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AMERICAN STUDIES IN SCANDINAVIA

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Alongside the freedom of expression and the freedom of information, academic freedom is one of the pillars of a modern democratic society. And scholar-run, open access, not-for-profit journals like *American Studies in Scandinavia*, as well as independent scholarly organizations like the Nordic Association for American Studies, are fundamental in promoting and ensuring academic freedom in the Nordic nations and beyond.

Simply put, academic freedom is the ability of those engaged in teaching and research in higher education to determine our own agendas independently of commercial or political influences, and to shape public debate through our teaching, research, and public dissemination, providing a sound and ever-growing knowledge base for society at large, ensuring a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints, and preserving a space for reflection and critique. The flipside of academic freedom is academic accountability; academic communities must establish and maintain their own autonomous means of ensuring that scholarly standards are met, and that teaching and research remain truth-seeking and not tendentious.

Thusly understood, academic freedom has recently been on the decline in both the US and, perhaps more surprisingly, the Nordic nations. The V-Dem Institute's Academic Freedom Index report for 2025 ranks Sweden fourth among the nations it surveys, but Denmark comes in at number 21, Norway at number 39, and Finland at number 45. The United States, by comparison,

ranks in at number 88.¹ A 2024 report on academic freedom by the Nordic trade unions representing academics in higher education found that academic freedom in the Nordics, once global leaders in independent education and research, was under pressure for a handful of related reasons. These included 1) diminished faculty and student involvement in governance due to a shift toward centralized models of university management; 2) external pressures as a result of funding dependence as researchers frequently find themselves adapting their research interests to the agendas of commercial or government funding bodies; 3) political and ideological influence that threatens researchers' and educators' ability to engage in independent analysis and critique; 4) the prevalence of forms of precarious employment associated with short-term contracts and positions contingent on external funding; and 5) perhaps most alarming of all, harassment and threats to free expression directed toward academics holding controversial or unpopular opinions (4-5).² While academic freedom in the Nordics fares better than its US counterpart (to which I will turn in a moment), it is clearly not without its challenges.³

Perhaps the greatest hurdle affecting academic freedom in recent years is the rise of anti-pluralist parties led by democratically elected leaders who, once in office, paradoxically pursue anti-democratic agendas. The question of whether, and to what extent, democracy itself can survive in such situations depends on the resiliency of the norms, values, and institutions supporting it—including its academic community. While

anti-pluralist parties typically pay lip service to democracy, they actively work to erode it. The democracy scholars Juraj Medzihorsky and Stefan I. Lindberg propose that this process of erosion occurs in four main ways: 1) anti-pluralist parties are typically unwilling to commit to the democratic process as a legal means of transferring power, often refusing to recognize the results of open elections; 2) they tend to deny the legitimacy of political rivals, often misrepresenting them as subversive or criminal; 3) they tend to condone political violence in the form of mob attacks and are willing to use the armed forces in support of their own agendas; and 4) they tend to promote laws restricting civil liberties, especially those of minority groups.⁴

Unsurprisingly, there is a strong correlation between the rise of anti-pluralist parties and declining academic freedom. According to the V-Dem report, this is due to the fact that once in power, anti-pluralist parties tend to “impose their political vision on academia, restricting free science and university autonomy,” and to normalize anti-pluralist discourse in ways that affect higher education policy (4). US President Donald Trump’s agenda bears a distinctly recognizable relationship with this anti-pluralist tendency, posing a number of clear threats to academic freedom in the US and abroad. His administration has pursued an aggressive agenda of intimidation, withholding of funding, and attempting to intervene directly in the autonomy of higher education. The administration has declared war on measures aimed at Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), a framework intended to foster inclusivity, particularly among historically under-represented groups including racial/ethnic and sexual minorities and those with disabilities, claiming that such measures promote reverse discrimination.⁵ The administration has also sought to ban public criticism of the Israeli state for its treatment of the Palestinian people, which has been acknowledged by respected authorities including Amnesty International and Human

Rights Watch as representing gross human rights violations and fitting the definition of genocide.⁶ The Trump administration routinely denigrates campus protests against the Israeli state and its US and western allies as expressions of anti-Semitism.⁷ To be clear, there are credible accounts of anti-Semitism in contemporary US political discourse and DEI is not without its problems. Nor are wokeness and political correctness beyond critique. But shutting down public debate and threatening those charged with upholding it is a profoundly anti-democratic way of approaching such issues.

Trump’s list of offenses against academic freedom is too long to be fully elaborated here, but a few key examples can suffice to convey the severity of the situation in the US. Citing the prevalence of DEI and the threat of campus anti-Semitism as its rationale, the Trump administration has assailed the autonomy of academic institutions. It has threatened to revoke elite universities’ tax-exempt status and withhold billions in federal funding, including two billion in grants to Harvard when the university refused to cede its autonomy to federal authorities, agree to police campus speech, revoke the study rights of international students deemed “hostile to American values and institutions,” and end DEI programs.⁸ Faced with losing 400 million in federal funding, Columbia University complied with similar demands.⁹ Yet Harvard has fought back. In retaliation, as of the time of writing, the Trump administration has decided to revoke the visas of *all* international students at Harvard, including those who have applied and those already enrolled.¹⁰ The administration has even weaponized DEI abroad; at my own university, UiT-The Arctic University of Norway, the Centre for Peace Studies received (and signed) an agreement calling on institutions that receive support from American funding bodies not to conduct research on topics the administration deems off-limits including climate, environment, diversity, gender and sexuality. (UiT, to its credit,

declared that the signing had been an “accident” and later withdrew its signature.)¹¹ Another, even more glaring example of this attempt to police the agendas of universities in the Nordic region is the fiasco that occurred when funding for an event at the University of Southern Denmark featuring Columbia University economics professor and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, who had been invited to speak as part of an ongoing, US State Department-funded lecture series, was abruptly canceled. The US Embassy inquired about the university’s embrace of DEI—which had been a requirement during the Biden administration, when the funding was granted—but even before the university could respond to that absurdity, the State Department canceled the grant independently of the embassy, apparently for other reasons. (With funding from the University of Southern Denmark, Stiglitz came in May in any case. His topic? Freedom.)¹²

Such measures are aimed not only at academia specifically, but at the broader public support networks designed to ensure access to the education and learning necessary to perpetuate a democratic society in the first place. Partially in retaliation for its presumed embrace of DEI, Trump has issued an executive order to begin dismantling the US Department of Education, prompting the abrupt layoff of 1300 employees and 12 billion dollars in proposed funding cuts. As of the time of writing, a federal judge has blocked the order and demanded that the fired employees be reinstated.¹³ The administration has also made deep funding cuts to the research budgets of federal science and medical organizations such as the National Institutes of Health, often targeting research topics with which it takes issue, such as climate change and gender. The National Science Foundation has undergone a similar process of budget slashing, termination of awards and grants, and reduction of staff.¹⁴ In March, the National Academy of Sciences issued a statement citing a “climate of fear” in the research community and describing a “wholesale

assault on US science.” The statement reads in part:

The quest for truth—the mission of science—requires that scientists freely explore new questions and report their findings honestly, independent of special interests. The administration is engaging in censorship, destroying this independence. It is using executive orders and financial threats to manipulate which studies are funded or published, how results are reported, and which data and research findings the public can access. The administration is blocking research on topics it finds objectionable.¹⁵

Nor are the humanities exempt from such attacks on academic freedom. The National Endowment for the Humanities, a body involved mainly in supplying grants to help run museums and libraries and support historical preservation, also saw its budget slashed, with the immediate result that it was forced to freeze its grants and place the majority of its staff on leave.¹⁶ The National Endowment for the Arts has been similarly affected, with much of its current grant funding withdrawn earlier this month, hours after Trump announced that he would seek to close the agency.¹⁷ In keeping with his authoritarian tendencies, and in violation of long-established democratic norms, Trump has signaled that he will continue to take a determining role in deciding the priorities of such cultural institutions, as in his recent interference with the presumably autonomous Library of Congress, where he abruptly fired librarian Carla Hayden over her woke views and replaced her with deputy attorney general Todd Blanche, whose only qualification for the post seems to be his loyalty.¹⁸ This admittedly incomplete list makes clear the authoritarian and anti-democratic tactics embraced by the Trump administration in its ideologically driven fight against the autonomy

of higher education and public scientific and cultural institutions.

There has even been at least one instance in which an academic journal has come under fire: *CHEST Journal*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal for chest doctors, was sent a letter by Ed Martin, acting US attorney for the District of Columbia, accusing the journal of being “partisans in various scientific debates” and lacking “viewpoint diversity.”¹⁹ Its obvious wokeness hectoring aside, the precedent suggests a clear threat not only to *CHEST*, but to academic journals in general, which are vital in maintaining academic freedom. From a journal editor’s perspective, it is interesting to note that the charge against *CHEST*—that the journal has failed to support a diversity of viewpoints and therefore contribute to public debate—is tantamount to saying that the journal has failed to protect academic freedom. The question of viewpoint diversity was clearly being weaponized in this case to promote a particular viewpoint—the Trump administration’s—but viewpoint diversity remains a legitimate consideration. As the editor of *American Studies in Scandinavia*, this realization left me asking: How does *ASiS* (or any other journal) avoid becoming partisan? How does it support a variety of viewpoints? There are various answers to these questions, all related to issues of academic freedom. For one thing, the journal embraces no specific politics and remains open to reviewing submissions by anyone on any topic related to its broad scope, assuming that such submissions meet the standards set and maintained by scholars in the field. Here is where anonymous, double-blind peer review comes into play: in the peer review process crucial to any credible academic journal, this one included, submissions are judged not on the viewpoints they express, but on the quality of their scholarship. Beyond that, the articles any given journal publishes, this one included, represent the topics and viewpoints of the scholars who submit their work to it and the national, racial/ethnic, cultural, and

gender/sexual backgrounds from which they write. Additionally, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, like other open access journals, is published on a not-for-profit basis by scholars themselves. *American Studies in Scandinavia* is not beholden to any funding body, governmental or commercial, that could determine its agenda. Nor is it reliant on article processing charges or commercial publishing interests. Finally, the content published by *American Studies in Scandinavia*, and other open access journals like it, is free and open to anyone with an internet connection, meaning that it will be available to help shape public dialogue and furnish credible and accurate information on the many topics its articles and book reviews address.

As the US walks away from its global role as a leading light in promoting academic freedom, the Nordic nations must pick up the slack. For the reasons I outlined above (and many others besides), the culture, politics, history, and literature of the Americas (and the US in particular) will remain an important research area globally. And as one colleague recently put it, Europe—and the Nordic nations in particular—might well represent the “last best hope” for American Studies worldwide. Recent dialogue suggests that they are up to the challenge: following its April board meeting, the European Association for American Studies issued a statement commenting on recent events that makes its position clear. The statement reads in part:

As scholars of American literature, history, politics, culture, and society—and as educators and researchers across multiple disciplines—we see it as our responsibility to critically examine and contextualize the broader implications of these developments. In our conferences and publications, we aim to provide a constructive space for informed discussion on the fu-

ture of American democracy and on relations between the United States and Europe.²⁰

The EAAS statement echoed a similar statement by the British Association for American Studies in proclaiming: "American Studies is as vital as it has ever been."

In the interest of promoting the free production of socially relevant knowledge and proving the vitality of American Studies, the current issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* includes articles on a variety of timely topics. Leading off the issue, Mark C. Miller's article, "State Attorneys General: Agents of Partisan Polarization," takes a legal studies approach as it examines the ways state attorneys general in the US often use their elected positions to promote political agendas, both Democratic and Republican, increasing US political polarization. Following this, Michal Kleprlík's article, "'1619' versus '1776': History as a Battleground in America's Culture Wars," addresses projects such as the *New York Times's* 1619 Project and the (first) Trump administration's 1776 report, as well as others, that construct highly motivated representations of US history governed by their guiding ideologies, a process that, like the politicization of the legal system Miller describes, works to further polarize the US public. Next, Hilde Løvdahl-Stephens's article, "When God Spoke American: Norwegian Pentecostalism and the North American Healing Revival, 1947-57," addresses the bi-directional nature of pentecostalism as it circulated between Norway and the United States in the post-war period and shows how the success of US pentecostalism in Norway fueled debates about freedom of speech and religion. Finally, Kyoung-Min Han and Yonghwa Lee's article, "The Transformative Power of Love in John Williams's *Stoner*," addresses Williams's under-studied novel as an expression of *love* as a phenomenological concept rooted in being.

In addition, the issue contains four reviews of recent books representing a salutary range of issues in American Studies. The first is Reetta Humalajoki's review of two recent books in Indigenous studies: David R. M. Beck's *Bribed with Our Own Money: Federal Abuse of American Indian Funds in the Termination Era* and Mary Klann's *Wardship and the Welfare State: Native Americans and the Formation of First-Class Citizenship in Mid-Twentieth-Century America*. The second review, by Marianne Kongerslev, focuses on Heidi Siegrist's *All Y'all: Queering Southernness in US Fiction, 1980-2020*. The third, by Nina Öhman, addresses Timothy D. Taylor's *Making Value: Music, Capital, and the Social*. The fourth, by Dirk van Rens, takes on Daphne Lamothe's *Black Time and the Aesthetic Possibility of Objects*.

The Nordic Association for American Studies will also soon meet for its 28th biennial conference, hosted jointly by the John Morton Center for North American Studies (JMC) at the University of Turku and the Finnish American Studies Association (FASA). Organized around the theme of Aspirations, the conference will take place in Turku on June 4-6, and will bring together scholars from regions around the globe whose work addresses important topics related to American Studies. On behalf of the journal, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the organizers of the conference for their hard work in organizing what promises to be a deeply engaging and intellectually provocative event.

In addition, I would like to thank all of those who contributed to this issue including the anonymous peer reviewers who continue to work to help the journal maintain its scholarly standards. I would also like to thank the current members of the Nordic Association for American Studies executive board: Jørn Brøndal (president), Nina Öhman, Stephen Darren Dougherty, Kim Khavar Fahlstedt, and Alf Tomas Tønnessen, as well as past board members Jenny Bonnevier and Lene Johannessen. In addition, I would like

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Justin Parks
Tromsø
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STATE ATTORNEYS GENERAL:

Agents of Partisan Polarization

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Abstract: Under the United States federalist system of government, each of the fifty states (plus the District of Columbia) has its own state attorney general (AG). As the chief legal officer of the state, the state AG is not only the top law enforcement official in the state but is also in control of all litigation entered into by the state government. The vast majority of the state AGs are independently elected state officials who can bring lawsuits in the “public interest,” free of the requirement that most litigants must have suffered some type of direct or indirect harm before they can sue (the legal term is “standing”). Through their partisan-motivated lawsuits against the federal government, state attorneys general are attempting to increase their role in federal constitutional interpretation and federal policymaking more generally, using both law and politics to do so. The danger is that these partisan-motivated lawsuits brought by the state AGs, and often won by them, are increasing the perception that American judges are merely partisan actors in black robes who are working in collusion with other partisan governmental agents to further a partisan agenda. These lawsuits are contributing to the decreasing trust that the American public has in its federal courts, and especially in the US Supreme Court.

Keywords: courts, litigation, state attorneys general, standing to sue, public interest

Under the United States federalist system of government, each of the fifty states (plus the District of Columbia) has its own state attorney general (AG). Most of the state AGs are directly elected, and thus fully independent, state officials. As the chief legal officer of the state, the state AG is not only the top law enforcement official in the state but is also in control of all litigation entered into by the state government. Therefore, state attorneys general are important statewide actors in the state governmental systems. As one scholar notes, “[b]esides a governorship, state attorneys general are arguably the most prominent statewide office one can hold in state politics” (Robinson 691). Agreeing, Smith states that the office of state attorney general has become “one of the most influential in the country” (517). Finally, Nolette concludes that “[s]tate attorneys general (AGs) . . . have used their position to take on a more prominent role in national politics, especially through increasing collaborations among themselves and other actors in national politics” (18).

In general, most state AGs have a common set of responsibilities and duties spelled out in state statutes and state constitutions. These functions can vary from state to state and from incumbent to incumbent, but in general they include: 1) representing the state’s legal interests in court, either as a direct party or by presenting *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) briefs to appellate courts like the US Supreme Court; 2) rendering advisory opinions to state officials regarding questions of law; 3) drafting and presenting state legislative proposals; 4) administering state funds in contracting, state bonding, and other areas; and 5) disseminating information regarding legal issues concerning the state (see Derthick 107 and Clayton 528). Lately state AGs have moved well beyond their traditionally purely legal roles and duties. The office of state attorney general now attracts ambitious politicians who clearly take political considerations

into account in their legal decision-making. Because they are most often independent, elected state officials with their own political agendas, state AGs today are often leading actors in furthering a national partisan agenda, using the federal courts to do so.

Increasingly, state AGs are suing the federal government in federal courts, with Republican state AGs suing Democratic presidential administrations and vice versa. As Mark L. Earley, the former Attorney General of Virginia, has noted, “[t]he most powerful elected position in the United States today, with respect to checking any perceived overreach of presidential or federal power, is not the Congress, the House of Representatives or the Senate, but is among the fifty state attorneys general” (562). The danger is that these partisan-motivated lawsuits brought by the state AGs, and often won by them, are increasing the perception that American judges are merely partisan actors in black robes who are working in collusion with other partisan governmental agents to further a partisan agenda. These lawsuits are contributing to the decreasing trust that the American public has in its federal courts, and especially in the US Supreme Court.

I first examined politically motivated state AG lawsuits against the federal government in a law review article aimed at legal studies specialists in the United States (Miller, “State Attorneys General”). That work was technical in nature, and among other things examined the evolution of state AG offices from purely legal entities into both legal and highly political enterprises. It also examined the increasing power of state AGs in part because of multistate collective lawsuits brought by them, including lawsuits against the tobacco industry (see e.g., Derthick). As I concluded in my previous article, “[s]tate attorneys general are both legal actors and political actors who are not afraid to join the fight in our polarized political climate. Politically ambitious state

attorneys general are using the powers and resources of their offices to help them achieve greater visibility and perhaps higher office” (Miller, “State Attorneys General” 30).

On the other hand, this current article is aimed at American studies specialists mostly outside the US. This article highlights the fact that the involvement of American courts in political and policy issues is one of the important aspects that makes the US constitutional democracy unique. This article also provides some insights into American federalism, through the lens of examining the activism of state attorneys general. In addition to updating the prior research, this article also takes a much broader approach, looking at the question of how partisan lawsuits filed by state AGs may have affected the trust that average Americans have in their courts. Public trust is essential for the American judiciary. As one recent study argued, “[t]he judiciary must compel the president and Congress to enforce its decisions without a public mandate. The judiciary must then rely on the people’s ‘reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will’ to protect its authority and independence” (Patterson et al. 23). Therefore, the research question for this article is whether the increasing numbers of partisan lawsuits filed by state AGs against the federal government promote public perceptions of the courts as being merely partisan actors in the US system of government. The merger of politics and law in the United States is a long-standing American tradition. As French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the early 1800s, almost every legal issue in the US eventually becomes a political issue, and almost every political one eventually becomes a legal one (Tocqueville 99-102). Judicial scholars, and especially political scientists, have long argued that American courts are political institutions because their decisions can have profound public policy ramifications. And by its very nature, constitutional interpretation done by American courts means making crucial political and public

policy choices in addition to legal ones. Along these same lines, both state and federal judges are selected through political mechanisms in the US (see e.g., Miller, *Judicial Politics* 55-85), and American judges and their decisions are often described in ideological terms (see e.g., Segal and Spaeth; and Baum, *Ideology*). Peretti has argued that having political courts is highly beneficial in the American system of pluralist democracy because, among other things, political courts enhance both system stability and the quality of policymaking among all the governmental institutions (*In Defense*). American-style federalism further complicates the interactions of the courts with other political actors in the US political system.

The Governance as Dialogue Movement

This article will examine the activism of state attorneys general through the lens of the governance as dialogue movement. Governance as dialogue scholars argue that the meaning of the US Constitution is not solely the responsibility of the US Supreme Court and other federal courts, but instead is a continuing institutional conversation among the courts, the president, the Congress, the federal bureaucracy, and the states (see e.g., Fisher, *Constitutional* and Fisher, *Reconsidering*). Alexander Bickel was one of the first to advocate for judicial scholars to consider the interactions between the courts and other political institutions in the United States. Bickel said that the courts must engage in a “continuing colloquy” with the more political branches of the government (240). Louis Fisher often refers to this phenomenon as “coordinate construction,” and as he uses the term it means “[t]he opportunity for all three branches to interpret and shape the Constitution” (Fisher and Adler 22). Keith Whittington, reflecting Edwin Corwin’s (1938) language, uses the term “departmentalism” to refer to this governance as dialogue phenomenon

(29). Barry Friedman generally agrees with this approach, although he adds that the courts play an enhanced role because they “facilitate and mold the national dialogue concerning the meaning of the Constitution” (581).

At this point, some examples of the concepts of governance as dialogue in practice may be helpful. In the 1930s, Congress started to enact federal statutes that allowed one house of Congress to overturn various federal agency decisions. The so-called “one-house legislative veto” came in a variety of forms and configurations. The US Supreme Court declared that this practice was unconstitutional in *INS v. Chadha* (1983). The Supreme Court stated that the legislative veto violated the Presentment Clause of the US Constitution, which requires legislative bills to be passed by both houses of Congress and then sent to the president for his signature or veto. Congress has basically ignored this Supreme Court decision, and it has continued enacting one-house legislative veto provisions in a variety of federal statutes (Fisher, *Reconsidering* 203-22). As another example of the governance as dialogue concept, let’s consider the issue of burning the American flag as a form of political protest. A protestor burned the American flag outside the Republican National Convention in Dallas in 1988, and then was convicted of violating a Texas state statute that criminalized flag burning. In *Texas v. Johnson* (1989), the US Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that flag burning as a form of political protest was expressive conduct protected under the First Amendment and declared the state statute to be unconstitutional. Congress responded by enacting a federal law criminalizing the burning of the American flag. The Supreme Court then struck down this federal statute by a vote of 5 to 4 in *United States v. Eichman* (1990). At the urging of President H. W. Bush, Congress then attempted to pass a constitutional amendment to overturn these Supreme Court decisions, but the proposed amendment failed to get the necessary two-thirds vote in the

US House of Representatives. Thus, the State Legislature, Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court all participated in the inter-institutional conversation about the meaning of the US Constitution on this issue.

Although governance as dialogue scholars anticipate that the states will participate in inter-institutional constitutional dialogues, it is not always clear which state official should speak for the state in this conversation. This is especially true when the governor and the state attorney general represent different political parties (see Johnstone). Certainly, the state AGs see clear personal and partisan advantages in claiming that they are the true representatives of the state in the inter-institutional constitutional conversation. Not only are state AGs often ambitious politicians, but they also often disregard the needs of other political actors in the state. As one study noted, “[e]lected attorneys general seek political advantage. They invariably curry favor with their political base (party, interest groups, voters) as they seek re-election or a new office. Correspondingly, elected attorneys general pay more attention to the needs of their political base than to the institutional or political interests of other parts of the executive branch, including the governor” (Devins and Prakash 2143).

Backgrounds of the State Attorneys General

Some additional background information about the state AGs may be helpful at this point. Forty-three of the state attorneys general (plus the AG for the District of Columbia) are independently elected officials running as either Democrats or Republicans, while in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Wyoming the attorneys general are appointed by the Governor (“Attorney General”). However, only in Alaska and Wyoming does the attorney general serve at the will of the governor (giving the governor almost total

control over the attorney general because of this removal power) (see “Appointing” 982), while in the other governor appointment states the attorney general can only be removed from office for cause (meaning that the attorney general has some independence from the governor) (see Marshall 2448). States have various citizenship, residency, legal experience, and age requirements for their attorneys general (“Attorney General”). Through their partisan lawsuits, the state AGs are therefore attempting to increase their voices in the inter-institutional conversation about the meaning of the US Constitution as envisioned by governance as dialogue scholars.

Since the founding of the United States, lawyers have been over-represented among American politicians (see e.g., Brown; Schlesinger; Eulau and Sprague). For example, of the fifty-two signers of the Declaration of Independence, twenty-five were lawyers, and thirty-one of the fifty-five members of the Continental Congress were lawyers. Lawyers also dominated the constitutional conventions called to write the new state constitutions after the American Revolution (Miller, *The High Priests* 31). Today more than half of all American presidents and vice presidents have been lawyers (see e.g., Gross), and a very high percentage of the president’s cabinet have also been lawyers (see e.g., Robinson 669). Lawyer-legislators have also long been the largest occupational group in Congress and in many state legislatures (see Miller, *The High Priests*). Lawyers, including state AGs, have various advantages in US electoral politics (see Miller, *The High Priests* 64-75). One of the most important is the fact that three elected offices are exclusively open only to lawyers: those of elected state judges, elected local district attorneys, and *state attorneys general*. These positions are often seen as steppingstones to higher political office (see e.g., Provost, “When is AG Short”; Sabato). As Bonica and Sen conclude, “[i]t is difficult to overstate the influence that lawyers—and by exten-

sion the bar—have exercised over the development of American political institutions and norms” (33). Therefore, many ambitious lawyer-politicians eventually seek the state AG position. An old joke is that state AG really means “aspiring governor” (see Provost, “When is AG Short” 597). Without doubt, some state attorneys general do have ambitions for higher political office. Many state AGs go on to be elected governors of their states or US Senators. Some have even become US Supreme Court justices (e.g., David Souter), while others have become president of the United States (e.g., Bill Clinton) or vice president (e.g., Kamala Harris). One aspect of being an ambitious politician is that these individuals often benefit from taking extremely partisan positions in the highly polarized current context of US politics. These ambitious politicians demonstrate that the office of state AG is both a legal position and a political one, especially for those who are seeking higher political office.

