic lives—crave. UC Berkeley, as both an elite ivy-adjacent university and modern neoliberal research institution, pressures students into a framework that privileges while it isolates, applauds students’ exceptionalism only to further pit them against each other in the classroom. In some ways, the Cal Band can be regarded as a way out of this struggle—or at least an escape from it. This is one of the reasons students often cite for seeking membership in the Band. Members who join during their second, third, or fourth year in school

² For a full table of UC admissions data from the previous decade, see the University of California admissions summary dashboard, broken down by student reported ethnicity and source school, located under the entry “Undergraduate Admissions Summary.”

³ UC Berkeley aggregates and publishes its admissions, outcomes, and faculty hiring data on its Division of Equity and Inclusion site, located under the entry “Diversity Data Dashboard.”

explicitly name the desire for a community and friendships centered around non-academic activities as their “why.” While I do not intend to invalidate that rationale nor the sincere sense of community that the Band cultivates for its members, it is important to return to these concerns of elitism and exclusion. Who has historically had access to the social community of the Cal Band? Explicitly or otherwise, who has been denied entry or phased out due to their gender, socioeconomic class, or race? By detangling the Cal Band’s historical and contemporary ethical knots—as they have been and are currently entwined with UC Berkeley’s—this thesis embarks on a critical analysis of university marching bands on one register, and the University itself on another. This thesis examines the college marching band to ask what structures and norms preclude equitable reform in these ensembles—and the university more broadly—and to examine what equitable reform could actually do for its past, current, and future membership. Though the particularities of this case study are not universal across all university band programs nor all public universities, this research can and should have implications for academic institutions which pride themselves on values of social progress and equity and recruit student bands to both represent and commemorate those values on the academy’s behalf.

Historical Overview

Today, the University of California Marching Band is made up of approximately 200 undergraduate members who rehearse and perform about 20 hours a week during the fall football season (closer to 10 hours a week during the spring basketball season). The Cal Band’s role as musical and ritual accompaniment to the Athletics teams reinforces a relationship of reciprocity. The experience of each entity is deeply affected by the presence and performance of the other. In other words, when the team is doing well or the game is close, the Band is more attentive,

engaged, and enthusiastic about a potential win. When the Band has high attendance, is playing popular tunes, and is actively participating as an audience, the team is more energized (as are the fans in the stands). The presence or absence of the Cal Band can drastically alter the experience—and even the outcome—of a game, and members recognize this and prioritize attending as many football and basketball games as they are able. From a financial perspective, this priority is not balanced in the breakdown of the Cal Band’s budget. Performance fees, private donations, and endowment funds cover the majority of the Band’s annual expenses, with the remaining income streaming in from other campus support and, minimally, Cal Athletics (Kell 2018). Students do not receive any of this income as money in their own pockets despite their role as the driving labor force behind the Band’s operations. Still, many continue to return and many new recruits audition each year for the opportunity to be a part of the Band’s historical legacy, its relationship to the Athletics teams, and its unique campus community.

The Cal Band has undergone multiple rebirths since its origins as the student-run University Cadet Band in 1891. Though it boasts its longevity as one of the oldest continuous college marching bands on the West Coast, this resilience has not been without patterns of pressure, restructuring, and threats of dissolution. Resulting from the National Defense Act of 1916, the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program was federally established and implemented at academic institutions throughout the United States, including the University of California, Berkeley.⁴ Amid the absorption of the Cadet Band into the ROTC in 1917, some members sought to preserve the student-run structure and sever ties with the ROTC, looking to the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC) for sponsorship instead

⁴ The joint origins of the Cal Band and the ROTC program are documented both on the UC Berkeley Army ROTC “History” webpage and in the Cal Band’s *The Pride of California: A Cal Band Centennial Celebration*, edited by Eric Heilmann and Kathy Heilmann and published in 1993.

(Heilmann 1993). In 1922, their bid was successful, thus starting a new chapter as the ASUC Band.

Financial instability was a common theme throughout the next two decades under the ASUC, yet the Band managed to expand its membership and fundraise for away games and performance trips during the peak years of the Great Depression. World War II and the nation-wide draft set back these membership milestones, decimating the Band's participant pool in part due to the remaining members rejecting appeals from female students to join the Band. Women comprised a majority of the undergraduate (63%) and graduate (52%) student population at UC Berkeley in 1944, making strides in enrollment in academic fields and student leadership roles which were previously dominated by or restricted to male students (Dorn 2008). Despite this war-time expansion of opportunities for women across the University, the Cal Band held fast to its gendered tradition, even if doing so compromised the size and overall effectiveness of the Band's performance.⁵ After the end of the war, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act provided veterans with a host of benefits to adjust to a post-war economy and prevent widespread unemployment among those who served. As a result, veteran enrollment in the University spiked and participation in the Cal Band reflected this shift. Crucially, the college-bound veterans who most benefited from this legislation were largely white and male, as the act only provided financial support if a veteran were to be accepted into the institution—which became increasingly difficult for people of color, women, sexual minorities, and disabled people whether they were WWII veterans or not due to the student population growth and overcrowding caused by the G.I. Bill (Herbold 1994; Abdelfatah and Arablouei

⁵ The 35-member Band in 1944 famously used visual illusions, such as lying down on the field, to creatively come up with the “marching” component of the field shows despite their low membership numbers. Don Griffith, who was in the Band in 1944, remarks that “[he] will never forget the embarrassment of trying to play the Star Spangled Banner, in the middle of a football stadium full of people, with a dozen instruments.” Heilmann 1993.

2022). With white men once again the overwhelming majority on UC Berkeley's campus, the Cal Band dramatically increased its membership and reaffirmed its identity as an organization of predominantly white male veterans.

The campus climate in the 1950s and 1960s threw this into further relief, revealing the contradictions of the UC's image of the enlightened, liberal, public educating institution and testing the Band's loyalty to the University through the turmoil. Between 1949 and 1952, the University of California nearly destroyed itself due to the implementation of a controversial "Loyalty Oath" requiring all faculty to declare their disavowal of leftist political ideas and associations to retain their employment (Blauner 2009). This policy threatened the job security of graduate students, transient lecturers, associate professors, and tenured professors in the name of McCarthyist anti-Communist values. The Loyalty Oath, which led to the dismissal of thirty-one non-signers at the University—nearly half of all academic faculty in the U.S. removed for political reasons during this time—remains one of UC's skeletons in the closet. The University's fear and intolerance of faculty's academic freedom bled into its stance on student groups in the 1960s. In 1964, the University administration announced that it would strictly enforce regulations prohibiting political activity and organizations on campus—including recruitment, fundraising, and scheduling events featuring outside political speakers ("Resolution"). Students at the Berkeley campus engaged in civil disobedience tactics borrowed from their activist experience with the Freedom Riders in the South, ultimately winning protections for students' political activity that set the stage for the Anti-War movement to come shortly thereafter.

The Band's relationship with the campus climate was—and is—complicated. The Band's outward image as a paramilitary organization raised conflict with other student organizations as

well as within the Band itself. As military veteran members in the Band's membership dwindled through the 1960s, the political identity of the Band too became more heterogeneous. At the Anti-War Movement's peak in 1967, a caucus of the membership refused to march in the annual military-themed halftime show (Heilmann 1993). Their demands were met, but at the cost of their spots in the Band's regular marching block, forced to compete to regain their spots for the remaining season's games.

To the credit of members, leaders, and directors stewarding the Cal Band over the course of the last fifty years, the Band today is not a one-to-one replica of its mid-twentieth predecessor. However, as this thesis will illustrate, the legacy that the Band commemorates and the traditions that it practices are so deeply entangled with white male military culture that it becomes impossible to fully extract this culture from the Cal Band's identity. Even as the present-day Cal Band attempts to reckon with this legacy and reform the Band's culture to support a more diverse membership, a reactionary subset of alumni voice their disapproval in the name of preserving the Band's identity. The disapproval materializes through gestures of nostalgia—reflections on what the Cal Band was like “back in my day,” from what kinds of shows the Band performed to what standards of excellence the Band held itself to. These standards privilege white, able-bodied upper middle-class men, though exceptional individuals of different racial, ability, class, or gender identities have found success in this culture. Like in other institutions founded on structures of oppression, a diverse population does not prove that oppression is no longer present nor does it automatically inhibit oppressive acts nor eradicate oppressive systems.

Literature and Methodologies

College football is a billion dollar industry, with each program in the top thirteen most profitable football programs generating over 100 million dollars in revenue in 2019 (Brewer 2019). The ubiquity of the sport and its ritual attachments—which include but are not limited to cheer and dance teams, tailgates, chants, and marching bands—cannot be disregarded.⁶ And yet, scholarship on college marching bands does not often get taken up—let alone published—in mainstream music research communities. Notable exceptions include John McCluskey’s insightful illustration of the structural racial divide between football teams which mostly field Black athletes and audiences which mostly seat white patrons (2020). His sample of sixteen college football teams across the United States reveals that marching bands and music coordinators in the athletic marketing department construct a soundscape that permits “token celebration of blackness in specific moments while using white sonic icons as the primary sounds associated with the sport’s portrayals of power and victory” (McCluskey 2020).

The intersection of music and sport is perhaps most heightened and embodied through a musical practice adjacent to marching band, which similarly has military origins: the competitive drum and bugle corps (often shortened to simply “drum corps”). Emerging research by Alyssa Wells and Jamil Jorge make invaluable contributions to the paucity of existing marching music literature. In detailing drum corps’ cultural norms and reckoning with the 2017 MeToo movement, Wells explores and critiques the practice’s “reverence for extreme precision, conformity, loyalty, unity, grit, and stoicism [as] factors [which] normalize harm and promote silence in the face of abuse.” (Wells 2022). In another vein, Jorge reflects on the

⁶ The intersection of sound and sport has gained some traction in musicological and sound studies spaces for other sports. The international sport of football (soccer) famously elicits rousing chants and noise making from its fans, performing and reinforcing fan loyalty and antagonistic rivalries in the stadium. See Herrera 2018; Marra and Trotta 2019.

transformational power of modern drum corps for young performers to cultivate intersectional belonging despite financial restraints and performance practices that often exclude prospective members on the basis of class, race, gender, and sexual identity (Jorge 2022).

This thesis stitches itself between and across these interventions, interrogating the college band's cultural norms and exclusions while commending its functional role in students' social and musical development. As McCluskey reminds and the Cal Band's history illustrates, the college marching band does not operate in a closed system, marking a crucial distinction between this case study and the aforementioned drum corps studies. The college band negotiates with its present membership and leadership as well as its various stakeholders: the University administration, the athletics department, spirit groups, the football team, the student body, fans, alumni, and donors. During a football game, the band acts on each entity as they act on the band in return, illuminating a network that relies on the band for its spirited engagement and in return carves out the anticipatory space for the band to perform. For the college football industry to be as profitable as it is, the balance of these roles must be stable and each party must fulfill its role effectively. To simplify things, if the football team is underperforming relative to the rest of the network, the band and the fans become disinterested and cynical. If the fans are unenthusiastic or disorganized and unruly, the band and the team become irritated and spiteful. If the band is underperforming, the fans and the team become disapproving and distant.