Over time, state AGs have clearly evolved into highly partisan officials. Before the November 2024 elections, the fifty-one state AGs (including the District of Columbia plus the fifty states) included twenty-seven Republicans and twenty-four Democrats. Immediately following the elections, there were twenty-eight Republicans and twenty-three Democrats. State attorneys general are therefore often ambitious politicians who have carefully planned their educational and political careers. It is therefore not surprising that both parties have created partisan organizations to promote and raise money for the election campaigns of state attorney general candidates from their respective parties. In 1999, the Republican Attorneys General Association was formed (Nolette 191-92), and over the years it has raised millions of dollars to support GOP candidates for state attorney general (Smith 539). According to its website, “[n]o organization has been more effective than the Republican Attorneys General Association. As free-

dom's cutting edge, Republican attorneys general were instrumental in challenging Obama-era overreach. Today, Republican attorneys general preserve the rule of law to ensure limited government perseveres" ("About RAGA"). The Democratic Attorneys General Association, founded in 2002 (Nolette 191-92), has also raised millions of dollars. According to its website before the 2024 elections, "[a]fter years of the [first] Trump administration undermining good government, a Congress that continues to face gridlock, and statehouses that are increasingly capitulating to far-right extremism, the role that Democratic AGs play in protecting democracy and the rule of law is more important than ever" ("About DAGA"). Clearly these two partisan organizations do all they can to elect more state attorneys general from their respective parties, and they are proud of their partisan victories in the federal courts.

Lawsuits Initiated by the State Attorneys General

Sometimes a state AG will sue on their own, but often these lawsuits are brought by coalitions of state AGs from the same political party. Almost unlimited access to the federal courts, because the US Supreme Court has allowed the states to sue in the "public interest," has allowed ambitious state AGs to push the courts to rule in favor of their partisan interests. As Nolette has observed, "[r]eflecting broader trends of political polarization and conflicts over policy, state AGs have used their position to ally with like-minded advocacy groups and partisan interests to pursue ideological policy goals. This in turn has led to greater conflict between AGs and other state institutions as well as among the AGs themselves" (Nolette 2-3). These lawsuits can clearly help attract attention for a politically ambitious lawyer-politician. As Clayton explains, "[c]er-

tainly the more active policymaking role assumed by state attorneys general may help to foster political careers, and in many instances protecting the 'public interest' may indeed overlap with what is good politics" (258).

State AGs have a clear advantage over other state officials in that they have almost automatic access to the federal courts. The state AGs can litigate in the federal courts without prior approval from the governor or the state legislature (see Spill et al. 606), and as mentioned previously the US Supreme Court has allowed state AGs to file almost any lawsuit in the federal courts to protect the "public interest" as the AGs themselves define that concept (see Miller, "State Attorneys General" 25-26). In other words, state AGs have almost unlimited "standing" to sue in federal courts, as will be discussed in more detail later in this article. State AGs also have other advantages. As Dishman explains, "[s]tate litigants have unique characteristics and advantages that allow them to frequently sue the federal government and obtain nationwide injunctions as remedies. These advantages include enhanced ability to establish standing, expanded venue choices, greater resources, and the ability to represent the public interest" (383).

All of these activities have greatly increased the collective voice of the state AGs in federal constitutional development and interpretation. In addition to their collaborative partisan multistate litigation, state AGs are also becoming a stronger voice at the US Supreme Court through the filing of partisan amicus briefs (see e.g., Provost, "When to Befriend"; Solimine). These "friend of the court" briefs present the Supreme Court with views of interest groups and others who are not parties to the dispute, but who nevertheless are interested in the outcome of court's ruling in the case. State AGs have been quite active in submitting collective partisan

amicus curiae briefs to the Supreme Court. Often the Republican AGs will submit one set of amicus briefs on a case, while the Democratic AGs will submit collective amicus briefs on the other side. Blocher argues that by signing onto amicus briefs submitted to the US Supreme Court, the state AGs are claiming to represent the voice of the citizens in the inter-institutional federal constitutional dialogue (110).

Progressive ambition does require both resources and public attention. State attorney general offices have greatly expanded in both size and institutional capacity since the 1970s (see Nolette 33-35). Clayton notes that “[a]ttorneys general’s offices that were formerly small, intimate environments have grown into large, hierarchical legal bureaucracies” (537-38). These increasing state resources came along at the same time as the willingness of federal political actors to give more power to the state AGs. Beginning in the 1970s, Congress enacted a variety of federal statutes that encouraged litigation by state AGs by giving the states the power to enforce a wide array of federal laws (Nolette 39-40), and federal agencies provided funding for these activities as well as information sharing to streamline the enforcement efforts (Nolette 36-37). The expanded role of the National Association of Attorneys General in the early 1980s, with assistance from the US Justice Department, has enabled state AG offices to coordinate their amicus curiae efforts and professionalize their appearances before the US Supreme Court (see McQuire 111; Nolette 34). As one group of scholars has concluded, “[a]s the offices of the state attorneys general have professionalized, the public profile of the office has grown, and it has become a more attractive office for ambitious politicians” (Spill et al. 607-8).

The number of partisan lawsuits brought by state attorneys general against the federal government in the United States has skyrocketed

recently. There were 50 lawsuits filed by Republican state attorneys general against the Obama administration, 139 lawsuits brought by Democratic state attorneys general against the first Trump administration, and 121 lawsuits from Republican state attorneys general against the Biden administration. As of March 23, 2025, Democratic state AGs had already filed 17 suits against the newly inaugurated second Trump administration (State Litigation and AG Activity Database). For example, during his first day in office, President Trump issued an executive order that attempted to restrict the so-called birthright citizenship requirements found in the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution. The next day, 23 Democratic state AGs (including the one from the District of Columbia) filed lawsuits to have the courts declare the executive order unconstitutional (Nakamura and Foster-Frau). A variety of lower federal judges did so (Marimow and Nakamura). Other lawsuits have involved whether federal employees were properly fired from their jobs and whether deported immigrants should have received due process before they were deported. More Democratic lawsuits against the second Trump administration are expected (see e.g., Mueller; Schick and Turner).

Republican lawsuits against the Obama administration were ultimately successful 64.2 percent of the time, Democratic lawsuits against the first Trump administration were eventually successful 83 percent of the time, and Republican lawsuits against the Biden administration were successful 74.1 percent of the time (State Litigation and AG Activity Database). As one scholar has concluded, “Republicans were trigger-happy when it came to multistate litigation under Obama, but that urge to fight the federal government evaporated the moment a Republican became president. The same can be said for Democratic attorneys general once a Democratic president assumed office” (Smith 536). Thus almost all of these AG-initiated lawsuits were

brought in order to further partisan agendas, using the courts to seek desired partisan changes in federal public policy or to limit the power of the president and other executive branch officials when the opposing party was in power. When the federal courts rule in favor of the state AGs' positions, these lawsuits can have the effect of increasing the perception that American judges are merely partisan actors, thus lowering public trust in the judiciary.

Lawsuits against the federal government initiated by state attorneys general have involved some of the most important and most contentious public policy disputes of the day. For example, some of the most prominent attacks against the constitutionality of the massive landmark Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare, were initiated by Republican AGs only minutes after Congress passed the ACA legislation and President Obama signed it into law (Nolette 168). Democratic AGs filed collective amicus briefs with the Supreme Court in favor of the constitutionality of the act. The US Supreme Court upheld most of the extremely complex new law in *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* (2012). The Court did, however, strike down various federal mandates for state Medicaid spending, as the Republican AGs had urged. Republican AGs also sued to stop many of the Obama administration's regulations designed to address climate change. In *Utility Air Regulatory Group v. EPA* (2014), the Supreme Court struck down some of the Environmental Protection Agency's regulations but upheld others. The complex 5 to 4 opinion generally saw the Republican justices in the majority and the Democratic justices in dissent. It was a partial victory for the Republican AGs and their partisan allies.

When Republican President Trump assumed office for his first administration, it was the Democratic AGs' turn to sue the president and federal agencies. For example, President Trump issued

a travel ban on travelers from various Muslim countries. In *Trump v. Hawaii* (2018), the Supreme Court split along partisan lines with the five conservative Republicans ruling that the president had the right to issue the travel ban. The four liberal Democrats dissented, finding that the travel ban violated federal immigration laws and the Establishment Clause of the US Constitution. Critics of the decision argued that it was clearly a partisan ruling. In another immigration law case, Democratic AGs sued the first Trump administration after President Trump moved to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), which suspends deportation for some illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children. In *Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California* (2020), the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that the Trump administration's termination of DACA was done in an arbitrary and capricious manner, in violation of the federal Administrative Procedure Act (APA). Chief Justice Roberts joined the four liberal Democrats in this decision.

When President Biden assumed office in 2021, lawsuits initiated by Republican AGs against the federal government resumed in full force. For example, in *Biden v. Nebraska* (2023), the Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3 that President Biden exceeded his authority when he proposed cancelling over 400 billion dollars in federal student loan debt. The six conservative Republican justices were in the majority, and the three liberal Democratic justices were in dissent. Justice Kagan's dissent argued that the majority opinion was opportunistic, unprincipled, and infected by politics. Justice Kagan wrote, "[f]rom the first page to the last, today's opinion departs from the demands of judicial restraint. At the behest of a party that has suffered no injury, the majority decides a contested public policy issue properly belonging to the politically accountable branches and the people they represent" (600 U.S. at 548).

In one of the most contentious policy debates in modern American history, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), the US Supreme Court declared that there was no federal constitutional right to an abortion. The 6 to 3 decision, with all the conservative Republican justices in the majority and all the liberal Democratic justices in dissent, overturned both *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), returning to individual states the power to regulate any aspect of abortion not protected by federal statutes. Republican state AGs filed collective amicus briefs supporting the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, while Democratic state AGs filed collective amicus briefs opposing abandoning *Roe*. Immediately this decision became an important partisan issue in the 2022 midterm congressional elections and the 2024 presidential elections. Additionally, multiple public opinion polls taken after the *Dobbs* ruling showed public approval of the US Supreme Court at a record low (see e.g., Biskupic 380; Patterson et al. 23-24).

The pattern has become clear that state attorneys general of the opposing party will use lawsuits against the federal government as a political and partisan weapon. For example, Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott, a former attorney general in that state, was quoted as saying in 2013 when he was AG, "I go into the office in the morning. I sue [Democrat] Barack Obama, and then I go home" (Nolette 168). Both through partisan multistate litigation and through filing collective partisan amicus briefs, the state AGs have increased their voice in the inter-institutional constitutional conversation about the direction of public policy choices in the United States. As two journalists have recently concluded, "[w]e are long past the time when State AG offices were seen as boring backwaters. They now play an increasingly important role in setting the national agenda and have become quite effective at using all of the tools at their disposal to do so" (Schick and Turner, n. pag.). Critical of

the partisan nature of these lawsuits, one scholar has concluded, "[s]tate attorneys general have leaned into our nation's divisive partisanship—often as an integral part of a quest for higher office—and used their traditional roles and powers to grandstand and showcase their party loyalty on a national stage. While this partisanship may garner national attention and party approval for state attorneys general, it comes at the expense of their state and constituents, particularly those constituents that fall outside their voter block" (Smith 518).

Courts as Political Actors

The increase in state AG-initiated lawsuits against the federal government has coincided with a change in the makeup of the US Supreme Court. From about the end of World War II to the early twenty-first century, a justice's ideology did not necessarily correlate with the political party of his or her appointing president. In other words, Republican appointees to the US Supreme Court were often conservatives, but not always so. In fact, since the early 1950s the most liberal members of the Supreme Court were usually Republicans. One of the most liberal members of the Supreme Court was Chief Justice Earl Warren, who was appointed by President Eisenhower and served from 1953 to 1969. Another Republican, William J. Brennan, Jr., was also an extremely liberal associate justice. He was also appointed by President Eisenhower and served on the court from 1956 to 1990. Justice Harry A. Blackmun, appointed by President Nixon in 1970, started out as a conservative associate justice but moved well to the left the longer he remained on the court until his retirement in 1994. Justice John Paul Stevens was appointed by President Ford and served on the court from 1975 to 2010. Over time he also became a reliably liberal vote on the Supreme Court. Justice David H. Souter was an appointee

of the first President Bush, served from 1990 to 2009, and joined the liberal bloc on the court almost immediately after his confirmation. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (1981 to 2006) and Justice Anthony M. Kennedy (1988 to 2018) were both Reagan appointees who were broadly considered moderates on the court. Thus, throughout this long period the most liberal members of the US Supreme Court were always Republicans.

Justice O'Connor was a key figure on the Supreme Court because she was almost always the deciding vote between the liberal bloc and the conservative bloc on the court, especially in 5 to 4 rulings. According to an analysis written after her death, over her time on the court she was in the majority roughly 87 percent of the time. (Feldman and Truscott). Justice O'Connor was so influential on the Supreme Court that Nancy Maveety titled her study of the Rehnquist Court *Queen's Court: Judicial Power in the Rehnquist Era*. When Justice O'Connor was replaced with the much more conservative Justice Samuel Alito in 2006, this signaled that an era of exclusively conservative Republicans serving on the US Supreme Court was beginning. Justice Kennedy's replacement, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, in 2018 moved the Republicans justices further to the right. When Democratic appointee Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was replaced by Republican appointee Justice Amy Coney Barrett upon Ginsburg's death in 2020, the alignment of all conservative Republicans against all liberal Democrats on the US Supreme Court was complete. Writing in 2023, journalist and long-time Supreme Court watcher Joan Biskupic complained that then on the court, "the bench was almost unrecognizable, particularly if one were comparing the current collection of justices to any grouping since the post-New Deal era. . . . The Court had no middle, no center to hold" (Biskupic 299, 326). It was feared that the US Supreme Court had become a partisan body, with

the conservative-Republican majority bloc opposing the smaller liberal-Democratic group of justices.

While political scientists and other judicial scholars see it as quite normal to describe American courts as political or ideological institutions (see e.g., Baum, *Ideology*), they are far less comfortable in seeing judges, especially federal judges with lifetime appointments, as partisan actors. This political-versus-partisan distinction is extremely important. Levinson and Balkin individually and collectively have referred to this distinction as ideological or political "high politics" and partisan "low politics" (see Levinson; Balkin and Levinson; Balkin). As Levinson explains this distinction, "[t]hough judges are 'political', the politics are 'high' rather than 'low'; that is, decisions are based on ideology rather than a simple desire to help out one's political friends in the short run" (8). Judges from the same political party may make similar rulings, but that is often due more to the fact that judges in the same party share an ideological approach rather than that they use their judicial positions to bolster their own partisan groups or backers. For example, in their examination of federal appellate court decision-making, Sunstein et al. found that on many issues Democratic federal courts of appeals judges made different decisions than Republican-appointed judges. However, there were many circumstances when partisan affiliations had no impact on these judges' rulings. These scholars attribute these differences in judicial rulings to ideological disagreements rather than to partisan influences (Sunstein et al. 147-50). Nonetheless, there is concern that Americans perceive their courts as becoming more partisan in their decision-making.

Many scholars point to the US Supreme Court's decision in *Bush v. Gore* (2000) as one of the most partisan decisions in history (see e.g., Peretti, *Partisan* 17). In that extremely complicated ruling, the justices split 5 to 4 along ideological lines

(but not totally along partisan lines) on the key issue in the case and decided that Republican George W. Bush had won the extremely close presidential election in Florida, thus giving him the nationwide electoral victory in 2000. In this highly unusual opinion, the US Supreme Court had actually determined which candidate had won a presidential election. Some commentators believed that on the key issue in the case, “every justice voted in favor of the candidate whom that justice presumably favored in the election” (Baum, *Ideology* 2). The *Bush v. Gore* ruling was not well received among most judicial scholars. Peretti has concluded that “[i]n so transparently and insincerely manipulating legal doctrine to put George W. Bush in the White House, the justices ‘showed their partisan stripes’” (Peretti, *Partisan* 5). Levinson has said that the court was using partisan “low politics” in the case instead of the conventional ideological “high politics” approach (8). In his careful analysis of this decision, Gillman argues that the US Supreme Court “acted in ways that were uniquely partisan and outside what should be considered the acceptable boundaries of judicial power” (3). Noting the differences between so-called ideological “high politics” and partisan “low politics,” Gillman concludes, “ideological influences on judicial decisions are properly considered an inevitable and legitimate aspect of ‘good faith’ judging while mere partisan favoritism is treated as illegitimate and worthy of broad condemnation (or worse)” (7). Peretti agrees, stating that “[t]here are multiple lessons from *Bush v. Gore*, but the most obvious is that judges may be unable to resist the temptation of partisan judging when the stakes are great” (Peretti, *Partisan* 5). Kritzer notes that general public support for the US Supreme Court dropped among Democrats following the *Bush v. Gore* decision, but that it increased among Republicans, keeping overall support for the US Supreme Court at about the same level (32-38). Thus, *Bush*

v. Gore indicated that public support for the Supreme Court was beginning to mirror the partisan polarization present in broader American politics.

Partisan decision-making by judges is even more problematic when it involves perceived collusion between judges and other governmental actors like state AGs. Peretti, generally a supporter of political courts, studied a variety of election law judicial rulings where she found a clear partisan approach to case decisions. She concludes that “interbranch partisan cooperation in constitutional decision-making violates core normative beliefs about the law, including the expectation that judges should serve as neutral arbiters rather than biased partisans” (Peretti, *Partisan* 3). The American public also clearly mistrusts partisan-based decisions made by American courts. As one recent study argues,

[t]he federal judiciary has long held a deep public trust far exceeding that of the legislative or the executive. Americans have historically believed that judges rule based on legal reasoning in the context of the Constitution, free from the bargaining and compromise of the other branches. . . . When perceptions of the courts as trustworthy, impartial, and apolitical erode, politicians and the public may become more willing to endorse constraints on the courts’ independence and authority. (Patterson et al. 23)

Clearly, if partisan state AGs are leading judges to make partisan rulings, then this collusion can have dangerous ramifications for the legitimacy of the courts and for broader questions of how constitutional democracy should function in the United States.

State Standing in the Courts

Litigation in the public interest by state AGs has exploded because of the way the US Supreme Court has treated questions of standing for the states. Recall that the state AGs have almost unlimited access to the federal courts because they can initiate lawsuits in the “public interest,” and that the courts have allowed the AGs to define this concept. In the traditional conception of standing, the plaintiff must prove some actual or imminent harm was caused to them by the defendant. If a party does not have standing, the lawsuit does not go forward (see e.g., Miller, *Judicial* 52-53). State AGs have a great number of advantages over their private sector colleagues when it comes to matters of standing. As Hessick and Marshall explain, “States can establish standing by demonstrating an injury to the same sort of interests held by private individuals such as the interest in holding property. But because they are sovereigns, states also have sovereign and quasi-sovereign interests, and the violation of those interests can also support standing” (90).

Massachusetts v. EPA (2007) is the landmark US Supreme Court decision that has allowed state AGs to gain standing quite easily in federal courts. Massachusetts and eleven other states sued the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), hoping to force the agency to issue regulations limiting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in an attempt to combat climate change. Much of the Supreme Court’s opinion centered around the issue of state standing. In the 5 to 4 decision, Justice Stevens, writing for the court’s majority, stated that states have “special solicitude” to bring suits that private litigants may lack. After noting the court’s position that it does not allow “citizen suits to vindicate the public’s nonconcrete interest in the proper administration of the laws,” the majority concluded that the states have “sovereign pre-

rogatives” that are not available to private litigants. Thus, the states can have standing even when other parties do not. As one scholar has concluded, “[t]he practical effect of the ‘special solicitude’ precedent established in *Massachusetts v. EPA* is that State AGs now have near-automatic standing in lawsuits against the federal government” (Green 258).

The advantages in standing held by the state AGs as compared to other governmental actors, and to private parties, are substantial. As Meyer explains, “AGs are able to bring lawsuits with sweeping regulatory implications that private litigants are would be unable to bring for lack of standing or other legal reasons” (885). Thus these partisan suits bring many advantages to the AGs: “Not only do they have myriad ways to establish standing to sue the President or an executive branch agency, and exclusive doctrines by which to frame those suits in a favorable manner, but their participation is also controlled ultimately by the public interest, not private or corporate interests” (Shaub 674).

Thus standing for state AGs is far easier to achieve than standing for taxpayers and other governmental litigants. Taxpayer standing, or citizen standing, was eliminated in *Frothingham v. Mellon* (1923), then allowed in very limited circumstances in *Flast v. Cohen* (1968), and then again made extremely difficult to obtain in *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn* (2011). Standing for federal legislators was severely restricted in *Raines v. Byrd* (1997). With the increase in multistate partisan lawsuits against the federal government, state AGs were operating under the assumption that there were no limits to state standing. As a law professor argued, “[s]tate politicians are using state standing as a way of waging what are political or policy battles against the current administration in court as opposed to through the political process. There is good reason to think that this special solicitude stuff has kind of gotten out of

hand, and it needs to be curtailed. . . . But it's often hard to get a majority of the court to rule against standing when a majority of the court believes the underlying merits claims are strong" (qtd. in Liptak).

Three recent US Supreme Court rulings, however, have limited somewhat what appeared to be an almost unlimited right of states to sue the federal government. After President Biden won the 2020 presidential election, a group of Republican AGs plus various other Republican officials sued, claiming that there were significant and unconstitutional irregularities in the way that the states of Pennsylvania, Georgia, Michigan, and Wisconsin (all states that Joe Biden won in the election) had carried out their elections. In an unsigned *per curiam* opinion, *Texas v. Pennsylvania* (2020), the justices ruled that Texas lacked standing, because one state did not have a legal interest in how other states carried out their elections. The decision restricted the previously almost unlimited concept of state standing, but it did not provide guidance on what the limits of state standing are beyond this unique context. In *United States v. Texas* (2023), Republican AGs sued to overturn Biden administration guidelines that would have reduced the number and type of illegal immigrants who would be arrested and then deported. The Republican states wanted the federal government to increase immigration arrests and prosecutions, not reduce them. The Supreme Court ruled that the states have no standing to sue the federal government over issues of federal prosecutorial discretion. The 8 to 1 decision clearly restricts state AGs' standing, but again it does not spell out the exact limits of state standing outside of this very narrow context. In *Murthy v. Missouri* (2024), the US Supreme Court denied standing to state AGs of Missouri and Louisiana in their challenge to the federal government's attempts to persuade social media platforms to restrict disinformation about the pandemic and the

2020 election. The 6 to 3 ruling also did not provide much guidance about future limits on state standing.

Several federal district court judges, however, have applied the principles of *United States v. Texas* and these other rulings to deny state standing in lawsuits challenging new Biden administration gun control regulations requiring gun dealers to run background checks on buyers at gun shows, among other places. In May 2024, a federal district court judge in Arkansas denied standing for that state's attorney general, quoting the statement in *United States v. Texas* that "in our system of dual federal and state sovereignty, federal policies frequently generate indirect effects on state revenues or state spending. And when a State asserts, for example, that a federal law has produced only those kinds of indirect effects, the State's claim for standing can become more attenuated" (see e.g., Hardy). In a related lawsuit, a federal district judge in Texas in May 2024 granted standing to the state of Texas and blocked enforcement of the new regulations, but denied standing to the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Utah without citing *United States v. Texas* directly (see e.g., Shoab).

Not everyone is pleased with the way the Supreme Court has expanded standing for the states. Some argue that relaxed state standing rules allow the courts to interfere in federal policymaking in ways that they should not. As Davis argues, "Article III standing doctrine reflects the idea that courts should not be brought into political battles about the public interest. They must stay above the fray to the extent possible, deferring to the political branches and preserving their own legitimacy by exercising restraint" (1277). Also critical of unlimited state standing, another law professor concluded that

[s]tates should not get special power to sue the federal executive branch in court.

They should be subject to the same requirements as private parties, which would kick out most of these lawsuits. That would be a way of reducing these lawsuits, reducing the pressure on courts, and keeping the courts out of every single political controversy that arises with respect to the federal executive. (qtd. In Liptak)

Scholars have noted various additional critiques concerning this new trend in AG-initiated lawsuits, including whether the new partisan lawsuits are furthering American political polarization and whether it is proper for the state AGs to bypass the normal legislative and bureaucratic decision-making processes. As Lemos and Young argue, “[l]ongstanding concerns about state litigation as a form of national policymaking that circumvents ordinary lawmaking processes have been joined by new concerns that state litigation reflects and aggravates partisan polarization” (44). According to another scholar, “[t]he current partisan approach to multistate litigation detracts from the state attorney general’s role. Filing multistate lawsuits (or failing to do so) for solely political reasons takes the state attorneys general’s discretion too far. In such circumstances state attorneys general are no longer representing the interests of their state and constituents. They are representing personal and party interests” (Smith 536).