It is crucial to understand how the university marching band functions within the broader ecology and economy of the university and affiliated persons or groups. The complex relationship between the Cal Band and UC Berkeley resonates in multiple registers at once: symbolic, structural, and material. The shifting dynamics in one register affects the relationship in the others; that is to say that a strong symbolic relationship between the Cal Band and the

University can contribute to shifts in the structural and material relationships between the two. This kind of shifting occurs across decades as well as on a smaller timescale; for example, every year at the rivalry game (known colloquially as “Big Game”) against Stanford University, the symbolism of the event brings the Band and the University together, creates opportunities to ritualize constructed performances which commemorate the school’s unity, and brokers the exchange of the Band’s performing labor and the University’s capital in the form of monetary donations or provisions for food and travel. Even in years where the Band’s relationship with the University is more tenuous, Big Game Week has the symbolic power to override previously held grudges.

While this project began with transcribing current retellings of Band members’ experiences, I also work with archival documents and oral histories over a larger time frame to better trace these relational dynamics as they developed in the post-war period and throughout the latter half of the 20th century. This thesis cuts across the symbolic, structural, and material registers woven into the Cal Band’s rehearsed and recited origin stories by drawing parallels to the formation and reformation of the University of California along the same timeline. How are we to work through the contradictions between elitism and diversity or tradition and progress that are reinforced by the Band, its alumni, and the University?

This is all to complicate the mythologies of fixed tradition that are central to the narrative of the University of California’s flagship campus in Berkeley and upheld by the University of California Marching Band. Celebratory and critical discourses alike will point to the Cal Band’s excellence in producing precisely coordinated group performances on the field. The legacies of imperialism in American band culture are numerous, and the Cal Band is no exception to this reality. However, members within the organization and alumni of the organization attest to

students' agency in governing and shaping their own experience as central to the Band's identity. Current Band members and alumni claim the democratically elected student leadership hierarchy as one of the core tenets of the Band's structure. The regular turnover of leadership and the fragility of the Band's institutional memory can and does spark conflict with the values and practices of prior generations of the Band, and many alumni are poised to make this conflict known.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia offers a useful lens to examine how we all might reflect on our relationships to our own traditions and our investments in upholding such traditions. Nostalgia's first usage emerged in 1688 as medical terminology to diagnose an "afflicted imagination" that soldiers and students experienced during long periods on the battlefield, abroad, and away from their homeland (Vallee [2011] 2013). This conception theorized returning home as the only real cure for nostalgia's ails, though administering leeches, opium, and a living burial were suggested treatments (Boym 2001). Originally signaling geographic displacement and the resulting feelings of longing for *home*, nostalgia has come to take on temporal meanings of longing for an earlier *time* and loss because of an inability to actualize its genuine restoration. With this shift, popular discourses around nostalgia also began to frame nostalgia as a condition of modernity—of a coping mechanism that longs for affectual spaces ranging from the particulars of one's own safe, familiar childhood to broad, symbolic snapshots from a cultural imaginary (Sayers 2020). This framing of modern nostalgia finds itself fetishized and commodified by market forces. From "throwback playlists" to class reunions, much of modern nostalgia hovers between a desire to relive and a right to reclaim. The University employs these kinds of nostalgia through the

acousmatic reproduction of the Band's image and sound through campaigns on the ground and on the web to draw alumni support, patronage, and attendance.⁷

Nadia Seremetakis's *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture* offers an entry into nostalgia that explores the rich "stratigraphic" layering (and excavation) of sensory, affective exchanges that ground our engagement with memory in material artifacts (Seremetakis 1994). Rather than orienting her project toward the artifacts themselves, this text considers the senses that perceive the artifacts(/s) in the first place, displacing the primacy of the 'excavator' and zooming out to the "special space of perception where sensory and emotional reciprocities between the present and the past occur" (Seremetakis 1994: 141). This approach encourages a register of analysis that accounts for a composite and palimpsestuous sensory relationship to material artifacts. I choose to highlight Seremetakis's use of the metaphors of colportage, cloth, dust, and archaeology as a model for her proposed *anthropology of the senses* which "would show how the instrumental dichotomy between systemic and idiosyncratic valuation in material culture can be the political polarity between the valued and the devalued, between public-institutional memory and the unspeakable memories of cultural alterity" (Seremetakis 1994: 135). When Cal Band alumni discourses turns toward discussions around cloth (the uniform), I read this as parallel to how Seremetakis theorizes cloth as "the mechanical creation of an institutional memory which frequently suppresses the crevices and contradictions of everyday experience in favor of large scale and socially binding, myths and icons." (Seremetakis 1994: 133). The uniform stands in symbolic support of the myth of cross-generational continuity and unbroken tradition within the Band. Not only do modifications to the uniform

⁷ The stadium that houses Cal football games uncannily plays a Cal Band studio recording of the "Fight Song" over the speakers on the concourse as fans enter and leave. This produces a fairly disconcerting sensation when the Cal Band is performing its Postgame show on the field while the speakers outside are simultaneously sounding some other, disembodied Cal Band playing the "Fight Song" overhead.

signify the deterioration of the old materials and thus the passage of time, but these aesthetic disruptions appear to represent an affront to the Band's reputation and the mythologized *California Spirit*.

Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* further considers nostalgia's relationship between personal and collective memory, breaking down nostalgic experience into two types according to the individual's orientation toward the collective: restorative and reflective (2001). Though both types manifest as a way of coping with loss, restorative nostalgia attempts a reconstruction of the lost home while reflective nostalgia lingers with the relationship between "historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude" (Boym 2001: 49). Cal Band members and alumni oscillate between these different nodes of nostalgia, revealing the complexities of memory, narrative, and knowledge-production—complexities that both produce and are obscured by nostalgic discourses within the Band, its alumni association, and the vast constellation of university affiliates. When Cal Band alumni confront the traditions they had once practiced, their nostalgia reflects the theorizations by Nicola Sayer—a kind of *metamodern nostalgia* in which the subject is torn between a desire to reject and reclaim the past. This framing of nostalgia resists being tossed out by cynicism, acknowledging that those afflicted by it can fully appreciate the complexities of their relationships to tradition—relationships that fondly reflect on tradition's capacity to bond individuals across time while grappling with the coercive power inherent to this phenomenon. By borrowing the critical frameworks of nostalgia offered by Seremetakis, Boym, and Sayers, this study places marching bands in dialogue with other institutionalized musical practices and communities that grapple with complex legacies and traditions.

On the Author's Epistemologies

The “Songs of the University of California” booklet (originally published in 1944 by the California Alumni Association) is a pocket sized artifact with sentimental and institutional investments embedded in the lyrics and anecdotes on each page.⁸ This Songbook serves as a reference for the 38 songs it boasts in the Band’s official repertoire, and its first page notably imparts a set of five charges delivered at the Silent Walk initiation event. The charges are as follows:

1. *Serve the University with all of your heart.*
2. *Remember who you are and what you represent, for now you become a proud custodian of the California Spirit.*
3. *Meet and surpass the standards set by your predecessors.*
4. *Carry the California Spirit with you always, and impart it to others.*
5. *Perform to the best of your ability at all times.*

The brevity and referential nature of the charges cannot prescribe the policies on how the Band operates at a practical level, but it is not a stretch to suggest that the charges dictate how a Band member is expected to operate at a symbolic level. Each charge drips with reverence, identity, temporality, spirituality, and morality. They ask members to look inward and evangelize outward on behalf of the University and the “California Spirit.” These charges led my research process in the archive and in conversation. Throughout this thesis, I will unfold the charges as a guiding thread to explore how the Cal Band negotiates its relationship to the complex network of the University of California.

This project began with and has been shaped by my reflexive perspective and grew outward through interlocutors in my life and in the archive. My research materials include

⁸ The Songbook that I use as reference is the 2014 edition. There are aesthetic variations between editions since students are responsible for its print and they often include memes or other inside jokes and references, but the content of the booklet has largely remained consistent year-to-year since at least 1961, with two notable exceptions: the inclusion of a new school song in 2004 (“California Triumph”) and the renamed and rewritten “Gold & Blue” in 2012 (formerly “California Indian Song”). See the Appendix for selections from the Songbook.

discrete participant-observation events from the Fall 2021 season, Facebook group commentary, ethnographic interviews with with alumni and current members of the Band during the same time frame, the oral history archives housed in the Bancroft Library, Cal Band alumni's home collections, and the "Songs of the University of California" booklet which has been reprinted and distributed to members of the Band every year since 1944. I think of these materials as a constellation of my epistemologies, for they inform my way of knowing and understanding the interwoven threads of this community and its history. It is with this framework in mind that I humbly contribute my current interpretations of the constellation.

I name them thusly because their effect on my conceptualization of the thesis project extends beyond the project itself—beyond my relationship to the Cal Band, beyond my relationship to music pedagogy, beyond my relationship to the University, and beyond my relationship to music and music research. I credit the epistemologies at work here with illuminating the social and political patterns present in this thesis; they are likewise responsible for the discursive lacunae that reveal themselves around the particular experiences of raced and gendered bodies in and around the Cal Band. Although the Band and my interlocutors are not exclusively white cisgendered men, the dominant voices and positionalities setting the agenda in my sources and communities are those of white cisgendered men. As a result, the collective conversations about Cal Band identity take on a normative white male subjectivity. This research is driven by questions around nostalgia and is sourced from individuals who engage with those discourses, but another version of this study would benefit from a framing specifically around whiteness and heteropatriarchy. I wish to be mindful of the inherent limitations of epistemologies which rely on the survival of memories and those who bear them. Those who have been most severely excluded and repeatedly marginalized are often not immediately

present in memory studies research. The most raced and gendered alumni are only infrequently active in the materials presented here. Furthermore, many willfully abstain from joining the Facebook group or participating in formal alumni reunion events—in part, because of the normative white male subjectivity that pervades these spaces. This is a limitation as well as a recurring theme to reflect upon throughout the thesis and return to for future research. After all, acts of writing are never without acts of exclusion.

Chapter 1: Between Legacy, Tradition, and Identity

The critique of the university band must also be a critique of the university. Critical University Studies scholars make clear that the economic model under which the university operates is foundationally based on producing cultural capital and procuring revenue from student tuition, corporate investment, and returns from the university's real estate ventures (McClanahan 2011; Shermer 2021; Davis 2023). In a labor market that demands higher levels of education, more years of internship experience, and diverse commitments to service projects of its entry-level workers, neoliberal universities compete to provide the most well-rounded college experience—often boasting their yearly rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*, an American media company that quantifies key characteristics and reputational factors and uses that information to rank universities at the regional, national, and global level (Morse and Brooks 2022; Morse and Wellington 2022). The *goods and services* that the University provides its enrolled students extend beyond course credit, a diploma, and the opportunity to learn from leaders in scholarly fields; over the last century, the modern American University has leaned heavily on marketing a fully encapsulating, life-changing experience and life-long community to its enrollees. Popular media and national sports culture go further to glamorize the opportunity to

invest thousands of dollars in tuition and housing costs for the quintessential college experience: living in the dorms, making friends with the upcoming generation's movers and shakers, interning in the labs of faculty performing cutting-edge research, and *supporting the home team*.

University administrators and their marketing teams weave the University's institutional legacy and the traditions that commemorate and build upon that legacy into a tight knit illustrating its identity and claiming its niche to University alumni, prospective students, and potential investors. What knots, gaps, and tangles materialize between legacy, tradition, and identity? To thoroughly interrogate this question and the role of the marching band in tying these concepts together, this chapter will engage with the parallel histories of the University of California and the University of California Marching Band, revealing moments of uncanny resonance between the University and one of its most dutiful representatives. By excavating these histories, I intend to illustrate that the legacies and traditions that the Band carries and carries out are not essential to its identity but constructions of its identity and should therefore be subject to careful inspection and critical reevaluations when legacies and traditions do harm unto the living members of the group. The first section of this chapter examines the legacy of the fundamental material relationship between the University and the University Band, naming the relationality and directionality of the Band's *service* to the University as a moral duty rather than the fair fulfillment of a balanced transaction. The second section of this chapter explores the echoes of this fundamental relationship as it manifests through performed rituals and traditions, and how the embodied memory of these traditions imposes a kind of hauntological disciplinary force on those who reject or reinterpret tradition. The overall objective of this chapter follows a chronological arc that narrates the inscription of the Band's symbolic legacy into routinely performed traditions that reinforce each other as essential to the Band's institutional identity.

Legacy: “Serve the University with all of your heart”

The University of California Marching Band has a complex symbiotic relationship with the University at large. At once, it owes its existence to the University while it also labors for the University; it is comprised of and led by students of the University while it maintains one staff position paid for by the University (the director); it depends on University donors and alumni for financial support, yet it is not officially housed within the music department nor the athletics department—which is unusual when compared to most collegiate marching bands. Though the politics of the bureaucratic decisions which led to these contradictions and points of conflict are fascinating and rich with stories of struggle, tension, and drastic change, this project emphasizes the affective echoes of these politics and how they continue to resonate in the stories the Band tells about its own history and how it reflects on these stories. As such, this section will reflect on two mid-century snapshots in the timeline and their rippling effects: the restructuring of the Band’s identity and purpose in 1940s-50s post-war period; and the conflict between the Band, the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), and then-President of the University of California, Clark Kerr, during the Free Speech Movement in 1964. In my sketch of these formative moments in the University’s and the Band’s ongoing relationship, I hope to draw parallels with vignettes from my ethnographic work during the 2021 Fall season, ending the section with an exploration of what the charge has come to mean sentimentally and symbolically for members and alumni of the Band. The mapping of these ruptures in the timeline provides context for the legacy that the Cal Band bears and gives weight to the relationship of service to the University that the Band still prides itself on.

With origins as the military-adjacent organization known as the University Cadet Band, the Cal Band has undergone an intense period of reorganizing throughout the middle of the 20th century as its source of financial and structural support changed. As I have touched on previously, much of the Band's identity and its traditions were constructed and codified in the span of years immediately following WWII, catalyzed by the return of soldiers from the war front to the university classrooms—and the Cal Band. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill) brought 2.2 million veterans to college campuses across the United States (Olson 1973). Given the pressure to adapt to an emerging modern university model with a larger campus population and thinly stretched financial resources, the Band's membership had to rethink how it would uphold a service relationship to the University. The Cal Band Oral History Project, initiated by Dan Cheatham in the 1980s, brings together conversations with dozens of Band members, football players, and University officials active during this post-war period—which was a tumultuous and highly contested period for the modern university itself to re-evaluate and reformulate its intellectual investments and responsibility to its students, faculty, shareholders, the government, and the public. Not only does Cheatham's work serve as a bountiful repository from which to piece together the histories of the Band; it also reveals the figures and legacies this Cal Band's archivist (and the Cal Band History Committee) has deemed worth knowing through the very act of curation. Revisiting the Cal Band Oral History project with a critical eye for these patterns should reveal not only the effects of the University's bureaucratic restructuring on the Band, but also the Band's complicated and ongoing role in the project of the modern university.

Let us begin with this post-war moment of rebirth. Current narratives of the Band's history emphasize this period due to the drastic turnover of membership (and the campus

population) during WWII and the core leaders who kept the Band on life support during the war. At a time when large swaths of the Band were drafted into duty, gaps were filled by active service members stationed on campus, further blurring the lines between a University student organization and one by and for the military. Cheatham's oral history project, too, follows the leadership during and after the war years. In what appears to be a written course description of the 1945 University of California Band, acting director Alcide Marin outlines the explicit ties between the Band, the athletics teams, the University, and the war. He dictates that "at football games, University meetings, rallies [sic], and other student functions, and in connection with the war effort, the Band will provide music as needed" (Cal Band Oral History Project). The explicit acknowledgement of the Band's military membership and the implicit expectation of Band members to contribute to the patriotic efforts on campus are made clear in these kinds of mission statements and documentation. The document goes as far as to crosslist the marching band course listing in both the music department and military department, further sharpening the legacy of militarism in college marching bands. Aspects of the Cal Band's paramilitary models of rehearsal and socialization have gradually tapered out as hazing disciplinary measures have come under scrutiny in college band and fraternity settings, but the core of this legacy lives on the lining of the military-style uniform and the collection of Cal songs—marches which metaphorize school rivalry with militarist themes and—at times—racist, violent lyrics ("California Indian Song" now known as "Gold and Blue"). This thesis will return to the multiple manifestations of the Cal Band's legacy in the next section, but it is important to flag the parallels between the military band's service to the nation and the college marching band's service to the University that root back to this early period in the Band's history.

Clark Kerr had a special relationship with the Cal Band while he was the Chancellor of UC Berkeley from 1952-1958. Kerr's disciplinary background in economics and industrial relations equipped him with the ideological investment in bureaucratic efficiency when overseeing the expansion of the Berkeley campus capacity to accept the influx of university students as a result of the GI bill (Gonzales 2011; Kerr 1961). His tenure as President of the UC system (1958-67) faced the wave of "baby boomer" admits with expansion on an even larger scale, resulting in the opening of three new UC campuses. His role in the construction and growth of the UC has had lasting impacts on the bureaucratic structure of the modern public research university. When asked about the Band, he regards its role in imbuing the modern university with life, community, and "loyalty." Kerr remarks on its steadfast commitment to its mission through politically turbulent times:

I would say, among other things, that the Band has never lost sight of its mission... People in the Band felt the same way except they had the additional opportunity to provide the musical highlight of the event. Thus, the Band's mission evolved to support fellow students on the athletic field who are competing for the glory of the *Alma Mater*... From this came the mission of supporting the University. There's a great love and loyalty within the Band for the University and its ideals. This was evidenced by the Cal Band's attitudes during the Free Speech movement when the Band, for the most part, remained supportive of the University during that period when others weren't. Somehow that sense of mission gets traditionally passed on from one set of Bandsmen to the next.

(Clark Kerr, *Cal Band Oral History Project*, September 9, 1992)

His appreciation of and admiration for the Band's loyalty and support reinforces the narratives that attribute fascistic tendencies to marching bands—that the Band stood by the University in its most tumultuous years of the Free Speech Movement (FSM). It was precisely this kind of argument that led the ASUC to rescind its funding of the Cal Band during FSM, suggesting that the Band too closely resembled the imperialism that student activists were organizing against during the Free Speech, Civil Rights, and Anti-War movements throughout the 50s and 60s.

What, then, were the University's *ideals* that the Band was so committed to serve? What does serving the University look like when the politics of the Band's membership come into conflict with that of the University?

This service—a responsibility to the team, the University, and all that a public institution represents—threads through the ethos of the Cal Band well into the 21st century. Conversations with Barbara Goodson (Newman Class of 1977) echoed this desire to serve the greater campus community. Goodson, who joined the Band the decade following the Band's and University's restructuring years (and only a few short years after women were permitted to join the Band in 1973), has devoted countless paid and unpaid hours as an alumna to the cultural ecosystem encompassing the Cal Band and the University. Since graduating, she has held positions working with the Band as a University employee, as a uniformed field conductor for football game performances, and as a liaison between the Band and the greater University with her formal service as the Cal Band Alumni Association (CBAA) Chair of University Relations and informal advocacy as a respected member of the Cal Alumni community. In conversation, she framed “serving the University with all your heart” much like she frames her life's work—as an act of service for the University and the ideals of truth, knowledge, and progress which the University purportedly represents. She further expanded the scope of our discussion to include other entities that serve the University: graduate researchers, the custodial staff, the tenured faculty, the adjuncts, and the Chancellor herself. Serving the University of California's legacy cuts across divisions of labor, illuminating just how deeply entangled the ecology of the University has become.

And yet, even as we all labor on behalf of the University, the modern university configures and rewards its laborers differently. The Cal Band and, for example, the Nobel

Laureates do not receive comparable compensation for their contributions to the University—they do not even refer to their home institution with the same moniker. Although the University of California casts its image in narratives of intellectual progress, truth-seeking, and knowledge producing, Cal (the nickname for UC Berkeley in intercollegiate athletic competition and spirit events) casts its image in *tradition*.⁹ In both Clark Kerr’s characterization and the school’s own marketing, serving the University as the Cal Band is classified as the latter. As Universities often do, this unwittingly puts the students which make up the Band’s membership in a double-bind that orients their scholarship toward progress, rupture, and innovation while restricting their participation in the Band to ritualizing and maintaining tradition.

Kiran Permaul (Newman Class of 2010) confirms this role of the Band as the bearer of traditions through the study and sharing of Cal songs. Permaul tells me about a trip to Europe with the California Alumni Association and alumni organizations from other universities, during which alumni of 30-40 years ask him if he knows the lyrics to the Cal songs. Of course, Permaul does—what is unexpected is that these alumni do as well. The staying power of these songs speaks to the power of Cal’s legacy to create and sustain these kinds of cross-generational communities. In Permaul’s reflection on this memory, he says:

These [songs] are the only things that bind us all with shared experience. I wish we remembered it's not just what is fun for me or what I think is cool--it's what the whole... You're playing for the whole stadium, for the whole community: students, alumni, staff, faculty, administrators, friends, and family, and people who have been married in or raised in--whatever. You're playing for all of them. You're not just playing for what your favorite song is. I wish there was more of that.

(Kiran, Permaul, interview with author, October 24, 2021)

⁹ It is notable that UC Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ deputized a task force in September 2022 to review and reconsider the dual identity of the institution. The task force is charged with the goal of constructing new and consistent naming conventions that foster a sense of belonging among students who feel excluded from either the Cal or the UC Berkeley identity. See Christ 2022.

This snapshot is itself representative of many of my conversations with alumni, which are draped in the language of service to the broader University of California's community and institutional legacy.

It is clear that Kiran Permaul recognizes the complexity of the forces acting on and through the University which affect the trend toward individualism which he alludes to in the previous comment. Permaul, who is a historian by trade as well as the chair of the Archiving and History committee for the Cal Band Alumni Association (CBAA), asserts that changes he has noticed in the Cal Band with regards to its relationship to the University are evidence of a larger cultural trend in the United States. He points to the American individualist ethos as well as a shift in the class demographics of the University as reasons for the Band's perceived lack of commitment to the broader campus community.

So thinking about an organization or a campus as a whole, I think people don't necessarily think about that as much as they could and/or should. And I can understand why they don't, because the university has also stopped thinking that way. The campus desperately wants to form community, but it has forgotten how to. Athletics desperately wants community but it does everything in its power to destroy it.

(Kiran, Permaul, interview with author, October 24, 2021)

He laments that this is an unfortunate turn because the Band inherently brings together students from different fields and disciplines across the campus. He says:

One of the benefits of the Band, which makes it in many ways better than the ASUC [*Associated Students of the University of California*, the elected student government], it actually is a more representative body of the campus because there are engineers because there are biologists because there are forestry majors because there are music majors, historians, polisci, writing, foreign language, all of it. It actually cuts across the campus.