One possible effect of partisan lawsuits brought by state AGs is an erosion of overall public trust in the judiciary. Public trust and confidence in the courts in the US has traditionally been much higher than public trust in the legislative or executive branches of government (see e.g., Baum, *The Supreme* 137-38). However, looking carefully at over twenty years of polling data, one recent study from the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania found that public trust in the federal courts has greatly declined recently (Patterson et al.). In 2005, roughly seventy-five percent of Americans surveyed had

trust in the US Supreme Court (measured as those who answered that they had a great deal or a fair amount of trust in the court), while general trust in the federal judiciary as a whole was even higher. By 2022, however, only forty-six percent of the American public had trust in the US Supreme Court. In that survey only eight percent expressed “a great deal” of trust in the court. In addition, this study found that today, “a majority of Americans believe the courts favor the wealthy and that judges fail to set aside their personal political beliefs when making their rulings” (Patterson et al. 24). The distrust in the US Supreme Court continues. A Pew survey from July 2024 found that forty-seven percent of those surveyed had a favorable view of the US Supreme Court, while fifty-one percent had an unfavorable view. This study concluded that “[t]he court’s favorable rating is 23 percentage points lower than it was in August 2020” (Copeland). Other studies have found similar declines in public trust and confidence in the US Supreme Court (see e.g., Biskupic 380).

Another finding of the Annenberg study was that the same political polarization currently rampant in American society has clearly affected public trust in the judiciary. In the past, there were few differences among the supporters of the two main political parties or independents in their views of the judiciary. Today, however, Republicans express much higher levels of trust in the courts than do Democrats or independents. In this survey, seventy-one percent of Republicans, forty-one percent of independents, and only twenty-four percent of Democrats expressed having trust in the Supreme Court to act in their best interest (Patterson et al. 25). This study concludes that “[t]he same polarization that has eroded support for the judiciary has also reduced belief in democratic norms” (Patterson et al. 31). The Pew study found similar polarization among supporters of the two political parties in their attitudes toward the US Supreme Court. This study concluded that while overall

support for the US Supreme Court was at forty-seven percent in 2024, “just 24 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents view the Supreme Court favorably. That is unchanged since last year and ties the court’s lowest favorable rating from either party in more than 30 years” (Copeland). In addition, Democrats are nearly three times as likely as Republicans (sixty-two percent versus twenty-two percent) to say the Supreme Court has too much power (Copeland).

The fact that state AGs are furthering their personal political and partisan agendas through their partisan lawsuits against the federal government makes the state AGs one of a variety of agents of increasing partisan polarization in American society. While there is a clear correlation between the increasing number of partisan lawsuits brought by the state AGs and the decreasing trust in the judiciary among the American public, certainly these lawsuits are not the only cause of the lack of public confidence in the American judiciary. Nevertheless, because the state AGs are pursuing their partisan agendas through these lawsuits and thus increasing their voice in the inter-institutional constitutional dialogue as described by governance as dialogue scholars, there is good reason to be concerned about the broader effects of these actions. The danger is that these partisan-motivated lawsuits brought by the state AGs, and often won by them, are increasing the perception that American judges are merely partisan actors who do not deserve the trust of the American people.

One of the best ways to confront the lack of trust in the US Supreme Court and the other federal courts lies in the hands of the Supreme Court justices themselves. The Supreme Court should rein in its doctrine of state standing, thereby reducing the number of partisan lawsuits filed by state attorneys general. This would reduce the risk that the courts are perceived as merely partisan actors in the United States governmental

system. Without changes in the doctrine of state standing, the partisan lawsuits brought by the state AGs will continue. As their lawsuits are growing more and more successful in carrying out their personal and partisan agendas, the state attorneys general are clearly perceived as agents of political polarization in American society.

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"1619" VERSUS "1776":

History as a Battleground in America's Culture Wars

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Abstract: The debate over the interpretation of American history has intensified in recent years, fueled by competing narratives exemplified by the 1619 Project and its counterinitia-tives, including the 1776 Commission, the 1620 Project, and 1776 Unites. The 1619 Project, launched by the *New York Times Magazine* in 2019, seeks to reframe American history by plac-ing slavery and black Americans' contributions at the center of the national narrative. While its supporters argue that it cor-rects longstanding historical omissions, critics contend that it distorts history and undermines national unity. The contro-versy surrounding the 1619 Project reflects deeper cultural and ideological divides, which have transformed US history ed-ucation into a battleground for contemporary culture wars. This article examines the origins, reception, and broader impli-cations of this historical dispute, situating it within the context of American political and cultural polarization. Additionally, it explores how these competing visions of history shape na-tional identity and influence public discourse on issues of race, democracy, and the American past.

Keywords: culture wars, the 1619 Project, the 1620 Project, the 1776 Commission, 1776 Unites, national identity, refram-ing history, American history, high school textbooks

Following the 2016 presidential election, historian Daniel K. Williams wondered in an article in the *New York Times* from November 9 whether Donald Trump's victory would end the culture wars in American society. Despite Trump's electoral success, achieved through substantial support from white evangelical voters and the backing of prominent Christian Right leaders, Williams estimated that his presidency "may portend a potential breakthrough in the nation's polarizing culture wars" ("Could Trump"). This is because Trump's presidency would not provide substantial opportunities for the Christian Right to advance their agenda at the national level, but rather would allow them to do so at the state level. Williams argued that the disputes over conflicting visions of national identity would be significantly reduced if once-controversial issues such as school prayer or abortion bans were not the subject matter of constitutional amendments, as Christian Right leaders have been striving for since the late 1970s. In other words, many saw the state-rights approach to abortion and other non-economic domestic issues as a way to move beyond the culture wars. However, a mere four years later, after reflecting on the riots in Portland, Oregon, and the heated rhetoric of the presidential campaign, *Wall Street Journal* opinion columnist Daniel Henninger concluded that the culture wars had returned ("The Culture Wars"). In a similar, perhaps even bleaker vein, James Davison Hunter, an American sociologist who has been exploring the ideological polarization of American society for more than thirty years, claims in his most recent work that "the crisis of democracy in America is apparent to all" and that "Americans themselves are increasingly fragmented and polarized, unable even to converse across their differences, much less find a way to work together in solidarity to address what is a common crisis" (*Democracy* 3). The following text aims to show that the ways in which history is selectively interpreted or adapted to serve cultural, political, or ideological needs

(such as the idea of creating a "usable past") have recently become the driving force of this polarization.¹ Specifically, I argue that there are two main narratives currently clashing in the construction of a usable past. The first is the foundationalist narrative, emphasizing the US founders and constitutional principles as the stable foundation of national identity. The second narrative emphasizes injury and woundedness; rather than celebrating foundational ideals, it focuses on the stories of hardship endured by the oppressed and illustrates how national identity has also been shaped by resistance to these foundational principles. While these competing narratives are not new, there has been a noticeable shift in the intensity and prominence of the latter narrative, driven by feelings of anger, frustration, and powerlessness. A collective reckoning with historical grievances can be a natural aspect of emancipation and may even serve as a unifying force in pursuing a cohesive national identity. However, an excessive focus on these grievances could ultimately impede this effort, deepening divisions and escalating tensions in the ongoing culture wars for the future.

The Cultural Logics of the Culture War in America

By its very definition and layers of meaning, a culture war lends itself to varied interpretations. The vagueness and abstractness of this concept also leads one to question whether there is such a thing at all. A democracy that respects cultural diversity will always be an arena where different opinions, ideologies, or political visions clash. The notion that the polarization of the public discourse is only a myth, that the culture war in America is a fabrication, an exaggeration embraced by journalists and politicians, is justifiable.² However, it cannot be denied that modern democratic societies, including the United

States, are intrinsically polarized. In recent years, the crisis of American democracy, which is now often discussed in connection with the ideological and social conflicts polarizing American society, seems to stem more from deep-rooted cultural disagreements than from conflicts of a pure political, economic, ecological, or religious order. These cultural disagreements reflect a broader clash of values, norms, and worldviews in American life. In other words, while scrutinizing contemporary tensions and conflicts in the US political ecosystem, it is vital to focus on cultural patterns or structures that provide a meaningful and comprehensible picture of the world around us.

Initially, the term “culture war” referred to the German compound *Kulturkämpfe*, a term used in 1870 to describe a new religious war in Germany, which was an effort to impose the cultural dominance of Protestantism against the Catholic minority (Bell 80). Later, between the end of the German Imperial period and the beginning of Nazi Germany, it also described a conflict between the left- and the right-wing orientations in political affairs. However, since *culture* offers manifold definitions, conflicting visions refer not only to a society’s political ideologies, attitudes, and habits, but also to the habits and traditions that constitute a belief and value system, a *Weltanschauung*. From this perspective, Terry Eagleton perceives culture wars as one of the features of postmodern world politics. According to him, culture wars take place on three fronts: they may refer to quarrels between elitists and populists, between the guardians of a canon of literature or culture and those who embrace the inclusion of marginal groups. In addition to this polarity between the “highbrow” and “lowbrow” notions of culture, culture wars also include clashes over identity issues and, lastly, over the commercialization of culture (i.e., the “culture industry”) (64).

As previously mentioned, a structural approach to culture offers the most rigorous and informed analysis. James D. Hunter contends that developing a hypothesis about cultural wars requires moving beyond the interpretation of culture as the mere norms and values held by individuals. Instead, culture should be understood as “systems of symbols and other cultural artifacts, institutions that produce and promulgate those symbols, discourses that articulate and legitimate particular interests, and competing fields where culture is contested” (Hunter, “The Enduring” 20). Assuming that culture has deep structures that define “the background frameworks of understanding, knowledge, interpretation,” Hunter introduces the concept of “cultural logics,” i.e., logics of necessity, the basic frameworks of implicit meanings that constitute a limited range of ways of seeing the world and that, on the surface, make “particular political arrangements understandable or incomprehensible, desirable or reprehensible” (Hunter, *Democracy* 12). It is also at this deep and implicit level that the culture war has unfolded. By examining the cultural logics at play—in addition to considering power structures and ideological roots of the Left-Right political divide—we can better understand the intensity of conflicts over issues such as religious freedom, family, identity, education, or interpretation of the past (Hunter, *Democracy* 10-13). Hunter’s conceptualization of cultural wars in the US, articulated through the framework of “cultural logics,” centers on the axis of the sacred/secular divide. In his seminal work *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, which popularized the concept of “culture war” in the early 1990s, Hunter argues that the divide in the American public life, rooted in fundamental differences in worldviews and moral authority, develops around the dispute between two moral visions: the “traditionalist or orthodox,” which prioritizes traditional moral and religious values, and the “progressivist,” which upholds moral relativism and the redefinition of

traditional values (*Culture Wars* 42). In his follow-up analyses, Hunter, however, shows that there is more to say when unraveling the roots of culture war. In addition to an old axis of tension and conflict anchored in political economy and class interest (the Left-Right divide) and the axis of the traditionalist/progressivist divide, one can find another conflicting orientation—"transcendental or foundationalist" and "empiric or proceduralist."

This dichotomy concerns different perceptions of reality, different understandings of what is real and what is a source of moral authority and legitimacy in this reality. While one side of the cultural divide is animated by "a sense of ultimate reality rooted in transcendent authority," the other side puts a premium on personal experience, rejecting "the possibility of fixed standards outside of human experience" (Hunter, "The Enduring" 11). The difference between these camps primarily revolves around the foundationalist belief that ruling regimes seek justification from sources outside the power of political actors. Traditionally, these sources may include God, the laws of nature, or a permanent human nature. In contrast, proceduralists believe that the legitimacy of power arises solely from the political decision-making process. This practical approach acknowledges pluralism and highlights that the notion of political justice is not defined by transcendental truths, but through a voluntary agreement among individuals to abide by a set of rules promoting peaceful coexistence. These different and competing impulses through which to organize personal and collective existence refer to more fundamental shifts that transcend the borders of the United States. They penetrate to the very conditions of modern and late modern existence in Western civilization. That is the reason previous explanations, based on economic and class interests, as well as on demographic paradigms analyzing gender, education, place of residency, age, or

occupation, fall short in elucidating cultural disparity and lack of solidarity or social cohesion in fragmented and polarized public discourse. If we accept the premise underlying Hunter's claim that American culture is "undergoing a realignment" that generates tensions and conflicts played out "at the deepest and most profound levels . . . , not just at the level of ideology but in its public symbols, its myths, its discourse" ("The Enduring" 13), the significance of the secular-sacred divide, which is endemic to the desacralized experience of modern life, is undeniably valid and essential and remains central in the debate over the very meaning and purpose of the core institutions of American civilization.

An invaluable guide to the cultural conflicts in America throughout the twentieth century is Andrew Hartman's *A War for the Soul of America*. The title directly echoes the phrase famously articulated by Patrick Buchanan in his 1992 Republican National Convention speech: "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America" ("Culture War Speech"). Buchanan, who served as an assistant and consultant to US presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan, and who is known for his staunch conservative views, framed these cultural conflicts—prominent in national discourse during the 1980s and 1990s—as a battle for the nation's moral and spiritual identity. Tracing the development of the deep-rooted divisions over American identity, values, and education from the 1960s onward, Hartmann argues that the culture wars in America revolve around conflicting normative conceptions of Americanism, with the sixties as the crucial decade in ushering in "an intense new form of polarization that hinged on the very question of America and its meaning" (10). Unlike the secular-sacred divide, these debates center on differing visions of national identity, values, and what it means to be

American, fueled by neoconservative backlash against the New Left ethos of the sixties, as well as anxieties over the emergence of a “new class” at the expense of cultural, social, and moral standards that characterized mainstream American society during the 1950s.

This “new class,” which Hartman likens to Lionel Trilling’s “adversary culture,” was characterized by skepticism toward established institutions and conventions, often promoting alternative perspectives that challenged the status quo. Primarily composed of left-wing professionals, intellectuals, and educators, as well as progressive avant-garde artists and cultural elites who emerged in the post-World War II era, this “new class,” characterized by its progressive values and influence over cultural institutions including universities, media, and the arts, played a pivotal role in advancing the liberal and secular ideals of the 1960s and 1970s. While normative Americanism of the fifties was built on the ideas of American Exceptionalism, the Protestant ethic, traditional family structures (i.e., the nuclear family), gender roles, and a strong emphasis on conformity, patriotism, and religious faith, promoting the idealized image of a homogeneous, middle-class suburban life, the sixties saw the birth of many liberation movements aiming at forming an entirely new, more inclusive national identity that would foreground the diversity of culture. Embracing the premises of secular humanism and identitarian politics, the members of the “new class” saw themselves as being on the side of barricade advocating for a more pluralist vision of America. Since it was the rise of the New Left and the countercultural movements in the sixties that sparked a conservative backlash, another “background framework” of the culture wars unfolds along the axis of a normative vision of a unified moral order versus a pluralist vision that embraces diversity within society (Hartman 10).

However, within the context of American society, the clashes between traditionalist and progressive, foundationalist and proceduralist, or conservative and liberal camps over different cultural ideals, beliefs, or philosophies reveal a much longer history—they may even be traced as far back as excited debates about the Alien and Sedition Act of 1798, perhaps the first large-scale clash over immigration policy in the United States. Of course, there were other controversial issues, such as the abolition of slavery, the prohibition of alcohol, and the reading of the Bible in public schools, to name just a few. It cannot be denied, at least in the context of the United States, that the cultural logics of liberal democracy—particularly its emphasis on political pluralism and democratic inclusion—have provided a fertile ground for culture wars to flourish. It is also important to note that these conflicts are dynamic. Whereas, for example, in the 1980s, the culture war significantly revolved around sexuality, family, and religion, the 1990s witnessed a new set of conflicting visions underwritten by issues such as globalization, immigration, and multiculturalism (Jenkins 17). This conflict was often accompanied by growing tensions between universalist or trans-national and nationalistic modes of existence, or between a cosmopolitan mindset and one embracing local community (Hunter, “The Culture War” 1309).

In sum, the cultural divide in America is deeply rooted in two interrelated yet distinct tensions. The first revolves around the conflict between sacred and secular values, driven by the ongoing secularization of American public institutions. The second centers on the limits of acceptable pluralism, on the amount of diversity a society can accommodate without fracturing its sense of shared identity and purpose. While these frameworks are often interconnected, the cultural conflicts of the early twenty-first century increasingly focus on issues of diversity (Hartman 302). Efforts to reinterpret or reframe the American past, particularly the debates about how

history is taught in US schools, are part of this ongoing transformation. As Jonathan Zimmerman puts it in his study *Whose America? Culture Wars in Public Schools*, in the twenty-first century, public schools—particularly through the dispute over the nature and content of history textbooks—have become a major battlefield of culture wars in America (220). A clear example of this is the controversy over the 1619 Project, which aims to challenge the dominant narrative found in American history textbooks. The following section will examine how this project reflects the disagreements over the dominant views of the American past, and consequently over setting criteria for US history standards in public schools—issues that continue to fuel debate over the core of the American national narrative.

The 1619 Project and Progressive Interpretations of American History

Although there are no mandatory national history standards that are binding for all individual states, controversies over historical learning and the content of the public school history curriculum—which is intended to foster civic identity and shared values—have become a significant point of ideological and political contention. Defining what constitutes the American national narrative, the American story, is inherently elusive. The category of national narrative itself is ambiguous and suggests multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, certain competing paradigms reappear throughout history.

A stimulating and insightful analysis of the sets of values which underscore the American narrative is offered by William Chafe. Challenging traditional views, Chafe frames the American narrative as a series of moral contests, each reflecting the nation's struggle to reconcile its democratic promises with historical injustices. Chafe argues that from the first moments of the

founding of the British colonies in America, this narrative has been shaped by a fundamental conflict between two competing paradigms: one emphasizing the primacy of communal well-being, the other prioritizing the ethos of self-reliance and unfettered individual freedom as the guiding principles of political and social life (11, 12). Later, this conflict was intensified by westward expansion, which prioritized the values of individual liberty and self-reliance. The tendency is antisocial. Free enterprise, or laissez-faire individualism, and an emphasis on freedom, equality, the pursuit of happiness, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of political expression echo the right to unbridled individual freedom, recognizing self-determination, resilience, and opportunity to forge one's path as the founding principles of the US. However, Chafe's analysis largely applies to trends in American political life, and less so to the framework of history wars. Within the contested space of high school history textbooks, a more significant dispute revolves around the idea of American exceptionalism and the changing boundaries of legitimate pluralism (Hartman 266-74).

Although the viewpoints in American history have evolved over time—shaped by changing immigration policies and progressive agendas—a strong tendency remains in textbooks to celebrate, or even glorify, the positive roles of the Founding Fathers and other eminent WASP nation builders. From the 1920s onward, textbooks began to show greater respect for differentiated communities, reflecting Horace Kallen's call for cultural pluralism (Jařab 132). In his 1924 essay "Americanization and the Cultural Prospect," Kallen argues that schools should recognize and celebrate the talents and achievements of the entire ethnic panoply of America, expanding the historical canon beyond traditionally revered figures and events (132). Kallen wrote this text in response to a proposed bill in New Jersey that sought to ban "un-American" history textbooks

from the classroom. These so called “un-American” texts, which incorporated culturally plural voices, were criticized for allegedly belittling America’s illustrious patriots and undermining the concept of American exceptionalism—the belief, deeply rooted in America’s founding principles, that the United States is inherently unique and, in terms of moral and spiritual purity, superior to other nations, its people chosen by God to pursue a mission to promote democracy, freedom, and progress (Zimmerman 11, 12).

Concerns that the shift toward a culturally pluralistic approach in representing American history could undermine a tale of national greatness and unbroken progress were raised throughout the twentieth century. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, debates emerged around textbooks with perceived pro-collectivist and anti-capitalist biases. These controversies persisted through the Cold War, peaking in the early 1950s with accusations that some study materials promoted world government and pro-collectivist internationalism. Subsequently, under the considerable influence of the civil rights movement, demands for desegregated textbooks began to emerge. This movement aimed to provide African Americans with the opportunity to accurately portray the role and contribution of former Black slaves and Black Americans. By the 1990s, debates over history education had become entangled in the broader culture wars (Zimmerman 225). Zimmerman highlights how these disputes have repeatedly shaped public schools, with history textbooks and curricula becoming battlegrounds for competing ideological visions of the nation’s past. He cogently posits that, starting with the emergence of “new history” in modern scholarship in the early twentieth century, progressives aimed to include marginalized perspectives, while conservatives pushed back against what they perceived as historical revisionism that undermined national unity and patriotism. Triggered by the

History-Social Science Framework put into effect in California in 1988, the 1992 New York Report on multicultural textbooks, and the 1994 publication of National Standards for United States History, a government-sponsored project that aimed at developing comprehensive national history standards, the divide between the traditional, celebratory, patriotic approach to American history and a more critical and inclusive view of the past grew wider. Advocates of the celebratory perspective argued that the “progressive” interpretation of American history promotes “victim status,” paying too much attention to slavery and the displacement, exploitation, and denigration of Native Americans by white men (Symcox 93, 95).

A similar dispute emerged in 2010, with controversies surrounding social studies revisions in Texas and a ban on ethnic studies in Arizona. In addition to a heated debate about who has the authority to determine the story of the entire nation, the crux of the dispute was about diminishing the role of acclaimed heroes and denouncing “America’s ugly narrative.” In Texas, conservative advocates of the traditional interpretation viewed it as almost sacrilegious to portray the Founding Fathers in social studies programs as slaveholders. They sought to incorporate God into history courses, introduce new Confederate heroes, and emphasize conservative political actors such as Ronald Reagan and the Moral Majority. The decision to ban ethnic studies in Arizona originated from the concern that such programs foster resentment toward specific racial groups and allegedly favor group rights over individual rights (Jensen 85).

The clash between conservative and liberal perspectives resurfaced in 2014 during revisions to the Advanced Placement US History (APUSH) curriculum, the curriculum often regarded as the closest thing to a shared national history curriculum (Zimmerman 220). In Jefferson County, Colorado, controversy erupted when

conservative school board members deemed the revised APUSH materials too progressive and anti-American. In response, the Jefferson County School Board came up with its own proposal to revise the APUSH curriculum, emphasizing “patriotism, the free market, and respect for authority” (Tampio 30). Although this dispute was significantly motivated by political partisanship, it illuminated a changing landscape in history education. The core of the dispute centers on how to approach the more troubling aspects of American history, often referred to as “difficult history,” and how to interpret the past through conservative or liberal perspectives. The current division concerning American history largely stems from the struggle to find a reasonable balance between two competing educational approaches. One approach emphasizes patriotic education, celebrating American exceptionalism and the nation’s achievements. By contrast, the other seeks to contextualize historical hardship and injustices while highlighting talents and the contributions of various ethnic groups and races.

The ongoing, unresolved nature of this dispute is likely to continue provoking strong emotions in the future. This is evident in the efforts of the 1619 Project, developed by Nicole Hannah-Jones and a group of contributors from the *New York Times* and the *New York Times Magazine*. Their goal is to reframe American history by placing “the consequences of slavery and contributions of black Americans at the very center of our [American] national narrative” (Silverstein 4). In addition, the Project aims to educate Americans about their history while challenging the dominant narrative in American history education. In her introductory essay, Hannah-Jones argues that the founding documents of American democracy were inherently flawed since these documents reflected the prevailing attitudes, institutions, and business practices of their time,

failing to recognize enslaved Black individuals as citizens or grant them basic human dignity:

The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence, approved on July 4, 1776, proclaims that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of black people in their midst. “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” did not apply to fully one-fifth of the country. Yet despite being violently denied the freedom and justice promised to all, black Americans believed fervently in the American creed. Through centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country live up to its founding ideals. And not only for ourselves—black rights struggles paved the way for every other rights struggle, including women’s and gay rights, immigrant and disability rights. (Hannah-Jones 16)

The Project, marking *in its title* the arrival of more than twenty enslaved Africans in Virginia on August 14, 1619, seeks to include new figures and voices into the old story—this, in general, has become a major driving force behind many progressive revisions of American history. Moreover—and this is the reason why, out of numerous attempts to retell the past, this project stands out—it takes a critical view of traditionally revered events and people in American history, suggesting that the current form of American democracy is not the result of the Founding Fathers’ wisdom, but rather of Black defiance and resistance. According to Hannah-Jones, the true perfectors and master builders of American democracy are not the prominent figures of WASP culture, such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, who are traditionally

regarded as champions and defenders of American democracy. Instead, she argues that the true defenders are African Americans. Through their tireless fight for freedom and civil rights, they have significantly contributed to American society's ability to fulfill its founding ideals (Hannah-Jones 17).

By offering such a radical, thought-provoking interpretation of pivotal moments in American history, the 1619 Project has induced a conservative backlash. Critics argue that the project is driven more by progressivist ideology than by an impartial quest for knowledge. On the one hand, the project zeroes in on neglected events and voices from the American past, bringing to light some grim practices such as slave breeding and the rape of Black slave women in the South; on the other hand, as Sean Wilentz has emphasized, when dealing with founding principles and founding mythology, it sometimes builds on false assertions that undermine otherwise praiseworthy intentions ("A Matter"). Historical accuracy regarding the causes that impelled the British colonies in America to dissolve the bonds with the British king and declare independence has been questioned, for Hannah-Jones downplays "a long train of abuses and usurpations," which are enumerated in the text of the Declaration of Independence. She suggests that the rebellion against "absolute despotism" might not have resulted in the separation if some of the founders had not been aware that they could thereby protect the institution of slavery: "Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons some of the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery" (Hannah-Jones 18). Seen from this perspective, Hannah-Jones concludes, America as a nation was founded not as a "democracy" but as a "slavocracy." Similarly, Hannah-Jones discusses the Civil War and the long history of resistance to white supremacy from the Reconstruction Era to

the civil rights movement, further exploring her basic assumption that, from a historical point of view, Black Americans were predominantly viewed as an obstacle to national unity. Furthermore, the project points out that the legacy of slavery and rampant discrimination against Black Americans is not a closed chapter and that black racism, although officially prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "runs in the very DNA of this country" (Hannah-Jones 21).