(Kiran, Permaul, interview with author, October 24, 2021)

Not only does this frame the Band as nurturing a sense of *responsibility to serve* the University, but it also bestows its own self-importance as being *representative of* the University through its

diverse makeup and a structure of collectivity—as a kind of liberal democratic model for the nation at-large. The legacy of service to the University becomes the Cal Band’s identity. Cal Band’s identity becomes intrinsically—not merely circumstantially—tied to the identity of the University.

For students coming of age during the current phase of the neoliberal University, the highly competitive atmosphere translates these acts of service to the University into a nearly spiritual reverence for the University. The “college experience” in the new millennium, with increasingly low acceptance rates and increasingly high tuition costs, has transformed into an environment reminiscent of corporate professionalism: stressful, cut-throat, and socially isolating. My readers might question why anyone in this position would dare join an organization like the Cal Band that demands 20-30 hours a week, is fully voluntary, and is physically and mentally exhausting. I spoke with James Marquez (Newman Class of 2017) just as his final semester at Cal and final season with the Cal Band were wrapping up, and the gratitude toward the Cal Band as a bestower of purpose was striking:

I probably wouldn’t have that much of an investment in the affairs of the University and actually caring about how things are. The idea of serving something bigger than yourself, almost—that’s the first charge, too. There is a greater purpose beyond us. As a whole, each individual contributes to the bigger picture of it. . . It’s weird I can actually feel the sense of school pride, school spirit. I only really feel that when it’s [with] the Band. I don’t really feel that when doing school work or clubs or anything; that just doesn’t seem like it has a connection to the University at all. It’s just school. It’s just a club. It’s just research. But we’re doing it in the context where we have Cal songs playing, or wearing the uniform, you definitely feel like this is more formal. It’s so intangible but it’s there.

(James Marquez, interview with author, December 5, 2021)

For Marquez, performing with the Band has become more than an exercise in demonstrating one’s musical or visual proficiency. It has become more than a club to pass the time with close friends and acquaintances. The Cal Band, in its most idealistic state, becomes a calling to serve

the University itself and a conduit for offering one's service to the intangibility of the University's legacy and greater purpose. The next section of this chapter will explore how this idealistic view of the University of California Marching Band—and, specifically the nostalgic manifestations of this view—crystallizes into the rigid mandates of *tradition* and essentialist conceptualizations of the Band's identity.

Tradition: “Remember who you are and what you represent, for now you become a proud custodian of the California Spirit”

The Band commits itself to its legacy as a servant of the University through the reification and codification of traditions. In this section, I interrogate the common practice of college marching bands to perform tradition as a means of displaying their connectedness to the University's legacy. I posit that this *legacy* is what is being invoked by the “*California Spirit*.” Given this reading of the charge, it will be made clear why it is this charge which often gets deployed by Cal Band alumni in online forums as short-hand for disapproval of the Cal Band's current practices. This section documents my unfolding of the metaphoric *California Spirit* as a Derridean hauntological invocation; that is, one that inherently and infinitely makes reference to a precursory object that does not materially exist. In the sense that the *California Spirit* can never claim to fully represent something material, it is perpetually haunted by its attempt to do so. A hauntological framework colors nostalgia with reverent spirituality, transforming legacy into a metaphoric entity onto which individuals and cohorts of alumni then project their own interpretations. In detailing my interlocutors' interpretations and analyzing the usage in the context of conversations in the Cal Band Alumni Facebook group, we will witness the *California Spirit* splinter into as many definitions as the Band has alumni. Though the search for

a common definition may be a fool's errand, the process of doing so will illuminate shared themes which illustrate the mechanisms by which legacies built in an era of blatant exclusion on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and ability can reproduce harm along these lines of power nearly a century later.

My primary source material for this section draws from the physically distant yet intimately confrontational web of relations that the charge activates in the Cal Band Alumni Facebook group comments. Invocations of the charge to “remember who you are and what you represent” and gestures to the *California Spirit* often come in the midst of a contentious debate in the group. These phrases are not called upon to prompt discussion, but some alumni will invoke them as a way to close arguments—to moralistically point to the dogmatic text as a justification for whatever stance they hold. Through the usage as an admonition, this charge takes on a particularly serious connotation that challenges notions of frivolity and joyful commemoration that college cheer and “spirit” might typically evoke. Instead, the charge functions as a haunting specter which stirs nostalgic alumni's efforts to reclaim and restore the past. Jacques Derrida's notions of the specter and theories of hauntology enliven useful intersections with nostalgia theory in this attempt to track the elusivity of the *California Spirit*, the essence of this charge, and the interaction between the Cal Band's legacy, tradition, and identity. I draw on Sadeq Rahimi as my primary interpreter of Derrida in a recent monograph—*The Hauntology of Everyday Life*—that links up theories of philosophy, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and anthropology to provoke a pantemporal ontology of absence in which “the interface of the physical and the symbolic is where both meaning and ghosts are born” (Rahimi 2021: 6). As I will show in this section, the repeated summoning of the *California Spirit* in everyday conversations in the Facebook group unearths, exhumes, and revives an amorphous

specter which, precisely because it does not retain a fixed form and meaning, allows the summoner to project their own values and positionalities upon it.

Nostalgia, Hauntology, and the California Spirit

As this thesis turns toward questions of memory and nostalgia, it would be advantageous to rehearse again the theories of nostalgia relevant to this case. Firstly, nostalgia is a sentiment conjured through sensory experiences linking past and present (Seremetakis 1994). Secondly, nostalgia's orientation toward the past can take forms driven by restoration, reflection, and metamodernism (Boym 2001; Sayers 2020). Thirdly, nostalgia is often paradoxically reactionary and utopic in its attempts to reinvigorate the idealism of a previous time. It is discursively generative, albeit functionally unproductive, to ask if the nostalgic orients themselves toward the past as they remember it or toward the subjunctive future that could have been? But the *California Spirit*, after all, is not one specific memory of the past, nor a future-oriented ideology. Its status as a conceptual black box allows its defenders to project onto it a variety of memories and ideologies. Through a hauntological process of transforming a powerful yet intangible legacy into tangible traditions, the *California Spirit* exerts its own agency on the nostalgic subject, enacting a hierarchical structure of memory that is amenable to discipline according to power and privilege. This work requires a framework that appreciates the intensity of an object's absence and its accumulated affect over time.

The essence of the *California Spirit* gestures to hauntology for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, the very language of the Spirit points to the spirituality of embodying a tradition that spans generations—of being possessed by the duties bestowed by one's predecessors. Secondly, the full charge frames the *California Spirit* as something that is carried by Band members

enlisted as its caretakers, enacting a contract between the *California Spirit* and members of the Band as they undergo their initiation into the organization. This resonates with one of hauntology's core claims that all representations of *objet a*—the Lacanian object of desire—are inherently haunted by an *objet a* that can never be fully captured in its representations (Rahimi 2021). The *California Spirit*, the *objet a* in this case, can never fully manifest through the Band's actions and yet is never wholly extractable from its relationship to Band members as its vessels. The very essence of the *California Spirit* is derived from the call for Band members to evangelize it in perpetuity. Thirdly, the delivery of the charge—within the larger ritual of Silent Walk—embeds this contract in through the ventriloquy of Dan Cheatham (Cal Band Drum Major in 1957) and Benjamin Ide Wheeler (UC President from 1899 to 1919) as the authoritative voices for the Cal Band and the University of California, respectively. Delivering their words through my voice that evening, I willfully took part in a spiritual possession—accepting the haunting of the *California Spirit* and transmitting its otherworldly power to the Band members who stood before me. Fourthly, the echoes and afterlives of this charge in the Cal Band Alumni Facebook group—in spaces beyond the text and beyond the ritual—summon their own distorted and distressing specters of the *California Spirit*. This section will dwell longest on this last kind of invocation of the *California Spirit* because this is where the sharpest intergenerational conflicts arise and this is where the spirit feels most omnipresent. I will be analyzing two Cal Band Alumni Facebook group incidents through this hauntological lens: first, a debate about the sanctity of the uniform; and second, a debate about the sanctity of the pre-game performance.



Figure 1: Photo of Bob Warren (clarinet, Newman class of 1961) wearing the Big Ten style uniform during the Cal Band's annual trip to Los Angeles in 1962. Photo courtesy of Bob Warren, used with permission.

Invocation #1: The Sanctity of the Uniform

The marching uniform is quite literally the most material representation of the Cal Band's identity. As a *uniform*, it signals a shared identity between all members of the Band who wear and have worn it. Donning the uniform transforms oneself into a visual representation of all who have worn the uniform prior and transports oneself to memories of every instance this bodily sensation has been felt before. Wearing that thick wool coat, cinched at the waist by a cloth strap and a shiny metal buckle, connects the body to an archive of memory through the sensation of touch (Seremetakis 1994). Of course, the uniform, like the Band as a whole, has undergone phases of abrupt redesign and gradual evolution since the Band's beginnings. The Cal

Band's marching uniform changed a number of times through the 1940s and '50s as the Band disaffiliated with the ROTC and reorganized under the ASUC. The 1961 redesign, based on the style of bands from the Big Ten Conference, remains the prototype for all subsequent uniforms that the Band has adopted over the last 70 years (see Figure 1). The Band has replaced the physical uniforms once a decade due to general wear and tear, but every new iteration looked fairly similar to the iconic 1960s Big Ten style near and dear to alumni and Cal fans. Nearly every Cal Band alumnus alive today has worn a variation of this uniform. The experience of marching in these uniforms—shared between individuals and across generations—sets the stage for alumni outrage when the Cal Band stood in the stadium *without* the navy blue wool coats, without the white vest-like overlay, without the straps, the buckle, nor the shiny gold cape marked with a “C.”

During an afternoon football game on October 2nd, 2021, the Cal Band decided to forego the uniform jackets for the march up to the stadium and while they played in the stands. The weather was uncharacteristically hot and humid for the California Bay Area in October, and there was concern for members risking heat exhaustion—particularly those musicians who would be carrying 30 pound instruments on the march from the center of campus to the stadium at the top of the hill. When word of the temporary uniform change reached the Cal Band Alumni Facebook page, alumni quickly offered their criticism. Figure 2 shows two comment threads which clearly reveal this incongruity between alumni expectations and the Band's decision. It is no coincidence that these light admonitions are coupled with nostalgic sentiments, albeit self-aware ones. After all, nostalgia matures in these sensory interstices of past and present experience (Seremetakis 1994).



Figure 2: Alumni joke about the uniform jacket decision in two concurrent comment threads. Individual commenters are anonymized and labeled by light, dark, and gradient shades.

The uniform, itself an artifact representing material continuity between the 1960s and now, catalyzes alumni’s nostalgic response when it is suddenly altered without warning. Because the uniform is enshrined as a symbol of the Cal Band’s identity and continuity, wearing the uniform unaltered and unmodified becomes a sacred tradition that dutifully carries on the Band’s legacy. Not only do modifications to the uniform—even temporary ones—signal a shift in the Band’s culture away from a legacy of *grit* and *toughness*—which itself reveals the Band’s deeply held values as being derived from a particularly militaristic masculinity. This disruption seems to be interpreted by some alumni as a more serious threat to the sanctity of the uniform and the identity of the Cal Band.