Counterprojects and Competing Visions of a Usable Past

The effort to insert more people of color and more women into the dominant narrative has shaped most disputes over history since the 1920s; however, the 1619 Project has introduced into the discussion the question of not just who should be included in the story, but of what the inclusion of other voices and issues does to the dominant narrative. It is this challenge that initiated a response by many academic historians, who pointed out factual errors.³ In addition, the development of an educational portal, supported by the Pulitzer Center, sparked significant backlash among right-wing and conservative audiences as the project aimed to equip educators and librarians with materials that could help them offer a more comprehensive representation of history to their students.⁴

Criticism of the 1619 Project can be divided into two categories: direct and indirect. The former explicitly targets the 1619 Project's framing of American history, especially its curriculum and reading guides, activities, and other resources, which were designed for teaching American history in high schools. The latter challenges other "divisive concepts" including racism and sexism, calling for legislative measures that would limit or ban activities labeled "critical race theory," as well as discussions in schools that touch on sensitive topics that could make students feel guilty

about belonging to a group of oppressors of any kind based on race, ethnicity, sex, or gender. In this broader context, the 1619 Project has become an imaginary lightning rod for a larger culture war crusade against critical race theory, which has been framed by conservative lawmakers and activists as a radical ideological agenda infiltrating schools (Goldberg 3).

Despite this intense backlash, the actual classroom implementation of the 1619 Project has been relatively limited. According to the Pulitzer Center's annual report released in 2019, more than 3,500 classrooms in the United States used the materials (2019 Annual Report). Five school systems adopted the project district-wide (Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Washington, DC; Wilmington, Delaware; and Winston-Salem, North Carolina). With a total of 35,195 high schools in the United States (including middle and junior high schools), this figure represents less than ten percent ("How Many Schools"). Nevertheless, the controversy over the project prompts an inquiry into the underlying reasons for the significant public opposition, which has led to legislative actions in forty-four states. From the publication of the 1619 Project to the present, eighteen states have passed laws or issued executive orders restricting how teachers can discuss "divisive concepts." Some of them—Florida, Arkansas, and Wisconsin, to name just a few—prohibited lessons or training that promote "indoctrination" or critical race theory, or any other training that teaches that "individuals are inherently racist or sexist because of their race or sex" (Schwartz). Most of the legislative measures of the opposition to the 1619 Project seek to ban schools from promoting either theories seen as anti-American or theories that put a premium on the idea that individuals bear collective responsibility for acts committed by members of their race and that racist or patriarchal societal structures and systems create social problems. The direct bans on the 1619

Project were introduced only in a few states—Alaska, New York, Rhode Island, and Florida—and, with the exception of Florida, none have been enacted into law.

In response to state legislation, the 1619 Project has initiated the creation of various counterprojects supported not only by a political party, but also by nonprofit and nonpartisan organizations and think tanks. One such initiative is the 1620 Project, created by the National Association of Scholars. While it claims to be a nonpartisan organization that "fosters intellectual freedom, searches for the truth, and promotes virtuous citizenship," many of its activities and policy positions reflect conservative viewpoints. This makes it a significant player in the ongoing culture wars surrounding education and historical interpretation. As a nonprofit organization committed to reforming higher education by upholding the standards of a liberal arts education, the NAS initiated a critical examination of the 1619 Project, debunking it as pseudohistorical propaganda that, according to Mary Grabar, seeks only to divide American society (see *Debunking*). The proponents of the 1620 Project refuse the 1619 Project's revision of history by questioning the idea of collective responsibility. They reject the perspective that American history is primarily a narrative of systemic racism that emphasizes racial oppression while downplaying the pursuit of liberty and justice—principles that are often regarded as core values. This is also why the project links the commitment to intellectual freedom to 1620, particularly to the Mayflower Compact, as a more fitting conceptual starting point for understanding the origins of American self-government, embracing American exceptionalism. In his article "1619 Again: Revisiting the Project's Troubled Past," Peter Wood, the president of the NAS and the chief initiator of the 1620 Project, articulates deep concern about the grave faults and the potential harm it may inflict on America:

The six biggest errors in my view are (1) that slavery was somehow new to America in 1619; (2) that the American Revolution was fought to preserve slavery from the threat of emancipation; (3) that Lincoln was a racist intent on separating blacks and whites; (4) that the blacks “fought back alone” to secure their rights; (5) that Plantation slavery was the foundation of American capitalism; and (6) that the nation’s entire history is best seen as a struggle by blacks against white supremacy. (Wood, “1619”)

This criticism arises because the 1619 Project asserts that it is grounded in historiography, not fiction. The rhetoric of the 1620 counterproject builds on a call to curb the spread of what its authors perceive as a new, off-the-wall reframing of history running against well-established facts. Even though the backlash is primarily driven by the pursuit of accuracy and the professional duty to safeguard history against misinterpretation or abuse, it firmly subscribes to the belief that such a progressive, unorthodox interpretation of the past undermines American democracy and, by extension, the West itself. Argumentation unfolds in the spirit of a lost cause narrative that builds on the assumption that Western civilization is dying and the American mind is declining because of a retreat from, as Allan Bloom puts it, “the truth or superiority of American principles and our [American] heroes” (56). While acknowledging that oppression, exploitation, and racism have shaped the American past, the 1620 initiative is not focused solely on issuing a warning. Instead, it aims to promote discussions on how these darker aspects can be successfully integrated with the founding principles and ideals on which American democracy was founded and continues to evolve.

A considerably more radical and therefore controversial rhetoric defines the 1776 Commission (also called the 1776 Project), an advisory

commission appointed one year after the publication of the 1619 Project by Donald Trump. The then-American president established the commission to call for a centralized approach to the national curriculum, supporting so-called patriotic education that promotes positive stories and images of the country’s founders. In addition to teaching students the basic skills needed for functioning in society, this approach to education emphasizes that educators have another essential task to fulfill: “to convey a sense of enlightened patriotism that equips each generation with a knowledge of America’s founding principles, a deeper reverence for their liberties, and a profound love of their country” (1776 *Report* 17). The 1776 Project highlights the founding principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence including the rule of law, freedom, an individual’s right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and the importance of constitutional restraint. According to this logic, the 1619 Project is considered a threat to American principles because it prioritizes the rights of groups over the rights of individuals. Progressivism, affirmative action, and identity politics are perceived as a departure from the focus on equality of outcome. This is evident, for example, in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that prioritize the full participation of all individuals, especially those from historically discriminated, underrepresented, or marginalized groups. While the proponents of DEI initiatives perceive them as necessary correctives to social injustices, the critics of DEI efforts argue that any preferential treatment of individuals on the basis of race, ethnicity, and other classifications such as sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or national origin undermines meritocracy and individual rights. Furthermore, similar to the claims made by the 1620 Project, the emphasis on identity-related issues in response to historical wrongs and injustices reinforces the notion that American society is divided into two groups: oppressors and oppressed. This perspective

may imply that individuals are inherently racist, sexist, or paternalistic based solely on their race, sex, or ethnicity.

The Report released by the 1776 Commission has faced significant criticism for its insufficient consultation with professional experts in American history and its overt alignment with partisan politics, which reduces American history to a political document focused primarily on hero worship, glorifying positive and inspiring tales and images of the country's founders. At the same time, another project emerged, inspired by the events and ethos of 1776—the 1776 Unites Project. This Black-led movement of scholars and grassroots activists recognizes the unquestionable state-building role of the founding fathers and perceives them not as pragmatic slaveholders, but as educated men and visionaries who, in their actions, managed to transcend the limits of their time and showed America, and the world, the way to freedom and democracy. As one of the project's initiators, Robert L. Woodson, writes, this counterproject aims to dispel the myth that the current divisions in American society are the result of the past or that current social unrest is directly related to slavery. While acknowledging that there is racial discrimination, 1776 Unites dissents “from contemporary groupthink and rhetoric about race, class, and American history that defames our national heritage,” maintaining “a special focus on voices in the black community who celebrate black excellence and reject victimhood culture” (Woodson, “1776 Unites” 6). In other words, America should not be defined by its past failures; instead, it should be defined by its promises, for people are prone to overcome difficulties and challenges when they learn about inspiring victories that are possible despite long-lasting and systemic forms of oppression (Woodson, “Introduction” 20, 21).

Although America may be flawed, 1776 Unites asserts that the nation's promise—the Spirit of '76, which forged core values such as self-determination, equality, resilience, and the opportunity to create one's own path—remains relevant and continues to strengthen American national identity. It also maintains that America functions as a source of inspiration, reinforcing the notion that the nation continues to serve as a symbol of hope for people worldwide. Seen from this perspective, curricula should narrate stories of resilience and upward mobility, drawing from both the past and the present. Priority should be given to promoting American ideals such as the pursuit of happiness and the equal opportunity to succeed given hard work and personal responsibility and stories that show examples of self-determination, self-reliance, and human resilience in overcoming adversity. Therefore, 1776 Unites, although consisting primarily of African American scholars, journalists, and activists, rejects narratives that foreground historical grievances of African Americans, emphasizing instead their achievements and contributions. One example of this perspective is their critique of proposed reparations that the federal government would pay to African Americans for historical wrongs (Black 75). According to 1776 Unites, critical race theory, by focusing on a racial power struggle between oppressors and oppressed in history curricula, negates the principle of self-reliance. The initiative argues that this framework promotes the idea that the federal government must treat its citizens as innocent, infantile victims who need protection from an irredeemably immoral world that would destroy them, if it were not for government intervention (Mitchell 127).

Conclusion

In his book *The Death of the West*, published at the outset of the new millennium, Patrick

Buchanan warns that “an older America is passing away, and a new America is coming into its own” (6). Claiming that there are two countries and two peoples within the United States, he echoes his earlier claim that a battle for the soul of America is raging in American society. The division persists, although the idea of a final encounter regarding the nature of American identity seems exaggerated. Nevertheless, there is a noteworthy shift in the rationale behind culture wars. Whereas conflicts between worldviews unfolded in the twentieth century on the axis of the sacred and the secular, of Godly versus Worldly America, more recent conflicts have evolved around contradictory approaches toward the interpretation of American past, becoming a battle over stories, values, and symbols from the past that will form American national identity. The disputes over control of the nation’s history within cultural institutions and educational facilities are not novel; their origins can be traced back to the 1920s, when new trends in history textbooks emerged,⁵ advocating for greater scholarly focus on the pluralistic nature of American society, often at the expense of “Anglo-biased” viewpoints. In the present, several recent controversial attempts to establish national history standards through shaping curricula show that public schools have become a major culture war battlefield.

Compared with tensions and conflicts that fueled culture wars until the 1990s, the dispute over history extends beyond the traditional clash over different moral visions and orientations, the “orthodox” versus the “progressivist” and the “foundationalist” versus the “proceduralist.” While the orthodox moral vision and foundationalist approach tend to be more resistant to change, viewing the achievements and principles passed down from the past as valuable references for addressing present challenges, the progressivist vision and proceduralist approach are prone to see the fixed standards and norms from the past as constraints that hinder further

social progress and emancipation (see Hunter, “The Enduring” 14-15). Recent efforts to reframe American history via new teaching materials, however, show that another salient distinction exists between the patriotic (exceptionalist) vision and the woke vision that promotes the narrative of injury and woundedness. The tension between those two visions raises the question of whether educators should focus on promoting positive stories from the past, instilling in each generation a profound love for patria and a deep reverence of core values and founding principles, or whether they should aim to commemorate the oppressed, draw attention to past wrongs, and deconstruct power structures that may perpetuate social injustice.

At the heart of this conflict, intensified by the 1619 Project initiative, lies the ongoing struggle over what constitutes a usable past for contemporary America. Is history meant to serve as a unifying force, reinforcing social cohesion through shared national myths and ideals, or should it function as a tool for reckoning with past injustices, fostering a more critical and inclusive national identity? Despite acknowledging the fundamental cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary America, as well as perceiving slavery and segregation as despicable acts of inhumanity, the various camps promoting either the 1619, 1620, or 1776 narratives differ regarding what they consider a usable past. The 1776 and 1620 narratives espouse American exceptionalism, individualism, and self-reliance and argue for the commitment to the promise of America’s founding principles. On the other hand, the 1619 camp places the consequences of slavery and racial discrimination at the very center of the national narrative. The latter partly echoes the post-1950s plea for the repudiation of “white skin” privilege and Western civilization’s legacy, including the retreat from required reading of classical works in the university curriculum or the acceptance of collective responsibility for acts committed in the past by members

of a dominant culture, race, or national group. Ultimately, the clash of 1619 and 1776 initiatives indicates that the dispute over history is, to a great extent, a contest over identity, values, and the moral legitimacy of the nation's past. The past is not just something to be remembered; it is a tool used to shape the present and future. It is evident that America has yet to fully reckon with the lasting impacts of white supremacist ideology, as embodied in slavery and Jim Crow laws. Collective self-understanding, which is grounded in deep-seated frustration over past injustices, is a common and natural part of emancipation. However, the strategic focus on historical grievances, particularly through the emphasis on victimhood and resentment in initiatives such as the 1619 Project, may finally undermine the quest for a cohesive national identity in America, an endeavor that has been both contested and inspiring and auspicious since the founding of the US.

Notes

1. The idea of a “usable past” was articulated by the American literary critic Van Wyck Brooks in 1918. In his study *On Creating Usable Past*, he sought to find usable models in the American past that would be meaningful for contemporary cultural production. Although Brooks’s concept originally refers to another moment of polarization (WWI and the struggle for cultural self-determination with or without European influences), it aligns with the broader debate on the nature and content of national identity.

2. In the context of the United States, see, for example, Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*.

3. See Wood, Bynum, McPherson, Wilentz, and Oakes and their letter to the *New York Times* editors (“We Respond to the Historians Who Critiqued The 1619 Project”).

4. While assessing the accuracy of the critique regarding the 1619 Project’s portrayal of American history is beyond the scope of this article, I aim to examine the public discourse surrounding it. This includes exploring reactions and counterprojects, as well as considering implications of this dispute for shaping American cultural identity.

5. See Arthur M. Schlesinger and his *New Viewpoints in American History* (1922), focusing on the influence of immigration on American history; Mary and Charles Beard and their *Rise of American Civilization* (1927), interpreting the Civil War primarily as a class-driven conflict between northern capitalists against southern planters.

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WHEN GOD SPOKE AMERICAN:

Norwegian Pentecostalism and the North American Healing Revival, 1947–57

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Abstract: This article tells the story of the Norwegian reception of the North-American postwar pentecostal healing revival. The 1950 visit by two American faith healers was a major media event. Although the healing revival was perceived as “too American” by many, including many pentecostal believers in Norway, the article shows that Nordic-American pentecostal groups played a role in launching the movement in the first place. Moreover, it argues that the American faith healers visiting Norway in 1950 shaped Norwegian public debate and understanding of religious freedom.

Keywords: pentecostalism, faith healing, culture wars, transatlantic exchange, migrant churches, Americanization, post-war period

Henry Lilleborg, a Minnesota-born factory worker in a small town outside Oslo, played a small but significant role in facilitating the growth of a new kind of religious culture.¹ Between the summer of 1948 and April 1949, Lilleborg reportedly translated four thousand letters from Norwegian into English before forwarding the letters and a cash donation to the US. The letter writers hoped to reach American faith healer William Branham, who would in return pray for them and send over prayer cloths for them to put on their aching bodies.² For these petitioners, it was clear that God was busily working through this American and his peers. By October 1949, Lilleborg claimed to have translated more than 10,000 letters. His volunteer work had exhausted him so much that he was looking for another line of work. Were he not to, he feared it would shorten his own life. Startled by this confession, the editors of *Friend of the Home*, the pentecostal magazine that facilitated the letter exchange, urged believers to pray for Lilleborg in return for his great service to the faithful.³ His workload, however, seems only to have increased after Branham and another star of the healing revival, William Freeman, visited Oslo in 1950. To lighten Lilleborg's workload, *Friend of the Home* encouraged people to "[b]e short and clear."⁴

The letters and the prayer cloths were what Oral Roberts, the pentecostal faith healer who would later outrank his peers, called "points of contact" between the believer and God.⁵ But as Andrew Atherstone, Mark Hutchinson, and John G. Maiden have pointed out, they were also important in uniting believers across geographic divides. They were the "'stuff' of charismatic renewal," and connected believers across the Atlantic, along with testimonies and books published by pentecostal institutions.⁶ Such transatlantic exchanges of religious ideas and practices were not new.⁷ But the end of the Second World War launched a new wave of religious and cultural exchange as American political and cultural

dominance increased and Europeans embraced, adapted, or rejected American cultural exports. The healing revival was a part of these dynamics. Pentecostalism in Norway had, despite its roots in the US, developed relatively independently from American churches, and the postwar era reignited the relationship across the Atlantic. The healing revival was perhaps the most hotly debated topic at its time, not only among pentecostals, but also in secular settings including newspapers and Parliamentary debates. Whether reading the Oslo-based newspaper of record *Aftenposten* or regional and small-town newspapers on the political left and right, Norwegians—secular or not—could not avoid the phenomenon. And yet the healing revival remains an understudied moment in transatlantic history that deserves more attention.⁸ The healing revival raised questions about what constituted true religion and what was just crass American sensationalism, questions that have remained at the heart of the discussion of pentecostal faith practices into the present.

This article is also informed by scholarship on postwar American evangelical missionary efforts. American pentecostal groups had for decades, like the broader evangelical movement, invested in foreign missions. The Second World War only intensified their drive to spread their faith. Along with fundamentalists and the nascent neo-evangelical movement, postwar faith healers were eager to make sure that as many lost souls as possible would be saved until what they believed was Jesus's imminent return. Nonetheless, this was not just a matter of American cultural and religious imperialism. Rather, as recent scholarship on American missionary efforts has shown, religious actors in different countries have been active participants in this exchange.⁹ This article adds to this discussion with a case study on how North American faith healers and Norwegian pentecostal believers dealt with the healing revival. It argues that religious culture was not one-directional. Rather,

people on both sides of the Atlantic contributed to the distribution of new faith practices.

There is no shortage of primary sources for this project. Pentecostal and other free church groups have produced an impressive amount of print material. In the 1940s, there were about a dozen pentecostal and holiness magazines, encompassing a broad range of groups of various statuses.¹⁰ This article examines the flagship *Korsets seier* (*Victory of the Cross*, first named *By-posten*, which has run from 1904 to the present), which was established by the founder of the Norwegian Pentecostal Movement, the English-born preacher Thomas Ball Barratt, and remains a highly influential periodical. This is paired with *Hjemmets venn* (*Friend of the Home*), published by small-scale preacher Michael Wåde, and *Profetrøsten* (*Prophetic Voice*), published by the independent but highly influential preacher Carl Rein Seehuus. In addition, I have used the National Library of Norway's extensive collection of digitized newspapers, which has provided ample examples of secular coverage of the healing revival.

Transatlantic Responses to the Healing Revival

Freeman and Branham were part of a group of young, charismatic American preachers who attracted thousands of people to their meetings. Branham and fellow revivalists such as Oral Roberts, A. A. Allen, and Gordon Lindsay grew out of the fringes of North American pentecostalism. These independent preachers joined a network centering on the magazine *Voice of Healing* (established in 1948). This network overlapped with the restorationist and apostolic Latter Rain movement that emerged in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. Both groups challenged the more established networks such as the Assemblies of God, which had co-founded the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942

and joined forces with groups that had openly disdained the ecstatic worship services in pentecostal churches. The faith healers rejected the NAE and its kind. Instead, they wanted to restore the early days of pentecostalism. As they saw it, signs and wonders—not staid bureaucracy—would save the church.¹¹

Norwegian pentecostalism was similarly at a crossroads after its leader Thomas Ball Barratt passed away in 1940. After the war, questions of what it meant to be pentecostal and how such a community should be organized—if at all—rose to the forefront. Like fellow believers in the US, they were split between those who wanted to “evangelicalize” their tradition by developing a formalized structure and by attaching themselves to other churches and those who wanted to restore the spirit of the early revivals.¹² But the healing revival was not necessarily a good fit for a Norwegian context. As the historian Nils Bloch-Hoell notes in one of the first substantial scholarly treatments of pentecostal theology, Freeman and Branham represented a practice that had been an anomaly in pentecostal churches in Norway. Such public healing events were an American import, Bloch-Hoell concludes, and they were seen as something alien.¹³

The history of Norwegian and North American pentecostalism, however, gets more complicated when we consider pentecostal churches in Norwegian immigrant communities in North America. Such churches existed in the tension between Norwegian traditions and the entrepreneurial culture of the postwar era. Norwegian-American immigrant pentecostal churches in the US were in many cases more or less transplants of churches at home. The Salem Gospel Tabernacle in Brooklyn, New York, for instance, had close ties with the Filadelfia Church in Oslo and “owed virtually nothing to the already flourishing American Pentecostal movements of that period.”¹⁴ These churches were scattered

around ethnic enclaves across the country. Letters printed by *Victory of the Cross* testify to an intricate network of largely ethnic churches from Brooklyn on the East Coast, via smaller and larger communities in the Midwest and Mountain West, to Seattle on the West Coast. Many writers noted that arriving in Brooklyn, Chicago, or Tacoma often felt like coming home. But many observed that the churches seemed less Norwegian as second- and third-generation immigrants were assimilated into American culture. Although some still understood Norwegian and other Nordic languages, it was clear that Norwegian-American pentecostal believers had looser ties to their ethnic churches. Many of them would seek out inspiration from anglophone churches. News traveled fast, and believers in Norway soon read reports of what they believed could be a new outpouring of the Spirit. In January 1948, for instance, a little over a year after the outbreak of the healing revival and Latter Rain movement, *Victory of the Cross* printed reports about a revival “as in the days of the apostles” taking place in Calgary, Alberta, following Branham’s preaching. A member of Oslo’s Filadelfia Church, the most influential church in Norwegian pentecostalism, testified in a short piece to having seen healing of the sick during meetings that attracted thousands.¹⁵

Scandinavian pentecostal networks were central to the rise of the healing revival.¹⁶ Many Norwegian and other Scandinavian believers had found a spiritual home in the Independent Assemblies of God (IAG), a denomination founded by Swedish immigrants. Reflecting the congregationalist structure of the Swedish Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches, the IAG was loosely organized, which allowed for religious experimentation. It was also this group that became central in spreading the healing revival across the US and Canada, and from there to Europe and beyond. The Chicago-based IAG preacher Joseph Mattson-Boze played a key role in promoting independent preachers in the US

and abroad. Born in Sweden, Mattson-Boze had migrated to the US in the 1930s to pastor an IAG church in Chicago. He remained in touch with the old country; he was a close friend of Lewi Pethrus, the leader of the Pentecostal Alliance, who had visited and pastored in Chicago’s Swedish community. When Mattson-Boze encountered the new revival, he had been quick to offer his network to preachers promising healing and salvation after he had returned to Chicago. His church hosted meetings for faith healers like William Freeman and Latter Rain preachers like James and Phyllis Spiers on several occasions. As editor of the *Herald of Faith*, Mattson-Boze spread the message about the new revival to believers across the continent. As he saw it, he could facilitate cooperation between established churches and what many of them saw as a gang of rowdy and sensationalist preachers.¹⁷

After the war, Mattson-Boze returned to Scandinavia for a visit. While he was in Oslo in 1947, he shared that he was acutely aware of the competition from other preachers. In particular, he warned against the fundamentalist group Youth for Christ that had visited Oslo one year earlier with a young and yet largely unknown Billy Graham on the team. Such groups could lead to superficial religiosity, Mattson-Boze warned, and not enough of the religious awakening needed in the country.¹⁸ Back in the US, Mattson-Boze introduced Pethrus to Freeman, who again invited the faith healer to Europe.¹⁹

Swedish and Swedish-American preachers were instrumental in spreading the revival. But what did influential Norwegian pentecostal leaders think? A preacher, pastor, and editor, Rein Seehuus was the son of a second-generation Norwegian-American woman who had returned to her family’s home country, married, and eventually joined the ranks of pentecostal believers. The revivalist spent lengthy periods in the US and authored long reports back to readers in

Norway about religious and political developments in the *Prophetic Voice*. In 1949, Seehuus wrote a series of letters from America, in which readers could follow him on his travels from one Norwegian-American enclave to another, from Brooklyn, NY, through the Upper Midwest to Tacoma, Washington. One thing that stood out to him was how he was met with respect as a preacher. Even his relatives would call him Reverend or Pastor, he noted. Americans held religious leaders in high regard, he explained, because of the separation of church and state and the lack of a priestly class in the country.²⁰ But he was not always happy with what he saw. Seehuus admired the higher material standard of living in the US. He warned, however, that these material goods created complacency and hindered the work of the Holy Spirit in the country. American churches were spiritually dead, he complained. As he saw it, there were no real differences between the church and the unchurched.²¹

The reports changed in the fall of 1949 after Seehuus reached Chicago, where he attended Wilbur Oglivie's and William Freeman's faith healing meetings. He was awed by what he saw. Freeman's preaching was nothing special per se, Seehuus had first concluded. Freeman was not a particularly charismatic person who came with new theological insights. But then he saw what happened when Freeman started praying for the sick. Freeman commanded evil spirits to leave the sick body, Seehuus reported, in a way he had never seen before. Describing the event, the preacher alluded to the words of Jesus in Matthew 11. The blind could see. The deaf could hear. The lame could walk. Not only that, he wrote, people who looked like they were nearing death rose to walk out of the meeting completely healed. Disease was Satan's work, he now had come to realize, and God wanted all those who were suffering to be healed. Seehuus concluded that there was a new outpouring of the Spirit.²²

Leaders of the Pentecostal Movement also sent their reports back home. The head of its publishing house J. G. Bratlie wrote a series of letters from his trip across the US. In September 1949, a Norwegian audience could read his thoughts on Oral Roberts's ministry. Bratlie had traveled to Tacoma, Washington, to experience the healing revival for himself. He was impressed—everything was bigger in America, it seemed. The tent used for the meetings, Bratlie wrote, could seat 4,500 people. It was packed every night, he wrote, and more than two hundred people had been saved at the meetings after listening to Roberts's powerful sermons and watching him pray for people to be healed. The Americans were also *professional*, he noted. The healing services were meticulously organized, he explained. Each night, the revival team would hand out cards so that those seeking healing could fill them out to provide information about their health issues. He could not say all of them were miraculously healed, but he concluded that some had been. Bratlie had sat on the stage close to the preacher and could observe the events close-up. He had no reason to doubt them.²³ The magazine followed up on Bratlie's account with a lengthy report from Roberts's revival in Minneapolis. This had been even larger, readers would learn. As many as 60,000 people attended the meetings, with about 5,000 attending each night. The reporter noted Roberts's ability to discern the Spirit. Never had he seen anyone gifted in the same way.²⁴ God was on the move, it seemed, and God moved through these Americans.

Others were not equally convinced. Pastor and *Victory of the Cross* journalist Erling Strøm had attended a meeting with Roberts and had been impressed by his preaching, but he was not so sure about Roberts's claims. Perhaps his journalistic instincts made him hesitant to conclude. Since he had not observed the reported healing himself, Strøm declined to say much about the preacher's powers. "There were instances that

seemed somewhat curious," he noted, but he could not confirm what had happened.²⁵ His skepticism toward new forms of religious practice was evident in his next letter, where he brought up the healing revival's sister movement, Latter Rain. He had left the West Coast for Chicago, where he attended the largely Scandinavian Independent Assemblies of God's annual meeting, that year hosted by Mattson-Boze. Strøm had met Norwegian and Norwegian-American friends there, and he noted that understanding the Latter Rain movement had been at the center of their conversations. Quite a few had rejected the movement, Strøm reported, and he admitted to being among those critical of it.²⁶ Earlier that fall, he had attended and preached at the General Council of the more evangelical-oriented and organized Assemblies of God in Seattle.²⁷ During this meeting, the denomination discussed the Latter Rain phenomenon. Eventually, they concluded that Latter Rain teachings on spiritual gifts and specially anointed prophets and apostles were unsound.²⁸ Strøm seemed to agree. He was more interested in the ways the nascent postwar evangelical movement operated. Earlier the same year, he had visited Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, a historically fundamentalist school a few miles south of the Swedish neighborhood of Andersonville, a center for Scandinavian pentecostalism in the area. Strøm had met Einar Christiansen, from Drammen, Norway, who headed a department at Moody, and who had given Strøm an overview of their work. Strøm was impressed. Moody students were given a thorough biblical education, he wrote, combined with practical evangelizing tasks to prepare them to win souls for Christ.²⁹

Such admiration of the Moody Bible Institute reflected an identity crisis of sorts among at least some Norwegian pentecostal believers. The editor of *Victory of the Cross* Martin Ski shared his thoughts on how to fit his faith tradition into the broader stream of Christianity. It had not been

possible for Thomas Ball Barratt to fit the early Pentecostal Movement into a broader evangelical community, Ski suggested. Rather, Barratt had had to find his own way. Yet Ski seems to have found hope in that even though the Pentecostal Movement represented a separate stream of faith, all water led to the same ocean. Ski, it seems, wanted reform and reconnection with evangelicalism writ large, and not a restoration of the movement that set them apart.³⁰

Stateside pastors were also worried that Freeman would bring an unhealthy theology to Oslo. Pastor Arne Dahl of the Salem Brooklyn Tabernacle shared his thoughts in *Victory of the Cross*. There was a new wind blowing in the US and in Canada, Dahl wrote. But he was not convinced that the "American methods" used during those meetings—which he did not fully describe because he had not observed them closely himself—would harmonize with the more conformist and conservative tone common in Norwegian and Norwegian-American pentecostalism. Just because something was new and exciting, he noted, it need not be good or godly. "It's not all gold that glimmers," Dahl warned.³¹

With Freeman's meeting approaching, leaders were more willing to take one step at a time. Pastor Osvald Orlie, who would later go to medical school and become a medical missionary in Congo, was hesitant about concluding too soon.³² In a piece originally written for *Victory of the Cross*, readers of *Friend of the Home* could learn about Orlie's thoughts on the upcoming visit. Orlie was a little disappointed that Freeman could only stay for two days. It would have been better, he wrote, if the faith healer had spent some time in the country ahead of the meetings to preach the Gospel and lay a foundation for his healing meetings. But he understood that Freeman's schedule was hectic. Orlie, however, expressed concern that people would pay too much attention to the faith healer himself. Freeman, he reminded readers, was merely a

vessel for God's power in the world. Only Jesus could perform miracles, he wrote, and if believers kept their eyes on Jesus, they would not believe in vain. Orlien noted that some observers, Americans and Norwegians alike, had questioned the results of the healing revivals reported in the US. Still, he trusted God to heal the sick and was willing to give the American healing preachers a chance.³³

The secular press was less willing to do so. Newspapers on the left and the right, across the country, reported from Freeman's campaigns in Sweden as they prepared for his coming visit to Oslo. At a time when many Europeans resisted American power, several observers noted that the faith healers represented a crass, American religious culture unfit for a Norwegian context. Most reports were indirect. But the conservative newspaper, and Norway's paper of record, *Aftenposten* published accounts from a journalist who had traveled to Gothenburg, Sweden, to attend Freeman's meetings in person. Freeman was a sly salesman who could trick anyone into buying just about anything, journalist Henning Sinding-Larsen thought. "If he had stretched [his arms] over a fridge," he wrote, "it would be hard not to buy it." Freeman's gestures made the journalist think of American catalogs where both consumer goods and personal development were being advertised. Sinding-Larsen was worried about the goods being sold in the meetings. Faith, he noted, should ideally be a private matter. Freeman's healing ministry, however, could threaten public health, and Sinding-Larsen suggested that future meetings should be stopped.³⁴

Public health was a concern for many. Already before Freeman made it to Oslo, there were potential problems ahead. Swedish parliamentarians tried unsuccessfully to deny him entry to the country.³⁵ During his stay in Sweden, Norwegian newspapers reported that the faith healer claimed to heal people from tuberculosis and

cancer.³⁶ Some reported that Freeman and Mattson-Boze had been interrogated by the police and that they had been denied entry to Finland.³⁷ Such news caught the attention of the then-head of Norway's public health services Karl Evang. He questioned whether faith healers should be allowed to practice in Norway and argued that Freeman's healing sessions might go against the 1935 quackery law about who could treat patients. The law required that anyone intending to cure someone of bodily ailments have an appropriate medical degree. The question that the border authorities would have to ask was whether a faith healer was a quack or whether this person, first and foremost, acted out their religious faith. Faced with this dilemma, the border authorities noted that there was little they could do to stop "a religious sectarian" with an American passport from entering the country, even if the religious practices he represented were alien to Norwegians.³⁸

The Faith Healers Arrive

Into this fray, William Freeman arrived in Oslo in late February 1950 with his Swedish-American mentor and translator Mattson-Boze. Martin Ski calculated that about 15,000 people attended the meetings, which lasted three days and were so crowded that the police had to be called upon to help manage the masses. It was clear that the organizers had gone to great lengths to avoid any accusations of scandalous behavior. They allowed journalists to cover the events—as long as they did not bring their cameras—and emphasized how calm, civil, and organized everyone's behavior had been. Freeman was not a loud and chaotic preacher, Ski wrote, but spoke of healing and salvation in the name of Jesus to existing and new believers peacefully and gracefully. Yet Ski admitted that he had mixed feelings about it all. Freeman's methods were so new, he said, that he had yet to conclude what he thought

about them. He described a preacher who had urged people to come up to him and shake his hand as they walked past him. He wanted evidence that it was of God, and asked for people who had experienced healing to send letters to the magazine with testimonies of their healing.³⁹

Many spirit-filled Norwegians seem to have believed that these Americans were gifted with special powers from God that demanded their interceding between the person seeking healing and God himself. In the aftermath of Freeman's meetings in Oslo, one woman testified in *Victory of the Cross* to having been fully healed after writing to Freeman two years prior, and in return she received a prayer cloth to lay upon her body.⁴⁰ A young girl claimed later to have been partially healed from polio during Freeman's meetings. She and her family believed she could have been fully healed had Freeman had more time in Oslo. They now hoped the forthcoming meetings with William Branham would complete the process.⁴¹ To this family, the physical presence of a faith healer seemed to be what mattered. Others believed that the power to heal could be transferred to a material vessel. After Freeman had left the country, a woman brought her son to the Filadelfia Church to ask them to pray for her son, who had a serious sinus infection. As soon as she entered the church, she wrote, she had been handed an envelope with one of Freeman's prayer cloths. It had originally been intended for someone else, but she felt lucky to be handed what was now a leftover cloth. She took it home to her son, she wrote, and immediately the boy had been healed.⁴² Regardless of what they believed about whether a faith healer had to be present or whether their powers could be transferred, these believers saw God as working in majestic ways through American faith healers.

The secular press thought otherwise. Newspapers across the country published commentaries and reports on the events.⁴³ One of the

most colorful commentaries came from *Dagbladet*, an Oslo-based culturally radical newspaper with a history of combatting Christian conservatism. "Freeman was nothing but a mediocre magician," Norway's foremost magician and circus director Arne Arnardo declared on the cover. Arnardo had been present at one of Freeman's meetings and concluded that the techniques the faith healer had used were the same as those used at his circus. People would believe just about anything while under his spell, the magician explained, and Freeman had done the same when people were convinced about being healed. The only difference between the two, he noted, was that while a hypnotist working for a circus had to pay taxes on their income, a faith healer could raise money and claim religious exemption from the tax authorities. The circus director jokingly suggested that he and some fellow hypnotists and magicians should create their own religion and reap the benefits of laxer tax regulations.⁴⁴

Although the secular press had been critical, some believers concluded that the overall coverage had been better than expected. A *Prophetic Voice* writer noted that the secular newspapers seemed disappointed in how "little American" Freeman had been. Instead of the circus that they might have expected, he noted, the meetings had been calm and well organized. The only extraordinary thing about the meetings, he wrote, was that actual healing had taken place. He had seen it with his own eyes.⁴⁵ Others complained about an anti-American tone in some of the coverage. In *Friend of the Home*, Florentinus Hällzon lamented the unfair treatment of the faith healers. In particular, he was bothered by the radical press' dismissive tone regarding the fact that Freeman was an *American*. When did being American become a negative thing? he asked. He complained that the press had little but praise for Black American athletes succeeding in international sports and for authors, actors, and musicians visiting Europe as cultural

ambassadors. Eventually he concluded that the faith healers' Americanness was not the problem. The Norwegian media was particularly hostile towards American *religion* and to anyone professing faith in a God who meets people in their everyday lives and cares about their conditions.⁴⁶

Things were about to get worse for those concerned with ridicule in the press. Shortly after Freeman and Mattson-Boze had left for Copenhagen, newspapers reported that hotel staff in Gothenburg had found dozens of unopened letters from believers in Freeman's room. Daily, the staff noted, letters from hopeful believers had arrived at the hotel, but the letters often ended up discarded. The preachers' host church in Gothenburg suggested that outsiders had gotten hold of the letters to take out any money in the envelopes, and they had requested that the police investigate the issue, but the police deemed that an unlikely explanation.⁴⁷ Readers could easily draw the conclusion that the preachers had defrauded innocent believers. The question of whether the American faith healers were fraudsters trying to make money on naïve Norwegians lingered. Many must have wondered, were the American preachers simply entertainers out to make easy money from desperate believers?

The question would become even more acute as a new troupe of healing evangelists arrived. William Branham, accompanied by *Voice of Healing* editor Gordon Lindsay, as well as Jack Moore and Ed Baxter, visited Norway, Finland, and Sweden in the spring of 1950. Branham, a friend of Mattson-Boze, arrived in a country in flux over how to deal with grand claims of healing. Karl Evang of the health authorities asked the police to prevent Branham and his team from holding healing services when they arrived a few weeks after Freeman had left the country. With the police present in the church, Branham followed the orders, or at least the letter of them. Branham

did so, although he had the support of a broad section of the Norwegian church establishment. They feared that the ban could affect more conventional practices. Their concerns were not theoretical. The Norwegian Parliament discussed the case as a test of the limits of religious freedom in the country. Simply put, the visit from Branham urged Norwegian parliamentarians to examine whether praying for the sick was merely a form of quackery or whether it was a legitimate part of religious practice.⁴⁸

Martin Ski may have had mixed feelings about the faith healers, but he was clear in his views on how the government handled the issue. To him, the case had broader implications for religious freedom. Norway was a Christian nation and land of religious freedom, but, he noted, had Jesus himself ministered in the country under the prevailing rules on healing, his ministry would have been illegal. To the health authorities, he wrote, "Jesus must have been a quack."⁴⁹ In the same issue, he republished an editorial from the Christian newspaper *Vårt Land*. The newspaper suggested that Evang, a social democrat and member of the Labor Party, had let his anti-religious ideology cloud his judgment when faced with the American faith healers and described Evang as a serious threat to religious freedom in the country.⁵⁰

Some secular media personalities showed their support, however. In *Aftenposten*, Phillip Rønneberg argued that Branham's experience was relevant for people outside the healing revival as well. He pointed out that praying for the sick was a key part of the Church of Norway's mission to care for the Norwegian people. Other churches routinely prayed for divine intervention without government meddling. The Catholic church, he noted, deemed praying for the sick a sacrament and routinely had foreign clergy perform their religious tasks on Norwegian soil without interference from Evang and his colleagues. It was a matter of hypocrisy, Rønneberg complained,

that the health authorities would stop an American preacher from doing something others had done before. Rønneberg more than hinted that the real reason for Evang's hostility toward American preachers was political. He was critical of how people in Evang's left-wing circles had complained about how Americans tried to keep Communists out of the country. Norwegian authorities had not stopped such agitators from spreading their message, he wrote, even though they had declared communist activities treasonous. To Rønneberg, it was absurd and hypocritical to see American preachers being stopped for doing something that otherwise would be protected by the religious freedom clause in the Constitution.⁵¹ Even the prominent bishop Eivind Berggrav of the Church of Norway, a central figure in the postwar international ecumenical movement, expressed his support for pentecostals against what he perceived as an attack on religious freedom. The police had responded to scandalous reports from Freeman's meetings, he believed. The police simply could not generalize about faith healers on the basis of such reports. Each case had to be treated individually, he argued.⁵² As he saw it, proper procedures were a dire concern to the Christian faith itself.⁵³

Principled support on constitutional grounds, however, did not necessarily translate to acceptance of the healing revival. A low-church Lutheran magazine criticized the Pentecostal Movement for using crass and sensational methods to market Freeman's and Branham's visits. Such methods, the editor wrote, made Christians partially to blame for a wave of mockery from secular outlets. In other words, to them it was not a question of whether God could or would heal the sick, but how, as well as who was involved and in what context the healing would take place. Ski thought the criticism was unwarranted and unfair. It was primarily the *secular* press that had created a circus out of the visit, he argued. Ski sought support in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Faced with criticism, Ski

pointed to Paul's advice to not be overly critical about messages from prophets, "but test them all; hold on to what is good." The Pentecostal Movement had been on solid biblical grounds, he believed, when allowing Freeman, Branham, and their troupes to preach and pray in their churches.⁵⁴

The Afterlife of the Healing Revival

In the following years, the limits of religious freedom remained a thorny issue in Norwegian politics. Those fearing government intrusion into religious life rejoiced in 1955, when Parliament decided *not* to outlaw faith healing. A writer in *Victory of the Cross* interpreted this as a vote of confidence in religious communities to make sensible choices, but he remained doubtful of the claim that God had anointed the American visitors with special powers to heal. Reports from the *Voice of Healing* were exaggerated, he argued, and he cautioned against healing campaigns in an American fashion.⁵⁵

As in the US, postwar faith healing practices were rejected by the pentecostal establishment.⁵⁶ Some were concerned with the schematic healing practices of Branham, Freeman, and similar figures. Osvald Orlien, by then a medical doctor and missionary, lectured about "Miraculous Healing" at the 1955 World Pentecostal Conference in Stockholm. He voiced a clear disapproval of the faith healing movement. As a believer, he held onto the belief that God could perform miracles, but he warned against teachings that connected sickness to a lack of connection with God. To be sick was not sinful, listeners heard, and humans should refrain from making grand claims about God's will. "God has no fixed way of healing," he concluded, "we cannot harness the Almighty."⁵⁷

Church polity was also a concern. Martin Ski worried about the effect emphasis on individual

prophets and apostolic leaders had on the healing revival and Latter Rain groups. *God's Word* should guide the churches, he argued, not prophecies from anointed leaders. It was time to move away from the spectacular and toward a more sober Christianity and collaboration with others. "Pentecostal believers in Norway," he had written already in 1949, "are not at a crossroads, they are walking the Way together with others who believe in Jesus."⁵⁸ In the mid 1950s, Ski represented Pentecostal believers in negotiations with the government over the legal status of churches outside the Church of Norway. It seems to have been important to him to get his church recognized as a free church in line with other churches. As he saw it, it was important to reform the existing structures and work within the system, rather than revolutionize or challenge existing churches.⁵⁹

In 1957, the Pentecostal Movement broke with the restorationist faith healer Aage Samuelsen, who had been inspired by Freeman, Branham, and their troupes. A proud working-class preacher, Samuelsen was eager to revolt against the staid religion of "fancy folks." After the much-publicized split, Samuelsen went on a preaching tour in the US. Upon his return, a news reporter noted his American style; Samuelsen's clothes and entire demeanor were those of a slick American preacher. He wore "a nylon shirt and a garish tie" and he had brought back an electric guitar that he used to reignite the energy from the meetings he had experienced stateside.⁶⁰ To Samuelsen, the US was a model society for religious freedom. He praised the US for having no restrictions on freedom of speech and for allowing faith healers to freely reach the masses even via new media outlets.⁶¹ The boisterous preacher stayed in touch with his American peers. In 1961, his magazine *Maran Ata* announced a revival in Oslo with eighteen American preachers including Branham, Gordon Lindsay, and Kenneth Hagin, as well as the South-Af-

rican preacher David Du Plessis.⁶² Samuelsen remained steeped in controversy. In 1966, a film loosely based on Samuelsen, *Broder Gabrielsen*, told a story of a charismatic preacher who lured innocent youths into religious fanaticism by playing American rock music on his electric guitar. Samuelsen eventually mellowed and enjoyed some mainstream approval, and by the time he passed away in 1987, there were plenty of others who provoked believers and non-believers with their theology and practice.

On both sides of the Atlantic, pentecostal entrepreneurs have created a thriving network of churches and institutions that preach health—and increasingly—wealth as evidence of faith. Such preachers have built a church structure based on charismatic preachers anointed to lead. In the US, preachers such as Lance Wallnau and Sean Feucht preach a message rooted in the theology developed in the postwar years. This theology has manifested staunch support of President Donald J. Trump, based on the belief that he is chosen by God to lead the nation. In Norway, the late world evangelist Aril Edvardsen, Christian TV mogul Jan Hanvold, and telephone healer Svein Magne Pedersen have drawn inspiration from the postwar healing revival throughout their careers. Independent pentecostal pastors Åge Åleskjær and Enevald Flåten built on the health and wealth theology of Kenneth Hagin when they established their churches in Oslo and Bergen in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, many Norwegian believers have been inspired by the Bethel Church in Redding, California, and the Australian Hillsong movement, both legacies of the postwar healing and Latter Rain movements. In each iteration of pentecostal influence from across the Atlantic, questions of whether believers can harness the Spirit of God to heal and create prosperity, and whether God anoints certain people for leadership and ministry, have challenged pentecostal believers. And more often than not, secular media and non-pentecostal observers have

deemed those beliefs and practices incompatible with Norwegian culture. They are plainly *too American*, many conclude. But a closer look at the history of the healing revival complicates our definitions of North American and Scandinavian cultures. If God spoke American in the postwar healing revival, it might have been with a Scandinavian accent.

Notes

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1. A note on terminology: the Pentecostal Movement (Pinsebevegelsen) refers to the largest Pentecostal network/denomination in Norway and the equivalent of the Assemblies of God in the US. The Pentecostal Movement (upper case), then, is distinct from the broader terms *pentecostalism* and *pentecostal*. These terms include the Pentecostal Movement and, for instance, the Free Evangelical Assemblies (Frie evangeliske forsamlinger), Maranatha, Christian Community (Kristent fellesskap), various Oneness groups, and the charismatic or neo-pentecostal groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Lower-case pentecostalism/pentecostal, then, refers to the broader movement on both sides of the Atlantic. This article mainly deals with the tension between those supporting the healing revival and the Pentecostal Movement, as well as its American equivalents.

2. Branham rejected Trinitarianism and held other theological views that broke with Pentecostal theology, but he still found a home in independent pentecostal circles. Kvalvaag, "Endetidens budbærer," 61; Lilleborg, "En hilsen til dem som ønsker pastor Branham's forbønn," *Korsets seier*, July 10-20, 1948, 408.

3. "Mellom venner," *Hjemmets venn*, November 19, 1949, 5; "Takkebrev fra helbredelse," *Hjemmets venn*, Oct. 29, 1949, 4.

4. "Vær kort og klar" and "Brev til pastor Branham," *Hjemmets venn*, May 10, 1951, 4. In 1960, Lilleborg still acted as Branham's contact person in

Norway. "Strøket," *Haugesund Dagblad*, 1960, Jan. 27, 2.

5. Roberts, *If You Need Healing, Do This*, 32.

6. Atherstone, Hutchinson, and Maiden, "The Evidence of Things Unseen," in *Transatlantic Charismatic Renewal, c.1950-2000*, Atherstone, Maiden, and Hutchinson, eds., 11.

7. Alegre, Aronson, and Gustavson, eds., *Revising Pentecostal History*; Stensvold, "Paving the Way for Pentecostalism," in *Charismatic Christianity in Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, Moberg and Skjoldli, eds., 25-48; Bloch-Hoell, "Norwegian Ideas of American Christianity"; Breistein, "De angloamerikanske vekkelsene og deres innflytelse på norsk frikirkelighet," in *Forankring og fornyelse*, Schuff, Salvesen and Hagelia, eds., 209-31; Stensvold, "Amerikansk vekkelseskristendom i Norge," in *Norges religionshistorie*, Amundsen, ed., 349-54; Gollner, "Evangelize-Americanize."

8. Bundy, "Visions of Apostolic Mission," 486; Alvarsson, "The Development of Pentecostalism in Scandinavian Countries," in *European Pentecostalism*, Kay and Dyer, eds., 19-40; Aardal, *Pinsevekkelsen i Norge*; Dahl, *Fra seier til nederlag*, 142; Lie, *Fra amerikansk hellighetsbevegelse til moderne norsk karismatikk*, 161-67.

9. Recent examples include Swartz, *Facing West*; Balbier, *Altar Call in Europe*; Maiden, *Age of the Spirit*.

10. Lie, *Norsk pinsekristendom og karismatisk fornyelse*, 144-45.

11. Harrell, *All Things Are Possible*; Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 203-21; Williams, *Spirit Cure*, 55-80; Bowler, *Blessed*, 41-76.

12. Alvarsson, "The Development of Pentecostalism in Scandinavian Countries"; Mikaelsson, "The Norwegian Pentecostal Foreign Mission," in *Charismatic Christianity in Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, Moberg and Skjoldli, eds., 62-64; Moberg and Skjoldli, "Introduction," in *Charismatic Christianity in Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, Moberg and Skjoldli, eds., 9-10.

13. Bloch-Hoell, *Pinsebevegelsen*, 369-73; Halldorf, *Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World*, 172.

14. Johannesen, "The Holy Ghost in Sunset Park," 553.

15. "Som i apostlenes dager," *Korsets seier*, Jan. 17, 1948, 27.

16. Blumhofer's list of supporters of the movement includes Scandinavian names such as A. W. Rasmussen, D. Bruzelius, and Elvar Blomberg. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 210-11.