The Band’s decision to forego the uniform jackets weighed the members’ comfort and safety against the continuity of the Band’s public-facing appearance and symbolic identity. Yet, rather than treating this decision as careful, complex, and informed by the particular circumstances of the day and the members’ health, some alumni critics in this thread wrote it off

as a disgrace to the principles of the Cal Band and a betrayal of the ethos of the *California Spirit* (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Alumni debate about the uniform jacket decision using symbolic and heated language. Individual commenters are anonymized and labeled by square, arrow, and elliptical shapes. These three commenters are not the same as those from Fig. 2.

The comments here take on a harsher tone than the previous figure, questioning the Band's commitment to its identity, its sense of spirit, and the worthiness of its legacy. These comments invoke the central charge of this section—to “remember who you are and what you represent”—shaming the Band's actions as disrespectful and not in accordance with the “old fashioned” values of a previous generation. By raising the specter of the *California Spirit*, the alumni critics go further than to simply inform the Band on the norm of *their* day nor offer suggestions for how to meet the challenges of *this* day. This invocation criticizes the current Band on the basis of a betrayal of its very core. As evidenced by rebuttals from more recently

graduated alumni in this thread, the *California Spirit's* invocation is not taken lightly nor is it taken as a universal given. Though the participation in the Band and its core rituals and traditions might be a shared experience, the cultural and interpersonal contexts of those experiences critically inform how the *California Spirit* is interpreted. Within a hauntological framework, the *California Spirit* is always referential and representative from its very inception and cannot be perfectly reproduced in these forms. Its resonance with particular individuals and cohorts within the Band and alumni is ghostly. In a similar fashion as religious spiritual practices, the *California Spirit* is channeled by traditions which honor the legacy of generations before the Band member and steeped in the cultural values of their own.

The conflation of the uniform with the *California Spirit* in this case study dutifully represents a certain generation and ethos of the Cal Band, but these criticisms miss the shift in what the *California Spirit* has come to mean in the younger generation's cultural context. The recent alumni in this exchange are naming the members' efforts and commitments to leadership and difficult decision-making as markers of the *California Spirit*. A month later, I spoke with one of these commenters, Ben Pridonoff (Newman Class of 2014), who provided more clarity and nuance about the exchange:

Even if you perceived it as something very symbolic, by questioning their *California Spirit*, you are kinda just spitting on all the other work that they do. To completely strip them of the respect they've earned is BS [bullshit], because there's so much going on that you don't know about. There should be some benefit of the doubt that you give them as a part of this institution that we all share and love. I think that could be one thing to bring up in that conversation. Maybe we try to lay off certain terms. But I don't like that as the final solution. I would want there to be a better cultural change in general where those sorts of comments wouldn't be made. . . Their feelings, their indignation, their thoughts are very much tied to their memories of Band. And the culture they lived in that doesn't exist anymore but was something they're very fond of. It's just so hard to make someone question their experience in an entity that they pledged themselves so wholeheartedly to.

(Ben Pridonoff, interview with author, October 24, 2021).

Thus, the Facebook group remains a complex space where memories are shared, reunions are planned, and conflicts are negotiated. Even the most distant living generations of the Band have more shared traditions than distinct ones—the Cal song repertoire has remained full and consistent with very few exceptions, for instance. Why should the temporary adjustment of one tradition raise any serious red flags about the Cal Band’s commitment to upholding its legacy and staying true to its identity?

Invocation #2: The Sanctity of the Performance

The aesthetic interruption of the Cal Band’s identity caused a stir among alumni in the online community, though this event pales in comparison to the commotion in the wake of a performative interruption that occurred at the end of the Pregame show multiple times throughout the 2021 football season. The Cal Band’s Pregame traditionally performs four consecutive “Cal songs” (songs in celebration of the University) followed by a patriotic hymn, “America the Beautiful,” and the U.S. national anthem, the “Star Spangled Banner,” which had been gradually worked into the pre-game ritual of all professional and collegiate sports games in the United States during the thirty year span that encompassed the two World Wars (Little 2018). Pregame had gone unperformed for the first few games of the 2021 football season due to concerns around maintaining physical distancing from the athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic. October 23, 2021 was the first time the Cal Band had been permitted to perform on the field since 2019. When the Cal Band reached the climactic end of the Pregame program and prepared to play the “Star Spangled Banner,” the stadium’s loudspeakers rang out with “Everyone is cordially invited to stand and join in singing our national anthem.” The Band played an opening chord to establish the key and began to play the anthem, echoing around the

California Memorial Stadium—named for and dedicated to Californians who lost their lives in World War I. The sound of two hundred musicians and thousands of voices was an overwhelming demonstration of United States patriotism, ritualized as the traditional conclusion of the Pregame and the segue into the face-off on the field that can itself be a representation of war, with all its strategy and physical violence. Enveloped in all these culturally thick signifiers, I watched the Band from the sideline. Yet, to my surprise, I saw perhaps a dozen Cal Band members kneeling—many who were not playing at all. Just as soon as the Pregame tradition was restored, it had also been ruptured.

The Cal Band Pregame show illustrates a tradition that Cal fans, students, alumni, athletes, and university employees have come to expect in the ritual of a college football game day. Pregame is certainly the most public-facing of all the traditions that a college band performs, but it is only one piece in a repertoire of dozens of rituals—big and small—that any band’s members are engaging with during their tenure in the organization. When Pregame, the Band’s longest standing public tradition, was kept off the field in 2020 and the first part of 2021, the alumni pages and forums buzzed with the anxiety that it may never return or may never be the same. With the small act of protest that these dozen members committed during that performance, those anxieties were proven true.

But Pregame has not always been performed exactly the same nor is it immune from changes or discrepancies on an ensemble or individual level. Cal Band members and alumni often frame Pregame as a self-contained, fully formed, and predetermined sequence of visual drill put to school songs beginning with the flow from the North Tunnel to the “Initial Wedge” and ending with the “Script Cal” and “Full Field Spread (see Figure 4). This particular configuration of sonic and visual elements that current Band members perform collectively as

“Pregame” has not always been so cohesively packaged. Though the musical repertoire of Pregame largely remains consistent from year to year, there have been contentious additions, removals, and changes often dictated by time restrictions that are par for the course as the college game day experience becomes increasingly professionalized and shaped by athletics marketing departments and television broadcasters. Furthermore, each performance is a performance of coordination between the Band’s individual members and is therefore subject to participatory discrepancies, whether intentional or not (Keil 1987). Lizz Campos Frost, the youngest of a Cal Band family legacy, and Cal Band Alumni Association president from 2017-2021, asserts that Pregame is “the essential Cal Band experience” but pushes back against notions of its fixedness, acknowledging and celebrating that “every Pregame is different because it’s [being performed] in different circumstances with different people” (Lizz Campos Frost, interview with author, February 25, 2022). Even missed entrances and hat drops, which are internally characterized as disruptions caused by individual error, become part of a given *performance of* Pregame—not as a deviation from the norm but as an essential element of the live performance event.



Figure 4: Photos of the “Script Cal” (top) and “Full Field Spread” (bottom) on October 22, 2022 from the East and West (respectively) press boxes in California Memorial Stadium. A year after the initial kneeling incident, some members still chose to kneel during the anthem (see 10, 25, and 30 yard lines on the left side of the bottom photo). Photos courtesy of the University of California Band, used with permission.

Returning to the case study at hand, the Band symbolically restored Pregame to its rightful place on the field, christening it with Cal songs and the grand conclusion of the national anthem. The kneeling members were active participants in the entirety of this performance, from

the first step off to the final break of attention, even if they had chosen to perform one part of it differently than the norm. The alumni Facebook group lit up with commentary during and after the performance, first with celebration that Pregame was back on the field and then with stark criticism because of the kneeling. Alumni opinions on the matter were heterogeneous, but a common sentiment that flooded the comment section of this thread was that “*this would never have happened when I was in Band.*” Two alumni (anonymized as A1 and A2) were especially vocal in this thread.

A1: I support athletes kneeling during the national anthem. But Cal Bandsmen DURING performance? . . .

A2: It’s each Bandsman’s responsibility to enhance the ensemble performance. They should not be allowed to take deliberate actions, e.g., kneeling in formation, that detract from the performance. . . During Pregame, Bandsmen are active participants in a show for the benefit of the fans. . . If a Bandsman cannot in good conscience perform the Anthem, then they should not be in the Wedge to begin with.

(Facebook comments, October 26, 2021)

In the extended versions of the comments and the subsequent discourse between the two alumni, they voice their support of *athletes* who choose to kneel during the anthem in protest, yet they both adamantly criticize members of the Band for performing the same act. What these comments make clear is that their loyalty to the sanctity of Pregame as a cohesive tradition trumps whatever liberal politics they might otherwise claim to subscribe to.

The frameworks of nostalgia and hauntology illuminate the mechanisms behind the heightened defensiveness among these alumni who were members of the Band in the 1970s and 1980s. The driving force demanding that the kneeling members be reprimanded and the Pregame tradition is spurred by “the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition” (Boym 2001:44-45). The nostalgic fear that one’s own experience will become

irretrievably lost if the community does not properly manage and maintain its traditions is ever-present in these communications. The specter of the *California Spirit* looms here too. One alumni commenter expresses that “The Band’s uniformity trumps individuality. *Remember who you are and what you represent.* The collective is more important than the individual” [italics my own]. This alumnus, who was also active in the uniform debate a month prior, invokes this charge again for the sake of restoring uniformity. For this individual, the *California Spirit* and the call to *remember who you are and what you represent* has accrued a meaning far beyond a commitment to school spirit and personal integrity. As a merely representational concept, we find this dangerous slippage between the *California Spirit* and an argument against individual freedoms. Within an online Cal Band alumni community that spans generations with vastly different positionalities and politics, the conditions are ripe to exacerbate potential harm at the intersection of nostalgia (the affect of one’s vivid personal memories) and a hauntological specter (a speculative projection of perceived cultural norms and values). This is especially true in this case, where alumni publicly shame the Band leadership for allowing such an “overindulgence of the individual” and make distasteful jokes about “pantsing” as punishment. In the wake of the peak COVID-19 football seasons (2020 and 2021), while many alumni lamented the perceived loss of traditions and values supposedly evidenced by this performative disruption, other alumni and current members of the Band whom I’ve spoken with celebrated the opportunity for a much-needed cultural reset.

James Marquez completed his last season with the Band at the end of 2021, mourning the 2020 hiatus and yet declared his appreciation for the pause which “allowed [the Band] to make more radical changes” that more faithfully represent this generation’s values. When asked to speak on the Facebook comments about the kneeling conflict, Marquez says:

[They are always] saying “when I was in Band,” but that was a different Band. Cal Band was still Cal Band but it was very different. . . We’re supposed to meet and surpass the standards set by our predecessors, but if we’re trying to make things better, that still counts as surpassing standards. If the standards were low, why not raise them and make things better? What’s wrong with making people feel better about doing Band?

(James Marquez, interview with author, December 5, 2021)

It is clear that J acknowledges the standards of an earlier generation of the Band, but he does not regard them as deserving of unmediated transfer nor does he let them haunt his every judgment. He instead negotiates for a model that works to reform traditions and repair the past. It isn’t that J doesn’t remember or is indignant about the pre-COVID Cal Band he joined in 2017—in fact, he often uses it as a reference point for the impact it left on him, for all the exciting new experiences he had, for all its flaws. Even traditions as grandiose as Pregame change; it isn’t shameful to mourn those changes, but it isn’t justified to shame those who changed it.