17. Alvarsson, "Relationer mellan Sverige och USA inom ramen för pentekostalismen" in *Varför reste Lewi Pethrus just till Chicago?*, Alvarsson, ed., 36-42; Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, esp. 203-21; Blumhofer, *Assemblies of God*, n. 51, 403; Malmström, "Han arbetar efter amerikanske metoder," in *Varför reste Lewi Pethrus just till Chicago?*, Alvarsson, ed., 81-137; Halldorf, *Lewis brev*, esp. 244-84; "Philadelphia Church," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1949, 14; "Philadelphia Church," *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 5, 1949, 12; Harrell, *All Things Are Possible*, 109; Colletti, "Lewi Pethrus," 18-29.

18. "Youth for Christ: Et salt i forråtnelsen," *Vårt Land*, May 10, 1947, 1. The Youth for Christ movement received coverage in secular and religious newspapers. Two examples are "Vekkelsesbevegelsen som samler opptil 60.000 mennesker til sine møter," *Dagsavisen*, Aug. 19, 1946, 3; and "Youth for Christ' kommet til Skandinavia," *Dagen*, Apr. 10, 1946, 1. This tension between the primitivist pentecostalism and the fundamentalist impulses was also present in the *Friend of the Home*, which reprinted speeches by and reports about fundamentalist preachers such as Billy Sunday and Dwight L. Moody, along with reports of the healing revival. Billy Sunday, "Dersom Kristus kom til Washington?" *Hjemmets venn*, Apr. 24, 1948, 1, 5; Dwight L. Moody, "Valentine Burke: Forbryteren som ble politikasserer," *Hjemmets venn*, Sept. 25, 1948, 1, 5; William Branham, "Hvorledes Branham fikk helbredelsens gave," *Hjemmets venn*, Aug. 28, 1948, 3, 6; William Branham, "Mitt møte med Herrens engel," 1; "700 sjeler ble frelst i ETT møte," *Hjemmets venn*, Sept. 25, 1948, 3.

19. Halldorf, *Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World*, 171.

20. Rein Seehuus, "Vi suser avsted gjennom hele Amerikas Forente Stater," *Profetrøsten*, no. 10, 1949, 308.

21. Rein Seehuus, "Amerikanere har grunn til å være i godt humør," *Profetrøsten*, no. 9, 1949, 272.

22. Rein Seehuus, "Oppsiktsvekkende begivenheter," *Profetrøsten*, no. 11, 1949, 1. Seehuus sometimes translated pieces from the *Voice of Healing*, such as T. L. Osborne, "Min livshistorie og mitt kall til å be for de sykes helbredelse," *Profetrøsten*, no. 1, 1950, 8-15; T. L. Osborne, "Min livshistorie og mitt kall til å be for de sykes helbredelse," *Profetrøsten*, no. 2, 1950, 38-41.

23. J. B. Bratlie, "På reise i Amerika," *Korsets seier*, Sept. 10, 1949, 406.

24. "Fra Oral Roberts helbredelses-møter," *Korsets seier*, Sept. 24, 1949, 440-41.

25. "Det var noen tilfeller som kunne synes som noe spesielt," Erling Strøm, "Fra det store landet i vest," *Korsets seier*, Oct. 22, 1949, 500.

26. Erling Strøm, "Fra det store landet i vest. 3dje reisebrev," *Korsets seier*, Nov. 12, 1949, 548. Pethrus, who had pleaded for welcoming the Latter Rain movement into IAG, was not mentioned. Halldorf, *Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World*, 169-70.

27. "Diary of a Delegate," *Pentecostal Evangel*, Oct. 8, 1949, 2.

28. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 210-11.

29. Erling Strøm, "Det framsto en mann utsendt av Gud," *Korsets seier*, Jan. 21, 1949, 39-41.

30. Martin Ski, "Kunne pinseveennene ha blitt i den kristne hovedstrømmen?" *Korsets seier*, Dec. 10, 1949, 619.

31. "de amerikanske metodene," "ikke gull alt som glimrer." Arne Dahl, "En hilsen fra USA," *Korsets seier*, Feb. 4, 1950, 69-70.

32. Nilsen, "Osvald Orlien," in Lie, ed., *Norsk pinse-kristendom og karismatisk fornyelse*, 128-29.

33. Osvald Orlien, "Foran pastor Will. W. Freemans besøk i Norge," *Hjemmets venn*, Feb. 10, 1950, 4.

34. "Hvis han strakte dem utover et kjøleskap, ville det vært vanskelig la vær å kjøpe." Henning Sinding-Larsen, "Freeman-feberen kan bli farsott," *Aftenposten*, Feb. 22, 1950, 2.

35. "Freeman gjenstand for interpellasjon i riksdagen i går," *Breviks dagblad*, Feb. 2, 1950, 1.

36. "Freeman kan helbrede kreft og tuberkulose," *Aftenposten*, Jan. 28, 1950, 1, 2-3; "'Mirakelmann' med kone bebuder sin ankomst," *Adresseavisen*, Jan. 26, 1950, 1.

37. "Freeman kom til Norge i går," *Telemark Arbeiderblad*, Feb. 21, 1950, 1; "Pastor Freeman kom uventet til Norge i går," *Aftenposten*, Feb. 21, 1950, 1.

38. "Mirakelmann, religiøst tivoli og reklamema-ker til Norge," *Dagbladet*, Jan. 31, 1950, 2.

39. Martin Ski, "William Freemans besøk i Oslo," *Korsets seier*, March 4, 1950, 130-31, 135.

40. "Helbredet på pastor Freemans møter," *Korsets seier*, May 13, 1950, 297-98.

41. "Helbredet under pastor Freemans møter," *Korsets seier*, March 25, 1950, 181-82.

42. "Helbredet under Freemans møter," *Korsets seier*, April 15, 1950.

43. "Voldsom tilstrømming til Freemans helbredelsesmøte," *Aftenposten: Ukens nytt*, Feb. 23, 1950, 1; Eugen Ludvigsen, "Freeman spekulerer ikke i sugesjon og religiøst svermeri," *Varden*, Feb. 28, 1950, 1; "Svindler eller profet?" *Firda*, March 10, 1950, 1; "Stor skuffelse over bønns-helbrederen," *Lofotposten*, Jan. 28, 1950, 20; "Hundretusener i kollekt-penger?" *Telemark arbeiderblad*, Jan. 28, 1950, 1.

44. "Freeman ikke annet enn en middels dyktig tryllekunstner," *Dagbladet*, Feb. 23, 1950, 1, 6.

45. "...etter avisene å dømme litt for lite amerikansk." Erling Gustavsen, "'Livets gang' om Freeman," *Profetføsten*, no. 4, 1950, 126-29; Erling Gustavsen, "'Livets gang' om Freeman," *Profetføsten*, no. 5, 1950, 133-34.

46. Florentinus Hällzon, "Pressens oppstyr om helbredelsespredikanten William Freeman," *Hjemmets venn*, Feb. 25, 1950, 3.

47. Examples of coverage include "Bønneseidlene ble funnet i hotellets søppelkasse-ulest," *Aftenposten: Ukesnytt*, Feb. 28, 1950, 1; "Bønneseidlene ble funnet i hotellets søppelkasse-ulest," *Ringerikes blad*, Feb. 28, 1950, 1; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Drammens tidende*, July 4, 1950, 6; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Sandefjord blad*, July 6, 1950, 4; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Nordlandsposten*, July 6, 1950, 5; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Harstad Tidende*, July 6, 1950, 1; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Teledølen*, July 8, 1950, 1.

48. Kvalvaag, "'Endetidens budbærer"; "Helbredelses nådegave og kvakksalverloven," *Korsets seier*, May 27, 1950, 314. For earlier discussions of freedom and impulses from the US, see Løvlie, "The Concept of Freedom in Theological and Political Debates in the 1870s," in *Freedom and Migration in a Norwegian-American Context*, Joranger and Clevén, eds., 93-105.

49. "må Jesus ha vært en kvakksalver." Martin Ski, "Helbredelses nådegaver og kvakksalverloven," *Korsets seier*, May 27, 1950, 323-24.

50. Reprint of editorial from *Vårt Land*. "Sensur av forkynnelsen," *Korsets seier*, May 27, 1950, 314.

51. Reprint of text first published in *Aftenposten*. Phillip Rønneberg, "Helbredelse ved bønn' og religionsfrihetens prinsipp," *Korsets seier*, May 20, 1950, 313.

52. "Voldsom reaksjon på politiforbudet mot Branham," *Vårt Land*, May 5, 1950, 1, 8.

53. Eivind Berggrav, "Biskop Berggrav holder kraftig oppgjør med helsedirektorat og politi," *Folkets framtid*, June 3, 1.

54. Martin Ski, "Hvem lager mest bråk?" *Korsets seier*, June 17, 1950, 371-72.

55. Henry Robbestad, "Kvakksalverkomiteen og helbredelse ved bønn," *Korsets seier*, Oct. 22, 1955, 677-78.

56. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 215-16.

57. R. M. Riggs, "Thousands of Delegates Attend the World Pentecostal Conference," *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 17, 1955, 2. A case in point about faith healing's continued importance is that in the mid-1960s, the *Victory of the Cross* ran reports that praised the work of the American faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman. Eyewitness accounts include Ada Vågås Lærum, "En hilsen over havet," *Korsets seier*, Sept. 6, 1967, 4; Agnes Moy, "Stormøte i New York City," *Korsets seier*, Jan. 31, 1970, 7, 11.

58. "Pinsevennene i Norge står ikke på skillevei, de går på Veien sammen med de andre som har Jesu tro." Martin Ski, "Gudsstyre eller folkestyre," *Korsets seier*, May 20, 1949, 14, 211.

59. Ingunn Folkestad Brestein, "Fra religionsmonopol til livssynsåpent samfunn. Frikirkenes rolle i fremveksten av det moderne Norge," in *Transnasjonale perspektiv på sekularitet og religion*, Okkenhaug and Skeie, eds., 45.

60. "dom fine." "nylonskjorte og skrikende slips." Gudbjørn Stedstadvolden, "Galskap i Guds navn," *Dagbladet*, Dec. 14, 1957, 13.

61. "Samuelson hjem fra USA: Vår kirke skal ikke styres av noen regjering," *Morgenposten*, Nov. 5, 1957, 2.

62. "Amerikanske vekkellespredikanter i Oslo," *Maran Ata*, Apr. 1961, 8.

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LOVE IN JOHN WILLIAMS'S *STONER*

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Abstract: This article examines the transformative power of love demonstrated by Stoner's life in John Williams's *Stoner*. Drawing on Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of love, the essay contends that Stoner's life, driven by love, is far from a failure. Stoner's falling in love with literature can be seen as what Marion calls a "saturated phenomenon" in that it makes him transcend himself and have his being defined in relation to the alterity of the other. Stoner's relationship with Katherine Driscoll is significant because it helps to resolve the separation of the mind and the senses caused by his love for literature. Through his relationship with Katherine, in which lust and learning become one process, Stoner recognizes love as an ongoing, continual process that involves the dynamic power of time. Realizing that he has given love to every moment of his life, he gives love even to his moment of death, which ironically becomes the most important moment of his celebration of life. Through his book, he seeks to continue to love loving beyond the moment of death and thereby defy death and non-being.

Keywords: love, literature, saturated phenomenon, the lover's advance, life

When John Williams's novel *Stoner* was published in 1965, it received lukewarm reception. The author himself was shunted into the shadows, along with his works. Although his historical novel *Augustus* (1972) won the National Book Award in 1973, even then he had to share the prize with John Barth's *Chimera*. *Stoner* charts the life of the eponymous William Stoner, a farm boy-turned English professor. Since most of the events of Stoner's life take place in a state university in Columbia, Missouri, *Stoner* has been categorized under the genre of the campus novel. It failed to gain popularity, however, even as a campus novel at the time of publication,¹ and it is difficult even now to find many scholarly discussions of the novel as a campus novel.² After almost forty years of obscurity, the novel was "reissued to dithyrambic praise in 2003" (Mewshaw 17) and has garnered both critical acclaim and sales since then. On its fiftieth anniversary, Gabe Habash discussed the surprising revival of the novel in both the US and abroad, and held that its "chronicle of the life of an ordinary man is perhaps the key to why it's translating so well" (n. pag.). Stoner is indeed as ordinary as he can be in the sense that, like so many people in real life, he lives a life lacking any noticeable achievements. The sort of eulogy offered at the beginning of the novel makes it clear that he has not made a great impact in his profession: "He did not rise above the rank of assistant professor, and few students remembered him with any sharpness after they had taken his courses" (1).

It is true that *Stoner* deals with universal themes of human life such as "[l]ove, commitment, compassion, work, backbone, truthfulness, death" (Reimann qtd. in Habash, n. pag.), and this explains the novel's appeal to many different groups of readers; however, it does not seem sufficient to account for a sudden surge in popularity in the twenty-first century. One possible explanation for the lack of interest in the novel

in the twentieth century might be found in its apparently existentialist bent: despite his undistinguished career and unhappy marriage, Stoner takes full responsibility for his choices and seeks to find meaning in them. The publication year of the novel happened to coincide with the decline of existentialism, which is commonly understood to be during the 1960s. The younger generation of French thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Gilles Deleuze disregarded Sartre, and the rise of post-structuralism shifted attention in literary interpretive practices toward questioning such concepts as universal truth or knowledge.

More recently, however, there has been a stream of criticism that focuses on the existentialist aspect of the novel. Mel Livatino, for example, claims that despite the lack of outward accomplishments, Stoner is "a quiet Job-like hero of the soul" who is "destroyed" but not "defeated" (421). Comparing Stoner with Sisyphus, Michael Sperber argues that "although he fails to thrive, he is not a failure" (2); like Sisyphus, who punishes himself with futile labor, Stoner manages to survive to atone for his guilt for turning away from his parents and their expectations for him. Umi Nur Fadillah also reads Stoner's stoic attitude toward life in relation to Camus's existentialist idea as manifested in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Fadillah holds that a Camusian existential wisdom is most noticeable in Stoner's pursuit of passion in life despite the unobtainability of meaning. In a similar vein, M. Clark argues that Stoner's quiet and nonconfrontational acceptance of "sadness and loss as part and parcel of all life stories, including those of a nation" (21) evinces a new kind of heroism. Although these readings offer insights into how to find meaning in Stoner's undistinguished career and unhappy marriage, they all seem to accept the premise that Stoner's life needs to be redeemed and that his capacity to love does not lead to an important achievement on its own terms. Moreover, it is not clear how and why an existentialist

text can come into fashion again in the twenty-first century when existentialism itself is no longer fashionable.

Departing from a position that interprets *Stoner* mainly as an existentialist work, this essay investigates how Stoner's love of literature exerts a transformative power throughout his life and becomes his salvation. Regarding the author's literary background, Mewshaw states that, just like Stoner, Williams himself "discovered in education and especially in literature a kind of salvation, an almost religious reverence for the word" (19). Mewshaw's essay contends that the author's "almost religious reverence for the word" reflected in Stoner's life is precisely what fascinates readers of the twenty-first century. Pointing out that "over the last decade, literary theory has opened itself up to the 'post-secular turn'" (8), Cassandra Falke argues that there are signs that literary theorists are moving beyond the linguistic confines of (post-)structuralism and renewing their attention to the transformative power, as well as the performative aspect, of a text. Among theorists who offer a philosophical grounding for the discourse of ethics in literary criticism, Falke focuses on Jean-Luc Marion, a French philosopher and Roman Catholic theologian. Although he was taught by such poststructuralist thinkers as Derrida, Louis Althusser, and Deleuze, Marion takes a different position as he investigates the intersection of philosophy and religion, suggesting that love takes precedence over cognition or even being itself in the formation of who we are. Falke builds upon Marion's phenomenological work, positing that reading can fortify our capacity to love by providing us with practice in love's virtues, such as "attention, empathy, and a willingness to be overwhelmed" (2).

The theological slant within Marion's phenomenology insinuates that the novel's rejuvenation in the twenty-first century is far from the outcome of a reactionary trend in readers. In the

first place, *Stoner* is not exactly as "existentialist" as posited by some critics. The novel is rather more in line with the Platonism of Simone Weil or the moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch, both of which are invested in critiquing the egoistic tendency in some forms of existentialism. The notion of "attention," which Murdoch borrows from Weil, is of particular importance in understanding why Murdoch criticizes the Sartrean conception of freedom. For Murdoch, Sartre's concept of freedom isolates the will or the choosing self, making it difficult to understand the consciousness within the categories of concern, care, and responsibility, which are all related to the idea of attention. As Richard Moran points out, attention for Murdoch "is in its very nature answerable to something outside oneself" (174), and this interest in achieving a "clear vision" of someone or something outside oneself as "a result of moral imagination and moral effort" (Murdoch 37) reveals the extent to which the active interaction between subject and object is valued in Murdoch's moral philosophy. Marion's phenomenology of love allows for a theological restoration in the postmodern era by suggesting that "the Divine cannot be subjugated to metaphysics, naturalism, or categories" (McGravey 129), and his investment in examining one's personal interaction with the Divine, especially in terms of love, aligns with Murdoch's emphasis on the importance of coming to a new appreciation of something or someone by attending to them (or it). This similarity between Marion's postmodern theology and Murdoch's idea of attention, which undertakes a critique of existentialism, suggests that *Stoner's* new reception can be understood as the underlying connection with a phenomenological aspect in the novel, rather than an impulse to retrieve the existentialism of the twentieth century.

Drawing on Marion's phenomenology of love, this essay seeks to arrive at a more just assessment of Stoner's achievements in life.³ The shift of attention from what a text *says* to what a text

does in Falke's phenomenology is also useful for understanding how Stoner's love of literature radically transforms his mode of existence. Stoner's entire life is driven by his earnest desire to truthfully live out his own "reverence for the word."⁴ Initially, Stoner falls in love with literature through his encounter with William Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, which launches the process of "a constant change within himself" (26). Falke's theory of reading as a means of strengthening our ability to love is founded upon the premise that "literature operates with an ethical force upon the selves that we are continually becoming" (5), and the "constant change" that occurs within Stoner testifies to the validity of such a premise. In analyzing Stoner's ongoing transformation, instigated by his encounter with Shakespeare, this essay pays particular attention to the changes in Stoner's relationship with time, of which there has been very little discussion among critics of the novel.⁵ Time is of critical importance in the examination of the "constant change" in Stoner because one cannot talk about a transformative process without considering the passage of time. Stoner's capacity to love grows as his relationship with time changes. There are two pivotal events in his life that radically alter his relationship with time: the first one is his falling in love with literature in Sloane's classroom; the second one is his falling in love with Katherine Driscoll, with whom he shares his love of literature. Stoner's falling in love with literature changes his relationship with time by making him *have* time rather than be *in* time. In connecting to Shakespeare, a poet who has been dead for more than three centuries, Stoner is born into time and begins to "*have* past and future" (Brann xiv).⁶ By resolving the separation of the mind and the senses caused by his love for literature, Stoner's love for Katherine helps him recognize the dynamic power of time in constantly shaping and changing his being. Reading Katherine's book, dedicated to him after years of separation, Stoner realizes not only that he has

never stopped loving Katherine, but also that he has given love to every moment of his life. Stoner's act of giving love even to his moment of death fills the only book he wrote with his own life, making it carry on the interaction with the past, the present, and the future.

"Mr Shakespeare Speaks to [Stoner] across Three Hundred Years": Stoner's Birth into Time

Before examining how Stoner's encounter with literature initiates "a constant change within himself," it is necessary to understand why falling in love is such an essential event in one's transformation. For Marion, love is the most distinguishing feature of human beings. Defining a human being as "the loving animal," Marion states, "[m]an is defined neither by the *logos*, nor by the being within him, but by this fact that he loves (or hates), whether he wants to or not" (7). In explicating the idea of love, Marion posits the notion of a "saturated phenomenon." A saturated phenomenon is, roughly speaking, an overwhelming and astounding phenomenon in which much more is given to us than we can take in. In Marion's terms, it is a phenomenon "in which the flux of intuitions always, and by far, exceeds the safety of the forms that I could ever assign to them, as does the intelligibility of the intentionalities that I could ever read there" (14). In other words, in a saturated phenomenon, intuition exceeds intentionality.⁷ Marion postulates love as a representative saturated phenomenon in stating that "the one that I love clearly imposes herself upon me as a saturated phenomenon, whose endless and measureless intuition does not cease to overflow all of the significations that I attempt to assign to her" (210). A saturated phenomenon helps us become aware of our perceptual limitations by forcing us to be exposed to what we did not know before. Being reminded of our limitations by saturated

phenomena can be a good thing in Marion's phenomenology of love because "by shattering the conceptual framework that we try to apply to them, saturated phenomena startle and permanently change us" (Falke 28). By breaking our cognitive framework and forcing us to open ourselves to what is radically other, love as a saturated phenomenon expands our world and even gives rise to a new world.

Stoner has never had his conceptual framework challenged by any external force until he is asked to think about the meaning of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 by Professor Archer Sloane in his Survey of English literature class. Born to a family of poor dirt farmers whose "lives [are] expended in cheerless labor, their wills broken, their intelligence numbed" (110), Stoner has mindlessly been going through the motions every day until this moment.⁸ To Stoner, therefore, Shakespeare is merely "'a poet who is dead'" (10), and neither Shakespeare nor his poetry means anything to him. To bewildered Stoner, Sloane recites the sonnet, making "the words and sounds and rhythms . . . for a moment become himself" (10), and Stoner experiences an electrifying moment of hearing Shakespeare "speak[] to him across three hundred years" (11). What Shakespeare says to Stoner, however, is not something Stoner can comprehend within his perceptual and cognitive framework. This is why he keeps saying, "[i]t means," without completing the rest of the sentence (12). This incomplete sentence does not necessarily signify that what is spoken to him is incomplete or not transformative enough. Shakespeare's sonnet sounds so astounding and dazzling to him that all he understands at the moment is that he is taking in something that exceeds his intentional structures. Stoner's contact with Shakespeare is thus what Marion would call "a saturated phenomenon" in that it awes and overwhelms him, bringing about a fundamental change in him. Emphasizing the significance of

Stoner being forced for the first time to contemplate the meaning of something, Livatino appositely describes what happens to Stoner on that day as "break[ing] into consciousness" (417). Tony McKenna calls Stoner's transformation "an elemental change in being," which makes it impossible for Stoner "to return to the life he has known on the farm with his parents, because it is an existence which has ceased to belong to himself" (191).

The following description of Stoner's reactions to Sonnet 73 illuminates the nature of the change caused by this particular saturated phenomenon:

William Stoner realized that for several moments he had been holding his breath. He expelled it gently, minutely aware of his clothing moving upon his body as his breath went out of his lungs. He looked away from Sloane about the room. Light slanted from the windows and settled upon the faces of his fellow students, so that the illumination seemed to come from within them and go out against a dimness; a student blinked, and a thin shadow fell upon a cheek whose down had caught the sunlight. Stoner became aware that his fingers were unclenching their hard grip on his desk-top. He turned his hands about under his gaze, marveling at their brownness, at the intricate way the nails fit into his blunt finger-ends; he thought he could feel the blood flowing invisibly through the tiny veins and arteries, throbbing delicately and precariously from his fingertips through his body. (11-12)

Deeply impressed by Sloane's recitation of Shakespeare's sonnet, in which the reader becomes mentally and emotionally united with what he reads, Stoner forgets to breathe "for several moments." The suspension of his bodily motions represented by the act of "holding his

breath" intimates that a literary experience for Stoner is a transcendent one in which he escapes the confines of his individual self and becomes connected to a larger life or existence. The reach of his mind extends not merely to three centuries ago, when Shakespeare wrote the sonnet, but also to an eternity that transcends time, and it is no wonder that what he experiences at this moment is described later as feeling "out of time" (15). The shift in Stoner's attention from Sloane to the light from the windows settling "upon the faces of his fellow students" also indicates the expansion of his consciousness by showing how he can now afford to look around and notice the existence of other beings. His perception that "the illumination seem[s] to come from within them and go out against a dimness" reveals another transcendent aspect of his literary experience through its translation of an external phenomenon of the light from the windows into an internal process of his mind. That is, although Stoner's senses tell him that the light he sees comes from outside the windows, his mind tapping into eternity makes it seem as if the illumination comes from within human beings. It is noteworthy that Stoner's transcendent experience, triggered by his encounter with Shakespeare, leads to the separation of his mind and his senses. The functioning of Stoner's mind is so heightened that his mind nearly becomes separated from the workings of his physical senses, and he perceives his hands, fingers, and blood flowing in his body from a distanced perspective as if they belong to someone else. All these reactions intimate that in surrendering himself to forces outside his "own egological sphere" (Marion 102), Stoner experiences a fundamental change in what defines and constitutes his self. He is, so to speak, "born again," into a new being.