Identity: “Carry the California Spirit with you always, and impart it to others”

The histories and anecdotes framed over the arc of this chapter narrate how the Cal Band’s identity coalesces in two parallel phases: 1) through commemorations of its symbolic legacy as a servant of the University, and 2) through interpretations of traditions which communicate the intersection of a personal nostalgic impulse and a looming hauntological mandate. The exploration of these historical and contemporary moments via the archive, live participants, and online spaces illustrates the power of an institutional legacy to leave structural impacts on how the Band operates and cultural imprints on how its stakeholders discourse. Cal alumni at a special reunion event overseas will expect Band members to know the words to every Cal song. The Chancellor will expect the Band to serve as their ally in a campus-wide political conflict. Generations of Band alumni will expect every performing member of the Band

to wear their full uniform and to stand and play the national anthem against the judgment of their own physical and political comfort. To bear the identity of the Cal Band—or, to wear the identity of the Cal Band—through the donning of the uniform, the performance of the songs, and the movement of the high step marching style is to take on the responsibility of performing a Cal Band-ness that will always be haunted by that which is out of the member’s control and awareness.

The University of California’s and the Cal Band’s institutional and social power work to commemorate its grand symbolic legacy by performing traditions which connect experiences across the massive span of time that the legacy covers. The strikingly paranoid urge to protect this legacy and these traditions is preservationist at its core. Nostalgia emerges as a call to excavate the site of memory and recover and reflect upon experience. The Cal Band charges highlighted in this chapter not only suggest nostalgic interpretations—they mandate it. The Band, reborn in the image of white, middle class, military men, performs and evangelizes this image at the behest of the institution on a macro symbolic level and the individuals who perpetuate it on a micro interpersonal level. In Chapter 2, this thesis will turn to explore how this identity maps itself onto the day-to-day operations of the Band. The inherited legacy and its traditions that constitute the Cal Band’s identity misrepresent the current population of the Band, which is diverse along identities of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability. Chapter 2 asks how these misrepresented individuals craft alternative ways of belonging and build out the space for a more equitable college marching band.

Chapter 2: Performing and Reforming Merit

The previous chapter identified the formative scenes that construct the Cal Band's institutional legacy and explored the ways in which this legacy is commemorated through tradition and synthesized into identity. This chapter picks up the conversation by engaging with the students' response to the system produced by this mechanism. An organizational culture built amid the cultural aftershocks of World War II and built by the white male veterans who served, has not been historically welcoming to diverse participants. The same can be said of the modern American research university, which is rooted in privileges of access and sheltered by an appeal to meritocracy. This chapter critiques the framing of the Cal Band's identity through the lens of merit, calling into question standards of evaluation which prioritize and praise an all-or-nothing approach to participation in the Band. In the university as well as Western musical ensembles such as the marching band, symphonic band, or orchestra, merit has historically rewarded white, male, able-bodied, upper-middle class members while isolating people of color, women, queer students, disabled students, fat students, and working students who have been less represented in leadership and barred systematically or excluded socially from participating due to their otherness.

This chapter follows the Band's parallel trajectories of performing and reforming merit. While the aesthetic demands of marching bands require a minimum level of rehearsal commitment and consistency across its members to achieve a cohesive visual and musical performance, there often lacks the will to acknowledge, celebrate, or think creatively about performing with difference. In practice, this means gatekeeping participation because a member has a health condition that would make it difficult to march up to the stadium and complete two full field shows during a football game; or because they have not been able to practice their

instrument before the audition because they cannot afford the cost of owning one themselves; or because the uniforms are not designed to fit bodies of diverse shapes and sizes. This chapter does not dwell on hypothetical marginalizations and subjugations of the Other by a symbolic white male frame. It instead attends to specific events which habitually activated this white male frame and inflicted real and lasting harm on those who could not mold themselves to the model Cal Bandsman.

Performing Merit: “Perform to the best of your ability at all times”

Being a Cal Band member in good standing has thus far been rendered as an act of character and commitment to what Cal Band represents. The charge to “perform to the best of your ability at all times” is the only one which explicitly addresses elements of performance. This ratio emphasizes the role of the Cal Band as more than a performing ensemble, but as an institution, a persona, or even an ideology. When these charges are first spoken at the Silent Walk ritual, this charge is delivered at the very end of the evening. This order suggests that one must learn to embody the *character* of a Cal Band member before they can truly *perform* as one, and yet it is only after officially performing in full uniform with the Band that new members are brought into the fold and ceremonially transitioned from recruits to “Newmen” (the rank given to first year members). The demanding early semester schedule strings together the Fall Training Program (three 12+ hour rehearsal days to learn the fundamentals of Cal Band’s marching and music and audition for a spot), a week to learn the music and drill for a Pregame and a Halftime show, and a 12 hour game day to rehearse and perform them both on top of the chaos of playing in the stands of the home football game. This schedule alone sets up a trial of the recruit’s physical, mental, and emotional endurance over the course of the few hectic weeks. Performing

“to the best of your ability” already assumes a certain level of ability, as the weeks preceding Silent Walk decidedly ensure. What exclusions does “the best of your ability” enforce when you are not the able-bodied subject typified by the fitness of the military veterans in the 1940s and 50s Cal Band? What does “the best of your ability” come to mean when the conditions of performance are actively disabling, like breathing in polluted air from nearby wildfire smoke or being surrounded by crowds of unmasked football fans during the ongoing threat of COVID-19?

This section reveals the contradictions embedded in an organizational culture that has systematically excluded potential members on the basis of ability. I necessarily foreground discourses of disability studies here to assert that we critique ableist structures and norms that marginalize individuals under the guise of meritocracy. This approach runs counter to a pedagogical paradigm often referred to as deficit thinking, which “ignores systemic influences that shape disparities in social and educational outcomes” (Patton Davis and Museus 2019). There are two key pillars of deficit thinking crucial to this study: 1) deficit thinking is a symptom of larger ideologies of classist, racist, and ableist oppression; and 2) deficit thinking is pervasive and implicit, reinforced through the repetition and circulation of cultural values and language which accentuate an individual’s characteristics as justification for poor outcomes (Patton Davis and Museus 2019).¹⁰ The impacts of deficit thinking in college marching bands—which are social communities as much as they are performing ensembles—function at the individual and group level. At the individual level, recruits who don’t make the cut miss out on a community of peers with like interests and an opportunity to contribute and improve their musical skills. And, at the group level, students learn what kinds of otherness are or are not

¹⁰ A note on deficit thinking: deficit models in education are relevant to multiple axes of power and modes of oppression along spectra of class, race, gender, sexuality, and ability. This chapter mainly focuses on deficit thinking as it pertains to students’ ability, but it is important to recognize that deficit thinking along these other axes is also prevalent in the Cal Band’s culture now and historically. It is also important to recognize that the construction and systemic oppression of these identities are wrapped up in one another and affect individuals multiply.

welcome and worthy of being included. To further a Maslowian argument that belonging needs to be prioritized as a genuine human need, disability advocate Norman Kunc (1992) writes:

The fundamental principle of inclusive education is the valuing of diversity within the human community. . . .When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become "normal" in order to contribute to the world. Instead, we search for and nourish the gifts that are inherent in all people. We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging.

An inclusive, needs-based approach to college band is not merely idealistic—it is necessary. If being a member of the Cal Band is akin to being representative of the University that would, according to the vision in the State Constitution, “contribute even more than California’s gold to the glory and happiness of advancing generations,” then it shouldn’t be a radical act to reevaluate the Band’s performance priorities according to the needs of this generation of Cal students (“About Berkeley”).

Deficit vs. Needs-based Paradigms in Context: The Uniform

I now return to the discourses provoked by the uniform fiasco detailed in the first chapter. The analysis this time around will shift our frame away from the judgments of the critics and toward the perspective of the members’ actual bodily needs. The alumni commenters in the Facebook group slung criticism that reproduces deficit thinking which, in a disability studies framework, characterizes the individual or group’s physical and/or mental difference as inherent lack when held up against an able-bodied, neurotypical model (Dinishak 2016). In an attempt to sidestep claims that these alumni critics are targeting the *members* of the Cal Band, they assert that their commentary was “a reaction to uniform policy” and expression of “disappointment at what previous generations see as a valued tradition” (Facebook comments, October 26, 2021).

Cloaking deficit thinking in the language of impersonal policy and cultural values firmly locates this discourse as a deficit paradigm. After all, this discussion does in fact convey to members that they believe the Band's decision is deficient in "*California Spirit*." When held up to alumni's proud accounts of enduring hot weather in full uniform no matter what, the choice to center member's needs is framed as a loss and a shame. By centering a rigid standard of performance rather than the needs of the members, the argument implied in this exchange is that these alumni are demanding that the Band perform *beyond* the best of their ability. They are mourning the loss of a culture that rewards a grit ideology of pushing oneself to the brink, physically and mentally (Gorski 2016). Amidst a current climate reality in which seasonal high temperatures are breaking historic records and extreme weather conditions are more common, disregarding safety precautions would not only be uncomfortable for members; it could quite possibly lead to serious health complications or death (Khatana 2022).

Deficit vs. Needs-based Paradigms in Context: Alumni Band Day

One annual alumni event sheds light on alumni's lived contradictions between ableism and disability and even paves a way forward for alumni to nurture a more needs-based approach to the activity. That event is Alumni Band Day, during which alumni return to the stadium to perform alongside the current Band in the stands throughout the game and on the field during halftime. Much like university homecomings, Alumni Band Day deeply engages with an economy of nostalgia, resurfacing the memories from one's own college band experience through the sights, sounds, movement, and energy of a college football gameday. Participating alumni can choose to involve themselves at different levels of commitment throughout the day according to a number of self-evaluated needs, including physical mobility, family obligations,

work conflicts, chronic illnesses, and more. Some alumni choose to commit only to the hour and a half post-game reception, while others spend the full 16 hour day rehearsing, volunteering, and performing. This latter cohort of alumni spends their Saturday mirroring the rehearsal and performance schedule of the Cal Band, including the exhausting march up the hill from Sather Gate to Memorial Stadium and the halftime performance marching on the field. Alumni Band Day offers an opportunity to recall and relive old memories through the reenactment of embodied traditions. The magic of this reenactment works beyond the register of the individual, though. Alumni Band Day forges bonds between all of its participants, building a cross-generational community. By tapping into one's embodied memories and performing them collectively in this way, Alumni Band Day bridges the gap between generations through a kind of *transtemporal* variant of William McNeill's *muscular bonding* which names the powerful affective connections built through a common physical experience (1995).