One way of explaining how Stoner is "born again" is by looking at the change in his relationship with time. People like Stoner's parents, who

are without past, present, and future, do not distinguish one day from another, and therefore the details of everyday life do not carry any particular meaning to be noticed. However, Stoner's experience of having "a dead poet" come alive for him makes him realize how, in the mind of a self-conscious being with "a self-acknowledged interiority," past, present, and future are all interconnected, and now Stoner is capable of taking notice of and granting meaning to the present moment. "[L]ight slant[ing] from the windows" is a humdrum and commonplace detail of life that often eludes our attention, yet it is of particular importance because it reveals how firmly he is in possession of his present. What is paradoxical about mundane realities of everyday life is that even though they are largely considered insignificant, and thus fail to attract our attention, they constitute the most precious and integral part of our beings: they can be experienced neither in the past nor in the future, but only in the present, the only phase of time when we actually have the power to determine the shape of our lives. In being true to his existence at the present moment, Stoner is able to pay attention to the slanting light from the windows and make it memorable and meaningful. His present experience, then, can turn into a past memory for his future.

Although Stoner's contact with Shakespeare helps him have past, present, and future and see their interconnectedness, it does not sufficiently enable him to grasp the dynamic relationship between time and his being. Stoner's contemplation of the future just before the beginning of his graduate studies offers an effective example of his limited understanding of how time shapes being:

But before William Stoner the future lay bright and certain and unchanging. He saw it, not as a flux of event and change and potentiality, but as a territory ahead that awaited his exploration. He saw it as the

great University library, to which new wings might be built, to which new books might be added and from which old ones might be withdrawn, while its true nature remained essentially unchanged. He saw the future in the institution to which he had committed himself and which he so imperfectly understood; he conceived himself changing in that future, but he saw the future itself as the instrument of change rather than its object. (24)

The passage begins with the word “But” because of the historical context, which is supposed to make Stoner feel uncertain about the future. With the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, most students at Stoner’s university wonder about the possibility of America’s involvement in the war in Europe, as they are “pleasantly unsure of their own futures” (24). Unlike the students around him, Stoner is sure of the future before him. Exhilarated by Sloane’s advice to continue his studies in English literature and become a teacher, he feels that “the future lay bright and certain and unchanging.” Stoner makes the mistake of confusing time with space, not any kind of space, but “the great University library.” As an immobile entity designed to endure the inevitable changes brought about by the passage of time, the University library actually represents the opposite of time: something fixed, static, and unchanging. Stoner’s view of the future “not as a flux of event and change and potentiality, but as a territory ahead that awaited his exploration” does not merely reveal his lack of understanding of the dynamic nature of time. It also shows his mistaken idea that his being is somehow fixed, and that “as the instrument of change rather than its object,” the future plays a very limited role in shaping his being, which he thinks has already been completed. At this point in life, he does not realize that the future is so full of uncertainty and potentiality that the way in which he exerts his free will at each and every moment determines and

shapes his being, which is also constantly in flux. As we stated above, Falke’s theory that reading can help strengthen our capacity to love is grounded on the idea that “literature operates with an ethical force upon the selves that we are continually becoming” (5). Stoner is unable to understand, however, that he is “continually becoming” his own self. As a consequence, in spite of his passion for literature, and after a series of attempts to love without the hope of having them reciprocated, he reaches a point at the age of forty-two where “he c[an] see nothing before him that he wishe[s] to enjoy and little behind that he care[s] to remember” (186).

“Lust and Learning”: Stoner’s Interaction with Time

It is not until he has an opportunity to share his love for literature with another human being that Stoner’s relationship with time reaches another pivotal turning point and helps him gain another important realization about love. Though Stoner’s relationship with Katherine Driscoll has received some scholarly attention, it has not yet been thoroughly investigated in terms of how profoundly it transforms his perception of time, as well as his ethical being.⁹ Stoner’s changing understanding of love in the following passage demonstrates how his love for Katherine opens his eyes to the dynamic power of time to affect his being:

In his extreme youth Stoner had thought of love as an absolute state of being to which, if one were lucky, one might find access; in his maturity he had decided it was the heaven of a false religion, toward which one ought to gaze with an amused disbelief, a gently familiar contempt, and an embarrassed nostalgia. Now in his middle age he began to know that it was neither a state of grace nor an illusion; he saw it as a human act of becoming, a condition that

was invented and modified moment by moment and day by day, by the will and the intelligence and the heart. (201)

Just as he thought of his future as a fixed entity, specifically in the form of the University library, Stoner thought of "love as an absolute state of being" when he was very young. This idea of love as a "state of being" to which one must try to "find access" is akin to his conception of the future as some kind of space. Stoner's understanding of love "in his maturity" is that it is an illusion worthy of "an amused disbelief, a gently familiar contempt, and an embarrassed nostalgia." Among his reactions to the "illusion" of love, "an embarrassed nostalgia" is particularly notable in that it involves his attitude toward time, in this case toward the past. Understood as a sentimental longing for the past, the word "nostalgia" implies that before he falls in love with Katherine, Stoner regarded not only the future but also the past as something static, fixed, and out of reach of his free will. He might have believed in the reality of love in the past, albeit "as an absolute state of being," but in his older years, he just feels nostalgic for his past belief in love, and that embarrassingly. He merely thinks that his decisions and actions in the present moment are completely irrelevant and therefore cannot affect what he believed or thought in the past. Being in love with someone who shares his passion for literature, however, makes him realize that love is "a human act of becoming," and that how he exercises his "will" and "intelligence" and "heart" revises and alters it "moment by moment and day by day." As Joakim Wrethed points out, what Stoner experiences when he falls in love with Shakespeare's sonnet is having his "perceptions tingle with life" (155), and the process of "becom[ing] the life he has glimpsed" (156) begins already at that point;¹⁰ however, it takes his falling in love with a woman to realize this. His new perspective on love as a process of becoming also expands and deepens his understanding of the interconnectedness of past, present,

and future. As is indicated by the statement that "he started to think of themselves as never really having existed before they came together" (203), Stoner begins to see how his experience in the present moment affects and even transforms his perception of his existence in the past. His newly gained insight into love ultimately helps him comprehend how his present constantly rearranges and reshapes his past, and future, rendering his being never fixed, but dynamic and constantly in flux.

M. C. Dillon's examination of the phenomenology of love provides a useful foundation for comprehending how Stoner's love relationship with Katherine helps him gain an insight into the ever-changing nature of his self-identity. Employing the existentialist perspective on love as a response to human finitude, Dillon suggests that love can offer ontological affirmation by leading one to strive, together with another fellow human being, "toward an intersubjectively valid existence" (356-57). According to Dillon, "love is doubly conditioned: it is conditioned on the validity of my perception of the other, and it is conditioned on [my lover's] affirmation of me as a valid person" (358). These double conditions are significant because they both "demand growth and self-transcendence" (Dillon 358). That is, in order not to fall back into autoerotic narcissism, one must step outside of what Marion calls one's "own egological sphere" and engage in a genuine interaction with a "truly transcendent other, one whose viewpoint is autonomous and external" (Dillon 358). Stoner's encounter with Shakespeare's sonnet is a transcendent experience since it takes him out of his "egological sphere" and brings him into contact with another consciousness. There are obvious limitations, however, to the kind of ontological affirmation Stoner can get from this contact: as a dead person, Shakespeare can neither receive nor return his love. Katherine, on the other hand, can reciprocate his love for her and share his love for literature, the most important aspect

of his identity. In providing Stoner with the ontological affirmation that he needs, Katherine's love helps him see his identity as something perpetually in the process of change. What Katherine loves about Stoner is much more than a series of fixed properties. If Katherine loves Stoner "for who [he] is (which includes the projects that anticipate [his] future), then [her] love is conditioned upon [his] fulfillment of that identity" (Dillon 357), which he may or may not fulfill depending on how he lives his present moment. For Stoner and Katherine, who they are includes the projects not only of each other's futures, but also of each other's pasts, which is why Stoner "started to think of themselves as never really having existed before they came together."

What makes the kind of ontological affirmation Stoner receives from Katherine unique is that their relationship is simultaneously intellectual and erotic. Unlike Shakespeare's voice in his sonnet, Katherine has flesh and body, and, as such, she gives Stoner an opportunity to be exposed to "the radical alterity of the other" that is absolutely unsubstitutable and non-replaceable (Marion 98). More importantly, their relationship as lovers makes essential their use of their physical senses as each steps out of their egological spheres and has their being defined by the other. In being in a reciprocal and erotic relationship with a woman who is also his intellectual companion, Stoner finds out that the workings of the mind and those of the senses do not necessarily have to rule each other out. As we discussed earlier, the transcendent experience Stoner has through his learning of Shakespeare's sonnet has resulted in the separation of his mind and his senses. Stoner's "break[ing] into consciousness" leads him to perceive the working of his bodily senses as something belonging to another being. On the other hand, Stoner's relationship with Katherine stimulates the use of his senses while simultaneously enriching and elevating his mind. Regarding what is unique about their love, Katherine says to

Stoner, "[l]ust and learning. . . . That's really all there is, isn't it?" (204). Being "brought up in a tradition that told them in one way or another that the life of the mind and the life of the senses were separate and, indeed, inimical" (205), they had not really considered the possibility of the mind and the senses working together, but instead believed "that one had to be chosen at some expense of the other" (205). In loving each other for who they are, Stoner and Katherine affirm sexuality in each other, as well as the love and passion they have for literature. Being in a relationship in which "love and learning [are] one process" (205), they discover that the mind actually "could intensify" (205) the senses.

This discovery of the complementary relationship between the mind and the senses sheds light on how Stoner can continue to love Katherine with almost the same intensity even when they are physically apart. In principle, the only phase of time available for sensory experience is the present. Through the experience of having "[l]ust and learning" complement each other, however, Stoner finds out how to utilize the power of his mind to make his past and future the objects of sensual experience as well. The reaction Stoner has to Katherine's book years after their separation provides a case in point:

It was as good as he had thought it would be. The prose was graceful, and its passion was masked by a coolness and clarity of intelligence. It was herself he saw in what he read, he realized; and he marveled at how truly he could see her even now. Suddenly it was as if she were in the next room, and he had only moments before left her; his hands tingled, as if they had touched her. And the sense of his loss, that he had for so long dammed within him, flooded out, engulfed him, and he let himself be carried outward, beyond the control of his will; he did not wish to save himself. (259)

In reading Katherine's book, which is dedicated to him, Stoner sees much more than the words on the pages. He sees Katherine "herself in what he reads," and he "marvel[s] at how truly he [can] see her even now" after many years. It is not just his mind, but also his senses that become more evident in the next sentence, in which he feels "as if she were in the next room." Even though Katherine belongs now to his past, he can still experience sensations of being with her "as if he had only moments before left her." The tingling sensation in his hands is especially remarkable as it contrasts with the distanced perception he has of his hands and fingers in Sloane's classroom. When he falls in love with literature for the first time, the enhanced function of his mind leads to the separation of his mind and senses, even to the point of making him feel alienated from his own body. The experience of falling in love with a person who shares his love for literature, however, resolves his alienation from his body and enables him, through the power of his mind, to experience sensations of touching a loved one who has long been physically absent from him in life. In letting "the sense of his loss, that he ha[s] for so long dammed within him, flood[] out, engulf[] him," Stoner acknowledges that his love for Katherine is by no means some event in the past, but is still an ongoing reality of his life that will continue into the future. Stoner thus gains another insight into the interconnectedness of past, present, and future: his love for Katherine makes all three phases of time available for sensory experience. Stoner's act of letting "himself be carried outward, beyond the control of his will" demonstrates his renouncement of his reductionist attitude toward time and being. Instead of trying to "save himself" by holding on to the image of himself as a fixed entity, he accepts his existence as it constantly interacts with time as "a flux of event and change and potentiality" (24).

Stoner's final realization about love needs to be understood in this context. In perceiving

through his sensory reactions to Kathrine's book his ongoing love for her, Stoner understands how his erotic relationship with her has trained him to use his senses to love her even in the absence of her physical body. The vivid and intense sensations of love brought by Katherine's book surprise Stoner with the knowledge that despite his being "nearly sixty years old," he is far from being "beyond the force of such passion, of such love" (259). This knowledge in turn helps him recognize that he has never been beyond the power of love at any moment in his life and will never be:

He had, in odd ways, given [love] to every moment of his life, and had perhaps given it most fully when he was unaware of his giving. It was a passion neither of the mind nor of the flesh; rather, it was a force that comprehended them both, as if they were but the matter of love, its specific substance. To a woman or to a poem, it said simply: Look! I am alive. (259)

The definition of love "as a passion neither of the mind nor of the flesh," but rather as "a force that comprehend[s] them both" significantly illustrates how his capacity to love has grown since the time Katherine was physically present in his life. If his relationship with Katherine has taught him how the mind and the senses can complement and intensify each other, his realization of the continuing presence of the power of love across the past, the present, and the future enlightens him as to the truth about love. Love has its origin neither in the mind nor in the flesh (or the senses), and thus it is not restricted or contained by either. This means that love is neither fixed nor stabilized according to the passage of time. Instead, as "a force that comprehend[s] both" the mind and the flesh, love constitutes the most important part of our being, thus conditioning our active interaction with time in a way that makes us feel alive in every moment. For Stoner, the meaning of being alive is nothing

other than fully opening his being to an object of love and letting it continually change and deepen him. Stoner's life full of love is thus a testament to the truth that, for a person truly in love, the past, the present, and the future are no longer three different phases of time intrinsically separated from one another. Rather, they are all bound by love that has the power to turn the mind and the flesh into "the matter of love, its specific substance." Beginning with his encounter with Shakespeare's sonnet, then, Stoner's life has been an ongoing process of his transformation into "the matter of love, its specific substance." Considering that Katherine is the first one to return his love, it is amazing that Stoner has never ceased to give love even when there was no hope of having it reciprocated, and that he has done it "most fully when he was unaware of his giving." This kind of unconditional dedication to love can be explained through the concept of "the lover's advance" (125), which Marion considers the second step in the erotic phenomenon.

Signifying the willingness to love first, "the lover's advance" can be made when the lover moves on from the question, "Does anyone out there love me?" to the question, "Can I be the first to love?" (Marion 125). According to Marion, "the lover's advance" is crucial to the constitution of one's self: "I do not become myself when I simply think, doubt, or imagine, because others can think my thoughts, which in any case most often do not concern me but, instead, the object of my intentionalities; . . . But I become myself definitively each time and for as long as I, as lover, can love first" (76). Even without any promise of reciprocity, in asking "Can I love first?" Stoner puts himself "in the presence of a specific alterity capable of loving" him (Falke 49). This is how he manages to effect his transformation into "the matter of love" regardless of the (lack of) response by his objects of love. Importantly, the primary purpose of "the lover's advance" Stoner

makes is none other than announcing to his objects of love that he is alive. For Stoner, loving to love is the most fundamental and effective way of defying non-being and asserting his existence. Katherine's book helps him realize how he has unconsciously been making "the lover's advance" in every moment of his life and leads him to consciously continue doing it.

Ironically, what completes his transformation into "the matter of love" that celebrates life is his moment of death, when he most consciously makes "the lover's advance." In his dying moment, Stoner reaches out for his book, which he is aware is "forgotten and . . . serve[s] no use" (288) from the perspective of the world. Though he is without "the illusion that he would find himself there, in that fading print," he simultaneously realizes and thinks to himself, "a small part of him that he could not deny *was* there, and would be there" (288, *italics original*). What he does to the book after this realization illustrates that Stoner is in fact most alive and loving at the moment of his death:

He opened the book; and as he did so it became not his own. He let his fingers riffle through the pages and felt a tingling, as if those pages were alive. The tingling came through his fingers and coursed through his flesh and bone; he was minutely aware of it, and he waited until it contained him, until the old excitement that was like terror fixed him where he lay. The sunlight, passing his window, shone upon the page, and he could not see what was written there. (288)

The fact that the act of opening the book makes it become "not his own" intimates that Stoner is, at this moment, giving all his being to the book, just as he has given love "to every moment of his life." He is emptying his being and filling the book with it, and the book takes on a life of its own.¹¹ Stoner's feeling "a tingling, as if those pages

were alive” evokes the two pivotal moments that permanently changed his relationship with time: when he fell in love with literature and when he fell in love with a woman who loved literature. Specifically, as he was listening to Sloane recite Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73, Stoner became acutely aware of the sensations of the blood flowing “from his fingertips through his body.” Now that he is on his deathbed, instead of listening to and connecting to a dead poet’s poem, Stoner is speaking to his own book and almost transferring to it the tingling that comes “through his fingers and course[s] through his flesh and bone.” The moment of his falling in love with Katherine also takes place through a book—more precisely, a book manuscript she revised after she audited his class—and his fingers similarly responded to the pages: “My God, he said to himself in a kind of wonder; and his fingers trembled with excitement as he turned the pages” (190). As we stated earlier, Stoner’s reaction to Katherine’s book after years of separation was the tingling of his hands, “as if they had touched her.” The difference between that moment of love and this moment of dying is that now, as his physical life is ebbing away, “the old excitement that [is] like terror fixe[s] him where he” lies, rather than rendering his existence dynamic and continually in flux. The pages become alive in his stead, and “[t]he sunlight, passing his window, sh[ines] upon the page.” It is almost as if this time Stoner’s book, instead of its dead writer, would notice the sunshine and tap into eternity, just as Stoner noticed the light from the windows on his fellow students’ faces back in Sloane’s classroom. His fingers finally loosen and the book is separated from his body, free to continue Stoner’s interaction with his past, present, and future by carrying “a small part of him” that is and will be there because his life has become the matter of love. Much like his beloved poet, Shakespeare, Stoner pours his life into his writing and seeks to make it alive “[s]o long as men can breathe or eyes can see” (Sonnet 18,

line 13).¹² Stoner’s book thus symbolizes the capacity of love to defy death and non-being as Stoner continues to have time and make “the lover’s advance” even after the cessation of his physical life.

“The Lover’s Advance”: Stoner’s Celebration of Life

“It’s love, Mr Stoner,” says Sloane to Stoner, explaining why he believes Stoner is going to be a teacher of literature. “You are in love. It’s as simple as that” (19). Sloane’s comment on Stoner’s state demonstrates the fundamentally transformative nature of the experience of falling in love. Whatever the object of love is, once one is in love, there is no going back to one’s past self. Having had his conceptual framework shattered by hearing Shakespeare speak to him, Stoner cannot go back to his life as a dirt farmer, but instead is “going to be a teacher” of literature (19). After such an overwhelming and transcendent experience, in which he is exposed to the “radical alterity of the other,” no matter what response he receives from literature—he is never acknowledged as a great scholar or teacher—he cannot help, in Marion’s words, loving literature. Dedicated to making “the lover’s advance,” Stoner’s life reveals that the kind of transformation love brings about is always ongoing and continuous, involving a radical change in one’s relationship with time. Before falling in love with Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73, Stoner merely exists with no capacity for self-conscious reflection on how his being is defined and shaped in the flow of time. Being in love with literature supplies him with access to a whole new world by enabling him to communicate with literary characters or people from the past and letting them influence and change his being in the present.

Although Stoner’s love for literature helps him have a past, present, and future, it is not until he

shares his love for literature with Katherine Driscoll that he revises his rather mechanical perception of the future as some fixed entity he is supposed to explore. While Stoner's love for literature has caused the separation of the mind and the senses, his relationship with Katherine resolves the separation and makes him see the potential of the mind and the senses to intensify each other when "love and learning" become one process. In turn, this understanding helps him comprehend that love is not "an absolute state of being" but "a human act of becoming," which entails the exertion of his will and intelligence and heart "moment by moment and day by day" (201). The powerful and intense sensations of love Stoner experiences in reaction to Katherine's book after many years of separation from her help him realize that his love for her is an ongoing reality, and this realization in turn helps him recognize how he has always given love to every moment of his life. Even in the absence of any hope of having his love returned, Stoner has never ceased to love loving. That is, he has passionately been making what Marion calls "the lover's advance" since his initial encounter with Shakespeare, and this has been his way of announcing that he is alive. Realizing how he has unconsciously been giving love to every moment of his life, Stoner consciously gives love even to his moment of death, which ironically becomes the most crucial moment in his celebration of his life. Instead of recognizing death as the cessation of his existence, Stoner picks up the only book he has authored in his life and fills it with his life and being, hoping and believing that it will continue the interaction he has had with his past, present, and future through his capacity to love. Stoner's book, then, is the greatest proof that his life is not a failure. Containing "a small part of him that he could not deny was there, and would be there," Stoner's book testifies to the continuing presence of the power of love across the past, present, and future that has constituted his life. In fact, his love for loving is

so great that he himself transforms into "the matter of love," which continues to exist beyond his death. Although the novel ends with Stoner's death, his book, which "[falls] into the silence of the room," turns out to be the loudest declaration ever: "Look! I am alive."

Notes

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1. The “campus novel” or the “academic novel” itself was not out of popularity at the time of *Stoner*’s publication. Many well-known campus novels, such as Mary McCarthy’s *The Groves of Academe* (1952), Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954), and David Lodge’s *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), enjoyed great popularity at the time and still remain in print. According to Merrit Moseley, some find the main attraction of academic fiction in its power to satirize higher education, while others focus on its “loving celebrations of the academic life” (11). *Stoner* deals with many aspects of university or campus life, but none of them can be seen as the driving force of the narrative.

2. In her interpretation of *Stoner* as an example of the campus novel, Lorraine Zhenping Yang argues that the feeling of consolation that the novel provides actually “encourage[s] passivity in its readers in the face of the rapid destruction of the idea of a university, ultimately hastening and worsening the destruction of what it attempts to protect” (160). Yang’s interpretation of the novel’s recent popularity, as well as its limitations, is based on the idea that *Stoner*’s love of literature “traps him within his inner world,” making him “unable to escape solipsism” (162). In what follows, we contend that, in contrast, *Stoner*’s love of literature in fact helps him forge and recognize a relationship between himself and the world as subject and object, and it is precisely this that makes the novel much more than a campus novel.

3. Barthes also deals with phenomenology of love in his book *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, but his (post-)structuralist exploration of love understands love mainly as a cultural and linguistic construct and seems more useful for explaining the unpopularity of *Stoner* at the time of its publication. For example, in theorizing love, Barthes focuses less on the redeeming power of love than on the absence or solitude inevitably involved in the amorous experience: “The lover’s solitude is not a solitude of person . . . it is a solitude of system: I am alone in making a

system out of it” (212). From this perspective, *Stoner*’s love of literature and life would have been looked at as a traditional notion of love that seems rather outdated.

4. Megha Agarwal is right in this regard in suggesting that in assessing *Stoner*’s approach to literature, “there is more at stake than the simple exegesis of a poem” (147). Being “continuously engaged in literal and metaphorical acts of translation and composition” (148), *Stoner* approaches literature with the kind of honesty and integrity available only to those deeply in love.

5. In stressing the importance of assessing *Stoner*’s life in its totality, Frits Gåvertsson rightly focuses on “the role played by love and the way it colors his perception” (41), but does not consider the relationship between love and time.

6. In her book *What, Then, is Time?*, Eva Brann explains the difference between human beings and other beings in their relation to time as follows: “more-than-merely conscious beings, that is to say, self-conscious beings that have a self-acknowledged interiority, in short *human* beings, *have* past and future. Divinity is beyond time, while stones and stars, dustmites and even dolphins in their lovable congeniality are only *in* time, in *our* time” (xiv).

7. Intention and intuition are concepts developed by Edmund Husserl to explain the structures of consciousness. In Husserl’s phenomenology, intention is the directing of one’s attention to something, such as an object, event, or idea, and thus “carries no implication of future action as it does in common speech” (Falke 23). Intuition does not “suggest a kind of sixth sense” (Falke 23), either; instead, in Husserl’s phenomenology, intuition “primarily expresses one’s immediate cognitive relationship to the objects of knowledge” (Hintikka 174).

8. This is not to say that *Stoner* inherits no valuable virtues from his parents. As Andrew Rowcroft points out, the early life on his parents’ farm is full of hardship and toil and grants *Stoner* the virtues of quietness and passivity, which help him avoid becoming “a victim of rash and impassioned decisions” (9). Nonetheless, these virtues do not automatically

lead to the generation of meaning until he falls in love with literature and thereby begins to have time.

9. Despite his perceptive reading of how the novel's prosaic style, in focusing on mundane objects, beautifully and almost poetically describes Stoner's transformed psyche through his liaison with Katherine, Lee Clark Mitchell argues that Stoner's love for Katherine simply intensifies rather than radically redefining his love for literature when he states that "Stoner's growing love for Katherine emerges in tandem with his love for literature, as he becomes ever more inspired by discovering how poems are created through a constellation of precisely placed words" (156).

10. Emily Abdeni-Holman similarly emphasizes how the novel presents meaning and life as ongoing processes. According to Abdeni-Holman, the novel refocuses "attention on living—a practice that is ongoing, a project, an activity, something subject to and unfolding in time, something that involves agency, something that changes—as opposed to life, which suggests something final, definite, and conclusive" (142).

11. D. Martin aptly describes the significance of this last moment of Stoner's life in stating that the "intensity and flow of the writing at the end of the book breaks on the reader with the same sense of profound insight that Shakespeare's sonnet brought to Stoner 40 years before" (1538). This perceptive analysis, however, does not proceed to notice the parallel between Shakespeare's sonnet and Stoner's book, into which Stoner breathes his life.

12. Most critics posit Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 as the main inspiration for the novel. Stoner's changing relationship with time through the development of his capacity to love, however, invokes a parallel between his life and another of Shakespeare's sonnets, Sonnet 18. Although he mainly discusses how the novel is built around Sonnet 73, Lee Clark Mitchell's analysis of the stylistic tension in the novel between "pedestrian, prosaic existence and a certain poetic release that accompanies a consciousness of self-transformation" (145) illuminates how *Stoner* effectively captures the process of Stoner's love of Shake-

speare, ultimately helping him achieve what Shakespeare symbolizes: the power of writing to transcend time and immortalize one's love.