Not only do these reenactment rituals spark new relationships between individuals; they construct a newly configured network of relations between members of this alumni community and the traditions they perform. At Alumni Band Day, my fellow Alumni Band members and I perform many of the same traditions we did when we were in the Cal Band, but there is no serious expectation that we will sound as good nor look as clean as the Cal Band. Try as we might, aging bodies struggle with the mobility demanded by the Cal Band's high step marching style, the mental sharpness required to learn and memorize a 10 minute show, and the physical endurance needed to play wind and percussion instruments all day. It is under these circumstances that alumni form new relationships to embodied traditions and may be called to recognize how ability gets privileged in the Cal Band—and marching bands in general. Yet, disabled alumni are never turned away from participating because of their disability. The phrase

“*adapt and perform*” floats through the air during the Alumni Band Day rehearsal every year, mobilizing an ethos of creative modification. This attitude shines through in trumpet alumnus Kiran Permaul’s conception of the *California Spirit* as the “willingness to persevere.” This resilience is not a coincidentally common asset among these individuals, however. It is important to recognize resilience as a shared, communal, interactional property—as something learned and contextual (Cover 2016).

Bearing this new, though likely unnamed, relationship to their peers’ and their own disabilities in mind, what prevents Cal Band alumni from explicitly and intentionally approaching the Cal Band with a more flexible, empathetic, needs-based paradigm as well? Disability, after all, is a normal part of human life and will come to affect us all as we age, face health emergencies and accidents, and experience the ramifications of being temporarily or permanently disabled in this world (Howell 2021). It is one thing to recognize disability injustice as something that affects Others and another thing to acknowledge the ways in which it affects us all, whether or not we choose to identify as disabled (Masters 2020). To reframe Cal Band’s commitment to “perform to the best of your ability at all times” as a commitment based on members’ needs would mean a radical rehaul of the Band’s audition and performance expectations and would require leadership at the student and alumni levels who are dedicated to seeing this reform through and supporting it with all their weight.

Reforming Merit: “Meet and surpass the standards set by your predecessors”

Systemic cultural change in an institution does not happen automatically nor does it happen overnight. Cultural change may require structural pressure, grassroots co-conspirators, bold leadership, or a crafty combination of these forces. After all, the Cal Band’s iconic high

stepping marching style was only adopted in the 1950s in response to external criticism and through direct action from a collective of members who wanted to refine its identity on the field. The Cal Band only began admitting women members in 1973 in response to external pressure from the University after the Title IX legislation went into effect, yet it took years of internal cultural work and intentional recruiting efforts before the Cal Band's membership would reflect the gender demographics of the University. Especially in a college organization where turnover is relatively quick (i.e. the leadership positions are elected anew every year and the Band's participation fluctuates with the cultural shifts of student priorities at the University), it is only through generations of care and dedication to the Cal Band's particular kind of craftsmanship that the Band commits to maintaining its identity and bettering its outcomes. This is the essence of "meet[ing] and surpass[ing] the standards set by your predecessors." This charge channels nostalgic tendencies to reflect on the past as its own antidote, demanding that the Band push past the inclination to rest on the laurels of previous generations and instead proactively grow the organization beyond its legacy.

Much of the criticism that circulates among alumni relies on an assumption that the alumnus's experience was the *right* one and that subsequent versions are somehow lesser or diluted. Critics of this kind imply that the current Band is not surpassing let alone meeting the predecessors' standards. This perspective frames aesthetic performance and imitative precision as the standard with which to compare the current Band to that of a previous generation. By prioritizing aesthetic execution as the sole and primary standard of excellence, the alumni reify a culture of impersonal meritocracy. The actions of the Band's leadership and membership during the 2021 season suggest a reformist approach to this meritocratic culture, balancing the expectation to uphold *tradition* and steward the *California Spirit* against the imperative to

reorient the Band's customs to equitably serve a diverse membership in a campus climate drastically different from that of prior generations.¹¹ When choosing to perform in the stands without uniform jackets, the reformist views the decision to sacrifice its aesthetic integrity is worth prioritizing members' physical needs. The loss of aesthetic uniformity due to members kneeling on the field becomes a moot point when weighed against members' will to politically protest the national anthem and its representations of civil hypocrisy and racial oppression. James Marquez, the youngest of my alumni interlocutors, declares his approval of these cultural shifts to me as his final season in the Band was coming to a close:

We're trying to make the Band a better place for everyone. We know how the past was, and if we're charged to make things better, then we have to make the culture changes and make the accommodations that we need to make sure that experience is there for everybody.

(James Marquez, interview with author, December 5, 2021)

I made it clear that there is a strong will to reform the Band's culture to be more equitable for its racialized, disabled, first generation, and working class members, especially as these students bear the brunt of the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the moral obligation to respond to the ongoing nationwide racial reckoning of the Black Lives Matter movement. He also reminded me the Band's decisions are not made monolithically but are debated and carried out by a robust democracy and seasoned student leadership structure.

Craft as Care

Through all the changes the Band has deliberated over, the structure of the Band as a student-driven organization remains steadfast. This commitment to student leadership,

¹¹ Campus climate, here, refers to higher education researchers' attention to complex multidimensional attitudes, structures, behaviors, and norms with regard to race, ethnicity, and diversity; "climate" expansively attends to these elements both within the university and in surrounding communities and networks. Museum, Ledesma, and Parker. 2015.

collaboration, and hands-on creativity is at the core of the Cal Band's identity. The Cal Band asks a lot of its members and leadership, yet does not reward students with course credit nor financial compensation. Students often set aside upwards of twenty hours of volunteer labor per week rehearsing, performing, teaching, "charting" the positions for the field shows, arranging music, etc. This labor is fully organized and carried out by the students. The skills to perform this labor are taught and shared by the students. The "final products" so to speak are snapshot showcases of student craftsmanship learned, practiced, and passed down within the Cal Band. This section theorizes the Band's craft—a commitment to student leadership and hands-on volunteerism—as an expression of care between and for its members that reframes merit as rewarding process rather than product.

Craft calls to mind the handiwork of material objects, but it is an apt framework for the Band's particular kind of volunteerism. As Glenn Adamson remarks in his monograph about craft in American history, "craft has an irreducible connection to human time, effort, and skill" (2021: 296). Students offer their labor not solely to fill the gaps left by the Band's spotty infrastructure of paid expertise (though the Director holding the only one paid position can be a limiting factor for some of the Band's bureaucratic needs). Student craftsmanship produces some impressive shows and musical arrangements, but it also generates opportunities to kindle, teach, and develop skills and collaborative relationships that do not exist in other University contexts, where creative projects are often competitive and/or strictly evaluated by faculty. Cal Band craft labor is processually valuable, too, because it connects current members to the tradition they are stewarding (Adamson 2021: 167). For example, student arrangements are a norm that is celebrated and routinely practiced through triannual calls for arrangements, colloquially called "cuts." The schedule for football, basketball, and Cal Day cuts pinpoints three opportunities

throughout the year to submit arrangements for popular songs, hear these cuts played by a subset of the Band, and receive specific feedback from the heads of the Arranging Committee. This practice of collective craft necessarily generates new musical material with each iteration, but the process remains relatively consistent as new leaders for the Arranging Committee are drawn from its committee participants year after year. The analytic of craft highlights the socially situated transfer of skills in the Cal Band's leadership structure. *Craft* offers room for change; a capacity to stretch; opportunities to share skills, methods, and approaches to problem solving.

Perhaps as evidenced by my own soliloquizing on the topic, alumni do not reluctantly regard this feature of the Cal Band's organizational structure; they shout about it proudly from the rooftops. When striking up conversation with Cal Band alumni, the stories shared most excitedly and vividly are about what contributions someone made—musical arrangements, field show charts, hand-painted banners, etc.:

[Arranging for the Band] is special and is a unique thing that doesn't exist a lot, being a creative thing and not just a work thing.

(Ben Pridonoff, former arranger, interview with author, October 24, 2021)

So I think it's the art of everyone coming together and building something from scratch, and being proud of that and enjoying that. I think that's what Cal Band is. It's all about enjoying it or the product that you've come together to create for yourselves. . . . I do think it's really about giving students a chance to create and perform something that they own.

(Ross Greer, former and current arranger, interview with author, February 22, 2022)

And I was talking to [a fellow percussionist] about it too, because we just were talking about arranging in general and he said kinda the same reasons about how much thought and effort was put into working out the arrangement.

(James Marquez, former arranger, interview with author, December 5 2021)

Craft inhabits an expression of care for these alumni—care for the arrangement, but also care for fellow collaborators and care for a creative process that stands separate from work accountable to capitalism.

This extends to aspects of the Band’s culture beyond the Arranging Committee. The core identity as a student-run organization sheds new light on the meaning of Cal Band’s legacy and tradition. What connects members across generations is more than the reenactment of traditions and rituals like Pregame. The linking thread is that “people *aren’t* just members. People are on committees. People are doing things here and there. We don’t have a staff doing things for us. We’re doing all of our stuff for us. It gives so much to all the members of the Band—more than just being a member would” (James Marquez, interview with author, December 5 2021). Every contribution as a member of this community takes on the symbolic effect of performing mutual aid to other members. Engaging with difficult decisions that challenge the Band’s cultural norms (such as foregoing the uniform jackets or kneeling during the national anthem) does more than performing progressive values; instead this exhibits an act of care for the most vulnerable members.

Acts of Care and Member Safety

Disability justice activist and scholar Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes “making space accessible is an act of love, not of obligation” (2018). The Cal Band’s recent initiatives to more emphatically prioritize member health extend beyond the threat of defunding, institutional disassembly, or public ridicule. These are acts of love and care for the members. Learning from the mistakes of seasons prior, when the Band rehearsed and performed in smoky conditions from California wildfires that have been shown to leave lasting disabling damage to climate survivors’ brain function (Grennan et. al 2023). The Band’s leadership now more actively monitors the air quality and cancels activities accordingly. During the 2021 and 2022 seasons, the Band prioritized its members’ health and safety during outbreaks of COVID-19 on

the campus, reducing transmission risk by adapting its rehearsal schedule to maximize outdoor rehearsal time and limit time spent in the cramped basement locker room and rehearsal room.

The 2022 season saw further changes institutionalized that would address the needs of the Band members' health and safety through the installation of new roles dedicated to providing members with emotional support, accommodations, and peace of mind. These roles are directed by student members and filled by alumni volunteers at home football games. During these games, alumni may be tasked with guarding the Band's personal belongings in the stands while members are on the field for the halftime show. The staffed stadium security have failed time and time again to protect the Band's section from encroachment by inebriated students and alumni passing through and stealing the Band's snacks, water, and other belongings on their way out. The role of a careful, committed squad of guardians was bestowed upon Band alumni who would then stand along the perimeter of the Band's seating section, verbally and physically preventing passersby from intruding.

This season also instituted an Accommodations Assistant (AA) who, like the Field Assistant (FA) and Emergency Field Assistant (EFA), would be responsible for aiding the Band during game day. These three roles are also filled by Cal Band alumni who tend to be graduates of the last few years and tend to live locally and visit regularly as fans in the stands when they're not volunteering. The FA is responsible for logistical tasks and physical labor; the EFA is responsible for medical assistance and transporting injured Band members if necessary; these positions have been built into the Band's operations for over a decade, shifting laborious tasks unto these volunteers to free up current members to participate in more of the gameday experience. The AA position, instated in 2022, is responsible for providing emotional and mental health support for members who have accommodation needs or those who have flare ups

or crises and would benefit from a calm, informed presence. The AA offers their full, undivided attention to these students as the FA and EFA offer their attention to their tasks, relieving the students of the full weight of dealing with mental health crises alone while enclosed by an intensely overwhelming environment. By explicitly providing the structure for students to get this kind of support within the activity's environment, students in need of this kind of support are shown that their needs are valid and their participation in the Band is valued.

The recent reforms, set in motion by the Band's leadership and supported by some select alumni, challenge the paradigm of deficit thinking. Participation in the Cal Band means more to these students and alumni than the Band's visual and musical output. By reframing participation as members' crafty contributions, student leadership, volunteer commitments, and diverse needs and ways of displaying their contributions, the Cal Band's culture trends toward crediting its members with a more equitable account of merit than some alumni onlookers have offered in recent years and in the primary source materials used for this thesis.

Conclusion: Sounding Institutional Memories and Nostalgia as Method

The cultural traditions, norms, and values that the University of California Marching Band has instilled in its alumni, fans, current members, and future generations have been contested and remain highly contestable despite the nostalgic will and long-standing practice of declaring otherwise. This thesis has explored the Cal Band's relationship with its legacy as a marching band built by and for white military servicemen and veterans that has historically served the University and the nation; its tradition of honoring that legacy through commitments to the illusive *California Spirit* colored by nostalgia and hauntological mandates; and its resulting identity as an institution wrapped up in the ethos of a public land-grant university that,

despite its spoken commitments to serving the diverse population of California equitably, still centers perspectives of whiteness, maleness, the non-disabled, and the upper class. The nexus of relations privileged here further extends to how the Band and its alumni have held up meritocracy as one of its governing ideologies. When taking into account the demographics of the alumni active in the most critical circles (a white male majority), the deployment of meritocratic principles to bolster alumni criticism against a Band population that is abundantly and multiply more diverse reinscribes patterns of marginalization and oppression. These patterns are not new to this or any university, despite the University of California's proud claim to the leftist civil rights and free speech movements that thrived on its campus throughout the 20th century. These patterns are also not new to the broader politics of the state of California, despite its identity as fertile ground for liberal social politics and establishment Democrats.

These ways in which the Cal Band *does* reflect and represent the University, California, and the nation, are perhaps not ones anyone should seek to honor. The acts of surveillance, discipline, and policing habituated by some alumni on the Cal Band Alumni Facebook page cannot be considered faithful to the values of the institution when they so overtly attack its very core and lifeblood—the students. The essence of college marching bands is not kept alive by the strict guarding of its legacy, traditions, and identity, nor its dependence on meritocracy to produce hierarchies of value among its members. Surely no pedagogical institution can claim this as its primary goal when doing so would exclude, marginalize, and oppress current and future members of the organization. The essence of these groups and the reason why participants remain so invested years after they have left is the sense of belonging to a community that values craft and care, and rewards the energy put into nurturing those values in oneself and others. Nostalgia's self-preservationist thread simultaneously highlights one's most vivid feelings tied to

this sense of belonging while throwing up blinders that make it difficult to view other generations' experiences with the same reverence and admiration.

Yet, alumni of the Band are not categorically immune from complicating their nostalgic attitudes—otherwise, I would not have written this thesis nor remained in this community. I, like many of my interlocutors, have brushed up against the complexities of being nostalgic for moments and memories that were psychologically harmful in hindsight. In each of my conversations with fellow alumni, it became clear that many of my interlocutors shared the experience of moving between moments of fond reminiscence and introspective discomfort about traditions that exerted physical, mental, and emotional pressure on them while they were members in the program. It is easy to shy away from the shame of feeling nostalgic about these experiences, but I instead asked myself and my fellow alumni to lean in, using nostalgia as a method for unpacking its own effect on ourselves and the Cal Band's cultural norms. Returning to Sayers's notion of *metamodern nostalgia* in this context—as a process that navigates between the desire to reclaim and reject the past—nostalgic ways of processing our memories and relating to one another need not always fall into the traps of regressive, reactionary politics. We can feel nostalgic for something *and* complicate that sentiment. Rather than choosing to tuck these complex nostalgic memories away or reject them outright, we lingered in the moments of metamodern nostalgia that complicate the binary narratives that the past can *only* be either irretrievably terrible or the purest ideal.

Nostalgia is more than an affliction or an analytic framework—we can use it as a method. Nostalgia as method requires a willingness to collectively process and negotiate the impulses of our affective memory. Nostalgia allows us to empathize with past versions of ourselves and our communities, providing an opportunity to renegotiate our relationships to those memories to

construct a better, more equitable way forward. Nostalgia as method is effective introspectively as well as interpersonally. In a space like the Cal Band Alumni Facebook group and other similar congregations of Cal Band nostalgics, recalled memories do not go unaddressed—commenter after commenter adds their own spin or anecdote to the pile. This collection takes on the shape of a collective negotiation of memory in which each contributor has the opportunity to retrieve and share their personal memory and each contributor likewise has the opportunity to reflect on that memory and potentially redress the harm conjured by that reflection.

In a comment thread on the day following the kneeling incident, an alumnus recalls an instance in 1977 when members were similarly asked to choose between performing with the Band and their political beliefs.:

A1: I will never forget marching in full uniform to stand and play for Prince Charles in front of California Hall. We found ourselves surrounded by very loud but otherwise well behaved anti-apartheid protestors [sic] whom we tried to play over. I was torn but I played on even though my sympathies were with the protesters. Not sure if I would kneel or not if I were in the band today but it is an interesting dilemma.

A2: I was just thinking of the same performance. The option at the time was not to participate. That was the deal. It was an honor to represent the university.

A3: Thanks for bringing that event back to memory! Today, I would kneel. It's an honor to represent the University – in either condonement, or protest.

(Facebook comments, 27 October 2021)

These comments reveal the ways in which alumni mobilize their personal nostalgia as a method for renegotiation—as a metamodern process that conversationally navigates between the desire to reclaim and reject the values they held as members of the Cal Band. When reframing this shared memory in today's political context, A1 voices their reflective indecision around upholding tradition, A2 claims this memory as vindication of tradition as it once was, and A3 fully redefines what it would mean to carry forth the intended values of the tradition today. Nostalgia

wields the most power when mobilizing the collective; it constructs a portal that compels us to revisit our past, but we need not be held captive by the values and decisions of our younger selves. The nostalgic impulse can instead be a prompt for personal and community reflection around which we might organize opportunities to renegotiate that which has caused and has the potential to cause harm.

This work is invested in sounding institutional memories that complicate and challenge the prevailing narratives of the university and the state. College marching bands play a particular role in sounding these institutional memories through and for their members, often mirroring these larger institutions by offering their own resources and communities for students to learn particular musical and social skills. What this work also reveals is that there remains a tension between the boon of fostering these communities and the bane of reproducing social hierarchies and power dynamics which allow abuse within these spaces. Though this study argues for a reframing of nostalgia as a method that works through collective memories with both compassion and criticism, the political valence of this method cannot materialize in isolation. It is precisely the perspectives of feminism, critical race theory, postcolonialism, and disability studies that inform the alumni vanguard who imbue this reframe with viability. Without these perspectives, the central argument of this thesis would hold no water. Without alumni friends and colleagues who commit themselves to voicing these perspectives, I could not sincerely put my faith into the future of the Cal Band Alumni Association.

Further investigations into the culture of and around college marching bands could take many forms. With specific attention to the gendered and racial dynamics of the Cal Band and its alumni, a second and third pass at these materials could more clearly illuminate the ways in which white cismen continue to dominate the discourse among alumni despite trends in the

Band's demographics reflecting an increase in participation and leadership by women, gender non-conforming individuals, and people of color—and at the intersections of those identities. Another trajectory might also analyze the Band's musical repertoire and the curatory process of deciding what stays, goes, and gets played. An approach to the repertoire is an approach to the Band's musical tradition and politics, revealing yet another angle to the institutional memories of the Cal Band. I hope for this thesis to provide one possible entry point for the multidimensional and interdisciplinary research that remains to be explored on this topic.

This thesis provides a critical documentation of the politics of memory and tradition in an organization conscripted to protect and project memory and tradition. At a predominantly white institution (PWI) chartered in the 19th century—such as our case study in this thesis—the task of the marching band to protect the university's and the band's legacy inevitably comes into tension with the professed mission of public universities in the 21st century to provide a holistic education and opportunity for social mobility at a reasonable cost for all state residents regardless of race, gender, ability, or class background. When we consider the social tensions built into the institutional fabric of the marching band, the university, and the state, perhaps a method of critical nostalgia offers one approach to the haunting histories of the ensembles and ideologies that are foundational to so many musical and non-musical educational trajectories in the United States.

Appendix

The document that follows is the first five pages of the Songbook “Songs of the University of California.” The document provides the reader with the written charges, a preface describing the nature and use of the Songbook, and a table of contents. This excerpt of the Songbook is reproduced from the 2014 publication and is used with permission from the University of California Band.

SONGS
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BAND
2014

Songs of the University of California

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BAND
2014

The University of California Band Charges:

1. Serve the University with all of your heart.
2. Remember who you are and what you represent, for now you become a proud custodian of the California Spirit.
3. Meet and surpass the standards set by your predecessors.
4. Carry the California Spirit with you always, and impart it to others.
5. Perform to the best of your ability at all times.



The 2014 edition of the Songs of the University of California was produced exclusively for members of the University of California Band. Sources for this publication include the Songs of California, published in 1944 by the California Alumni Association, as well as all previous editions of this Songbook. Many of the songs contained within these pages are trademarks of the University of California, Berkeley. Reproduction of this booklet without the permission of the University of California Band is strictly prohibited.

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Songs of the University of California

A Great Sense of Pride...

Since its inception in 1868, the University of California has produced a repertoire of songs unmatched in volume or variety by any other academic institution in the country. These songs have spanned well over a century of California history, surviving the dramatic changes that have occurred at the University and in the world during those years.

Few universities can claim Cal's distinction for having one of the largest and most diverse collections of school songs. It is the intangible qualities of music, spirit, and love of the University that gives Cal songs their importance today. As the chief custodian of these songs, the Cal Band has played a key role in keeping the spirit of these songs alive. Consequently, members of the Cal Band have a great sense of pride in their knowledge of the University and its songs.

Cal Songs are sung in many different settings: on the field, at alumni gatherings, during meals, and even at Band rehearsals. Have this book with you always, for you never know when you may hear the familiar cry of.... "Knock, Knock!"

The Songs of the University of California was brought to you by the

2014 Public Relations Committee

Songs of the University of California

Table of Contents

PREGAME

The North Tunnel Yell.....	5
Big C	5
Sons of California.....	7
California Triumph.....	8
Fight for California.....	9
America the Beautiful	10
Star Spangled Banner	10

POST GAME

All Hail.....	11
Palms of Victory	12
Lights Out March	13
California Marching Song.....	14
One More River	15
By the Old Pacific's Rolling Waters.....	16

RIVALS

Mighty Oregon	17
Fight On	17
Sons of Berkeley.....	18
High Above.....	18
Oskee Wow Wow.....	19
Bow Down to Washington	20
Fight 'Em.....	21
Gold & Blue.....	22

Songs of the University of California

CALIFORNIA SPIRIT

The Axe Yell	23
Cal Band March.....	23
California Drinking Song.....	24
California Victory Song.....	26
California We're for You.....	27
Golden Bear	27
Hail to California	30
Lady in Red.....	31
Make Way for the Bear	31
The Oski Yell.....	32
March On, California	33
Roll On.....	34
St. Anne's Hymn: University Hymn.....	34
Stanford Jonah.....	35
The Song of the Salvation Army.....	36
Titanic.....	37
Toast to California.....	39



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