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BOOK REVIEW:

David R. M. Beck, *Bribed With Our Own Money: Federal Abuse of American Indian Funds in the Termination Era*. University of Nebraska Press, 2024. 318 pages. ISBN 978-1-4962-3775-0.

Mary Klann, *Wardship and the Welfare State: Native Americans and the Formation of First-Class Citizenship in Mid-Twentieth-Century America*. University of Nebraska Press, 2024. 326 pages. ISBN 978-1-4962-1817-9.

The federal recognition of American Indian tribes in the United States is a contentious and often misunderstood system, which can be construed either as maintaining state control over Indigenous peoples or embodying treaty relationships with them. Forms of state recognition have been particularly heavily critiqued and criticized in Indigenous Studies scholarship of the last fifteen years. Most notably, Glenn Coulthard describes recognition as “a field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained” (17). Yet while federal recognition arguably maintains and legitimizes settler-colonial dominion over Indigenous nations, attempts to dismantle systems of recognition in the past have led to disaster. The development and implementation of termination policy in the mid-twentieth-century United States is an instructive example of this. Despite federal claims that the termination of the federal trust status of American Indian tribes would lead to Indigenous people receiving all of the rights associated with American citizenship, termination is widely recognized as having had devastating consequences. For terminated tribes, losing federal trust status led to the imposition of land taxes and subsequent major losses of land, as well as the end of social, health and educational services provided by the federal government.

Mary Klann’s *Wardship and the Welfare State* and David R. M. Beck’s *Bribed With Our Own Money*, both published by the University of Nebraska Press in the spring of 2024, are welcome new additions to scholarship on this distressing period of Indigenous history in the United States. These works help us understand why termination was implemented in the first place, why specific tribes were targeted for the removal of trust status, and how Native nations, individuals, and activists navigated federal policy in the era in order to reach their own social and political ends. In engaging with the termination era, however, the books take two very different approaches: Klann focuses on broadening the story of termination and bringing it firmly into the context of post-WWII United States welfare policies while Beck’s book hones tightly in on federal abuses of Indigenous money and ways in which tribes were coerced into accepting the termination of their trust status.

Klann does not frame *Wardship and the Welfare State* as a book explicitly about termination, but rather presents her work as situating Indian policy within a broader framework of mid-twentieth-century US domestic policy. The book is organized into roughly thematic chapters, with the first serving as an accessible introduction to the wardship relationship between Native people

and the federal government of the United States. Wardship, as Klann summarizes in her conclusion, was and is “the primary reciprocal relationship between Native people and the United States” (211). The focus on wardship, and the understandings and intersections of citizenship with that relationship in the mid-twentieth century, is what Klann offers as her main contribution to scholarship on both Native history and United States history more broadly. Subsequent chapters explore both the ideas and beliefs surrounding Indigenous life and communities held by state officials, and the different ways in which Native people navigated the intersecting and sometimes conflicting systems imposed through Indian policy and welfare policy.

Chapter two examines eleven “competency bills” that failed to be passed by the US House of Representatives between 1945 and 1955. These bills would have allowed individual Native people to sever their trust relationship with the federal government. The proponents of the bills viewed Indian wardship as dependency on the federal government and saw the granting of “competency” as a way to emancipate individuals and guide them toward so-called “full citizenship.” As far as I am aware, these failed competency bills—a key stepping stone towards the development of the broader policy of termination—have not been analyzed in depth elsewhere. In Klann’s assessment, evaluating these helps unpack what was meant by first-class citizenship in later termination rhetoric. The chapter also introduces what Klann terms the “*doxa* of Indian poverty knowledge—the assumptions, stereotypes, and ideologies that undergirded decades of Indian policy research and reform efforts on Native poverty” (212). In doing so, she builds on Alice O’Connor’s concept of poverty knowledge, arguing that the stereotypes linked to Indigenous people’s wealth or lack thereof constitute their own set of beliefs.

Chapters three and four both hone in on welfare applications and how Native people navigated the dual systems of welfare policy and Indian policy. Chapter three explores how Indigenous individuals sought support from the BIA in applying for welfare programs, while chapter four specifically highlights the additional challenges faced by Native women in securing this support. As Klann writes, “[t]he overlapping *doxa* behind Indian poverty knowledge and gendered welfare dependency did not make it easy for Native women to receive needs-based welfare benefits such as ADC [Aid to Dependent Children]” (123).

In chapter five, Klann convincingly shows how the GI Bill impacted Native veterans differently from non-Native veterans, with its provisions aimed at moving Native veterans toward assimilation. Yet Klann demonstrates that some Native veterans instead used the provisions of the GI Bill to attend Indian boarding schools and remain close to their homelands and families. In this chapter Klann additionally argues that wardship “shaped the decisions that Native veterans made about their GI Bill benefits” (133). In doing so, she refers to a 1946 statement by the organization of Navajo Veterans of Foreign Wars, which refers to obligations outlined in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Sumner. Instances like this, where the term was not actually used, raise the question of whether wardship was as central to Native conceptualizations of their relationship to the settler state as Klann claims.

Chapters six and seven take a slightly different approach from the rest of the book, focusing in depth on a few key sources to explore the ideas and language around wardship from two different perspectives. Building on the growth of the idea of the taxpayer-citizen in US society following the Second World War, Klann fleshes out the views of non-Native citizens on taxation and Indigenous people, as well as expectations of poverty. Paradoxically, the non-Native reports and opinion pieces Klann identifies present

American Indians as both impoverished *and* privileged.

Finally, in Chapter 7, Klann focuses explicitly on Indigenous viewpoints, providing a close reading of two statements by Native women—Helen Peterson and Ruth Muskrat Bronson—who were key figures in the National Congress of American Indians in the mid-twentieth century. Here Klann draws on the idea of relationality that is core to much Indigenous Studies scholarship, linking this to Peterson and Bronson’s writing to argue that the women’s “relentless care work exemplifies and illuminates how discussions of both tribal sovereignty and Native people’s welfare cannot be separated from the concept of relationality” (181).

In seeking to define relationality as the importance of “relations in Native epistemologies and ontologies,” Klann cites scholars from various Indigenous nations including Donald Fixico, Farina King, Kim Tallbear, Vine Deloria, and Julie Reed and quotes poets Joy Harjo (Muscogee) and N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa). What she does not do, however, is provide the reader with additional context on the backgrounds and experiences of Bronson and Peterson—their relationships with their communities and cultures, their experiences within the United States political system, and how these shaped their views of relationality. While there is certainly a sense of relationality in the quotes Klann brings in, an anchoring in the lived experiences of these women would better support this analysis.

Klann’s book is well written and very readable despite dealing with the heavy subject matter of federal policy. She adeptly brings out individual stories of Native people navigating these systems. This connection is largely made by reading federal documents against the grain, inferring meanings from—for instance—communications with the BIA and applications for welfare put in by members of different tribes. Klann also seeks

to weave Native voices into her book by quoting Indigenous authors both as epigraphs to chapters and within the text. This allows her to “understand the intricacies, layers, and impacts of Indian policies more than any other forms” (xx) of writing do. In addition to Harjo and Momaday, she quotes, for instance, Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota), Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) and Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation, Canada). While these quotes bring in Indigenous voices and perspectives, removing them from their specific cultural contexts to speak to the broad theme of Native experiences of federal policy runs the risk of coming off as essentializing. How directly does, say, Muscogee poet Joy Harjo’s 2021 memoir communicate the worldview of Helen Peterson, an Oglala Lakota political lobbyist, in the 1950s? That is not to say there is no connection between the two, but rather that without careful contextualization the parallel can appear to be based solely on their both being Native women.

David R. M. Beck’s book, in contrast, takes an approach that is closely focused on specific Indigenous nations, structured around six case studies. While historiography on termination has often noted the nefarious motivations of federal- and state-level proponents of termination, Beck’s book takes up the task of methodically documenting how federal officials coerced—whether successfully or not—specific tribes into accepting termination legislation. As Beck outlines in the introduction, the book is not a comprehensive history of the termination process on a national level or for the tribes in question. Instead, it is a “study of one specific aspect of the termination policy—the continuation of federal efforts to use money belonging to tribes to push a U.S. agenda that damaged both the tribes and individual tribal members and enriched outsiders” (xxiii-xxiv).

Bribed With Our Own Money is split into four parts. The first focuses on policy, with chapters

outlining how the federal government sought to bribe tribes in the first century-and-a-half of United States history (chapter 1), the development of termination ideology as “rights and responsibilities” throughout the 1940s (chapter 2), and the role of the Court of Claims and the later Indian Claims Commission (chapter 3). Beck does not mince his words in arguing that the infusions of money these commissions could provide served as further federal justification for termination: “[u]gly as this duplicitous representation of tribal funds was, the dishonesty shown here paled in comparison to the maleficent use of those funds to attempt to force tribal nations to accept termination of their trust relationship with the United States” (57). This first part provides the necessary context, placing coercion in the termination era within a longer trajectory of federal abuses of tribal money.

The rest of the book focuses on the push for the termination of specific tribes. Beck groups these tribes thematically, combining them based on resources extracted from the tribes (“Forests and Termination”; “Land and Termination”) or development projects forced on them (“Dams and Termination”). The book’s cases include two tribes which were wholly terminated—the Menominee in Wisconsin and the Klamath Tribes in Oregon—as well as the Ute tribe on the Uintah and Ouray reservation in Utah, which dispelled so-called “mixed-blood” members in order to avoid the termination of the whole tribe. The book also brings in three cases where the federal push toward termination failed: the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold, the Seneca Nation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville all managed to retain their trust status despite immense federal pressure.

The second part of the book, “Forests and Termination,” focuses on the Menominee and Klamath cases—undoubtedly the two most researched instances of termination to date. In both cases, federal officials intentionally

withheld settlements worth millions of dollars from the tribes in order to force them to accept termination legislation. Once apparent consent had been given, any further resolutions or protests against termination were ignored. As Beck points out, this was already recognized as coercion at the time and was pointed out as such by, for instance, former assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs William Zimmerman, Jr. (99).

In Part Three, “Dams and Termination,” Beck brings together two cases in which reservation lands were flooded by dam projects. In 1947, the Garrison Dam flooded the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, leaving the Three Affiliated Tribes with only six percent of their former agricultural lands. In 1966, the Kinzua Dam flooded one-third of the Seneca Nation’s Allegany Reservation in New York, displacing hundreds of families and forcing the moving of thousands of graves. In both cases, federal officials attempted to tie termination bills to the payout of compensation monies for lands lost. Neither case was successful. By the time Kinzua Dam was finally constructed, Beck argues, under a new administration the tide was turning against termination. In the case of the Three Affiliated Tribes, they “stood their ground, sought allies in the national Indian community and with statewide officials, and beat back the termination threat” (120).

In the fourth and final part of the book, Beck turns his focus to the Ute Indian Tribe in Utah and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, two cases where termination was linked to claims payments for lands forcibly taken by the United States in the 1800s and not properly compensated. Beck provides ample historical context on the abrogated treaty agreements linked to these claims cases. He draws strongly on existing literature—namely R. Warren Metcalf’s *Termination’s Legacy* and Colville historian Laurie Arnold’s *Bartering with the Bones*

of Our Dead. The Ute Indian Tribe effectively expelled the so-called “mixed-blood” members of the tribe in order to maintain federal trust status for remaining members. The Colville Confederated Tribes ultimately avoided termination by refusing to compromise and being unable to reach a termination agreement that satisfied the diverging aims of tribal members. This adds nuance to Beck’s argument, as in both cases he presents some tribal members as actively working toward termination. Beck nevertheless argues that these cases constituted coercion, with congressional representatives leading tribes to believe that termination was inevitable and that compensation could only be received by accepting it.

While the approaches of the two books are very different, they both contribute in their own ways to expanding our understanding of state-Indigenous relations in a particularly tumultuous period of United States Indian policy. The “Indian poverty knowledge” that Klann describes informed and shaped the views of Indigenous people held by federal- and state-level proponents of termination whose tactics of coercion Beck highlights. Both books highlight the differing ways in which concepts like “citizenship,” “freedom,” and “wardship” were defined and employed by state officials and Indigenous people. Here both scholars would benefit from an engagement with relatively recent scholarship documenting this exact phenomenon in the termination period, including—for instance—my own work (2017) and that of Katherine Osburn (2021). Curiously, while Beck draws on Mary Dudziak’s scholarship to highlight how termination’s language of freedom and emancipation fit into the broader ideas of Cold War civil rights (xix), he overlooks work by Daniel Cobb and Paul Rosier on Indigenous politics and activism in the Cold War era.

Also curiously, for books related to termination, both present slight mischaracterizations of

House Concurrent Resolution 108, the document through which the House and Senate announced that the federal government intended to end the federal trust status of tribes. HCR 108 did not, as Klann implies on page 31, in itself sever the trust relationship of any tribes, but rather required the introduction of various acts removing the federal trust status of specific tribes. In his conclusion on the lasting specter of termination, Beck notes that “HCR 108 has not been overturned” (194). This is an odd point since concurrent resolutions are only valid through the duration of the congress which passes them (Wilkinson and Biggs), and thus cannot really be overturned by subsequent congresses.

Nevertheless, Beck’s broader concluding message that until tribes can “operate safely under the protection of the trust relationship, the specter of termination will continue to haunt American Indian communities” (195) rings true. Likewise, as Klann points out in the epilogue to her book, mainstream conceptions of Native people as poor persist as much today as they did in the mid-twentieth century. Recent political developments in the United States, including the questioning of Indigenous people’s citizenship in the US-Mexico border region by ICE agents, shows that work on the termination period is timelier than ever.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Heidi Siegrist. *All Y'all: Queering Southernness in US Fiction, 1980–2020*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2024. 224 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4696-8281-5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.124168>.

In *All Y'all: Queering Southernness in US Fiction, 1980–2020*, Heidi Siegrist intervenes in southern and queer studies to make a case for reading queerness and southernness as parallel, if not co-constitutive. Southernness is a form of queerness and queerness is a form of southernness—in the sense that southernness is perceived as deviant Otherness. *All Y'all* inscribes itself into the emergent scholarship on the queer South, and it contributes to topical discussions in post-southern studies.

Although a more explicit reason for the temporal delimitation (why 1980–2020?) would have added some clarity to the book, overall this work offers intriguing and nuanced readings of both (semi-)canonical US/southern texts and lesser-known authors. One concern this reviewer has with the conceptualization of “post-southern” studies in general is that expanding the meaning of “the South” ad infinitum risks making the term meaningless. Siegrist avoids this by not limiting her study to *southern* fiction per se, but instead focusing on *US fiction* that represents the South more broadly.

In her four thematically, theoretically, and temporally diverse chapters, Siegrist traces the co-constructions of queerness and southernness by “queering the queer south” (1). Each chapter centers on a select few authors or works that illustrate how queerness and Southernness are articulated through disparate themes such as

food, the swamp, southern nostalgia, melancholia, and vampires.

In the first chapter, “Southern-Fried Perversions: Queer Appetites in the Works of Fannie Flagg and Dorothy Allison,” Siegrist traces queerness in southern fiction through its articulation to food and eating. The analysis of Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes* is particularly engaging, whereas the reading of Allison’s short story collection is less persuasive. The section focusing on Allison is also significantly shorter—about half the length—than the section on Flagg, which in itself is unproblematic; however, here it results in a slightly unfinished feeling to the chapter. The chapter furthermore includes a sort of interlude between the two authors, in which Siegrist briefly discusses the cookbook *White Trash Cooking* (1986) by Ernest Mathew Mickler. At first, this section seems like an odd inclusion; however, Siegrist manages to make it meaningful as a contextual bridge between her readings of Flagg and Allison.

Chapter two, “Near ‘Bout: Randall Kenan’s Swampy Southern Queerness,” turns to the southern swamp as a site of queer and Black potentiality. Focusing on most of the entire authorship of Randall Kenan, Siegrist explores how the swamp promotes various reconfigurations of spatial organization, from the plantation as an ur-symbol of the Old South to the texts themselves as sites of spatial/formalist innovation

and play. Kenan's oeuvre, Siegrist insists, "asks us as readers, to revise our expectations of southernness, to reorient to it as a space of possibility for Black, queer resistance" (86).

From this queer, Black resistance, Siegrist pivots to the Lost Cause, melancholy, and queer mourning in "Pornographies of History: Queer Southern Melancholy in the Works of Monique Truong and George Saunders." Siegrist is careful not to equate southern melancholy with queer melancholy throughout the chapter, and rather than argue only for their similarities, she traces their differences and importantly outlines how they resonate despite fundamental incompatibilities. This chapter dives into two works by Saunders and one novel by Truong to explore how they approach the historical imaginary of the South. Although these texts do different things, Siegrist shows both the strengths and the limitations of melancholy as a reparative tool for destabilizing national and regional mythologies. Melancholy can (but does not necessarily) offer a backwards glance in order to imagine a different future, and in doing so, this negative affect can be an instrument of change.

The final chapter, "Southern Gothic Hospitality: Or, Inviting in the Queer Vampires of Poppy Z. Brite, George R. R. Martin, and Jewelle Gomez," is perhaps simultaneously the most conventional and potentially the most divisive in the book (only one of these authors is southern, even if the definition of 'southern' is stretched). Here Siegrist revisits the "generically familiar" (127) vampire through readings of William Joseph Martin (aka Poppy Z. Brite), George R. R. Martin, and Jewelle Gomez. This chapter engages with the recent post-Ricean history of the southern gothic through firstly invoking the queer vampire figure as a recognizable monstrous shorthand for sexual and other kinds of deviance in George R. R. Martin's *Fevre Dream* (1982). Secondly, Siegrist reads Brite and Gomez as examples of how this traditional shorthand

can be complicated and reconstructed to produce an image of queer vampirism as more contradictory, unstable, and, yes, *queer*—multiple, fluid, oppositional, and indefinable. Throughout *All Y'all*, the Southern Gothic stalks Siegrist's analyses, from Flagg's grotesque storytelling to Saunders's and Truong's ghostly melancholia, but outside of this chapter on queer vampires, it is not engaged with in depth. However, this is a minor point that does not detract from Siegrist's expansive analyses and capacious scope.

Siegrist ends with a coda on "Dragging Southernness," a somewhat truncated meditation on (perceived traditional) southern gender conventions, which, she argues, "are particularly 'drag'able because they are already highly imitative: performative, well-circulated, and accordingly ripe for parody that deconstructs the idea of natural gender" (182). Siegrist covers a lot of ground in very few pages (pp. 159-65): Dolly Parton's gender performance, Lizzo's (problematic) queer allyship, southern states' curtailing of LGBTQ+ rights, Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Scarlett O'Hara, to name a few topics. Because the reflections included in these pages are important, they deserve a little more attention than this coda gives them.

Interspersed with the traditional literary readings of her chosen texts, Siegrist includes essayistic personal anecdotes to situate or introduce the topics each chapter discusses. These lend the text a personal style that is refreshing, but may not be to everyone's liking. It could be argued that including more cultural or social contextual material instead would have given the book a more universal academic appeal. However, this is not Siegrist's errand with *All Y'all*, and as she alludes in the introduction, the personal touch is significant "in our current political climate, as LGBTQ rights become increasingly precarious" (18). By coupling this personal aspect to

the chapters' thematic concerns, Siegrist highlights what is at stake for her individually, but also demonstrates why a book like this matters.

Some chapters are more focused than others and some will probably require prior familiarity with the literary artifacts in question, but this book should be an engaging read for anyone interested in representations of southernness and southerners and the US South's literary history, as it broadens our views of what counts as "the South." *All Y'all* persuasively illustrates how, in US fiction, the South is always already queer(ed).

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BOOK REVIEW:

Timothy D. Taylor. *Making Value: Music, Capital, and the Social*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2024. 230 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4780-3035-5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478059349>.

Why do music managers strive to get an artist's music on a playlist of a streaming service? How does a rock band in Los Angeles try to break into the music industry? What do "trendspotters" do? Answers to these questions can be found in Timothy D. Taylor's book *Making Value: Music, Capital, and the Social*. A collection of the author's earlier writings, the book provides a multifaceted examination of how the value that people ascribe to music directs its circulation to and from the marketplace. Over an introduction and eight chapters, Taylor presents several useful concepts and demonstrates each concept through case studies, of which several are located in the United States. Taylor is an ethnomusicologist based in the Los Angeles area and the book benefits from his long-term study of the topic, as well as his access to musicians and music professionals who are proximate to or in the American entertainment industry. The book is a compelling read for anyone interested in the ways in which American cultural goods and practices are made appealing to consumers around the world.

Each chapter offers a deep theoretical engagement with established anthropological and sociological lines of thought applied to historical and ethnographic data. Throughout the analysis, Taylor follows theorists including Anna Tsing, Pierre Bourdieu, Arjun Appadurai, David Graeber, Sherry B. Ortner, and Terrence Turner. A major focus is on ethnography, which the book turns to in order to elucidate people's actions

and realities. The book effectively demonstrates that attention to value through the study of social actors' actions provides a refreshing and productive avenue of inquiry in studies of music. Furthermore, the specific focus on value complements Taylor's recent groundbreaking works such as *Music & Capitalism: A History of the Present* (2015) and *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Ethnomusicology*, edited by Anna Morcom and Taylor (2023).

The introduction presents Taylor's view on value "as a variation of the idea of meaning, though broader, in that it includes 'the economic' (where 'meaning' tends to be more idealist)," and establishes its grounding in anthropological writings from two intellectual lineages, one extending to Karl Marx and the other to Marcel Mauss (2). Taylor also provides an extensive discussion on David P. McAllester's early book *Enemy Way Music* (1954) as an important ethnomusicological precursor to studies in value and music. The introduction also explains the book's foundation in practice theory: capitalism is "the structure" in and around which social actors produce varied, transformable values. To that end, Taylor follows theorists who conceptualize capitalism as a social form of uneven global reach that excludes some non-capitalist spheres, which nonetheless can be subsumed into it. The musical goods and practices in the book's case studies are situated in this relationship.

The first chapter presents “supply chain” as a concept adapted from Tsing (2015) that elucidates how cultural goods move between different value regimes by accrual of people’s actions in time and place. The three case studies in this chapter trace the paths of cultural goods and practices from one value regime to another by managers, other agents, and owners whose actions transform how they are valued. This includes early music managers in nineteenth-century Europe who steered the careers of virtuoso musicians, dealers of artworks who market a work’s provenance, the previous ownership, which accrues value, and bureaucratic processes such as the “consecrating” of traditions by UNESCO.

The second chapter introduces the concept “scalability” through an examination of music managers’ work toward bringing musical practices from outside the commercial field into its purview. The commercialization of music, according to this concept, hinges on the potential of producing more sellable commodities with the same amount of labor. To musicians this means making musical practices desirable to an expanding consumerbase, a process Taylor summarizes as follows:

turning musicians into laborers whose products can be distributed to a scalable fan base includes a set of processes that involves different strategies of standardization, broadly understood: creating a recognizable sound for an artist and stabilizing it; deciding on an artist’s look and capturing it with a particular photographer and videographer to stabilize it; assembling a team of professionals who are in agreement with the musicians about their career goals and who can help with the first two tasks; and in general turning artists into brands, sonically and visually recognizable entities to whom fans feel a connection that makes them want to purchase

or stream recordings, or purchase tickets or merchandise repeatedly (46-47).

To show how managers actually help their artists implement these strategies, Taylor provides captivating interviews with music managers. For music industry outsiders, managers may seem to be elusive figures behind the scenes, but here the reader gets an intriguing glimpse of their day-to-day work. For example, managers seek to promote an artist by “amplifying their story” and creating “moments” that connect an artist’s music with listeners. Getting an artist’s music on a playlist on a streaming service is an important vehicle for achieving these goals. To this, Taylor adds an interesting observation: “[n]ote that ‘playlist’ has become a verb” (64). Managers also help ensure that the artist appears successful, for example as measured in social media “likes,” because in a paradoxical way this increases the odds of the artist’s success (66).

The third chapter turns attention to “trendspotters,” consumer research professionals who keep an eye on emerging values and meanings that could be curated from outside capitalist production into commodifiable products. Taylor focuses on their work as part of his broader interest in the ways in which “consumer tastes and preferences can be harvested, codified, and reinforced or reshaped” (73). In practice, “trendspotters” make use of selected people’s practices and values: for example, something that is a sign for “cool” could be brought into the dominant culture. Here again, Taylor’s fascinating interviews with consumer research professionals reveal how they search for emerging values and meanings. In this chapter, the reader learns that consumer research professionals themselves view the study of consumer preferences as a way to improve products, to get qualitative insights beyond large quantitative data, and to segment markets and generational preferences, which include musical tastes. Also this chapter lifts the curtain on the use of ethnographic

methods in consumer research, when, for example, firms study consumer preferences in environments that are more comfortable than basic focus groups by organizing fun social settings for them. This chapter also addresses “influencers”—social actors in different spheres who do things in distinct ways and popularize ideas—and how they play a role in the production of value (84).

The fourth chapter examines how cultural commodities are made appealing to consumers by processes of “consecration and promotion”—in other words, by making a commodity appear as a gift, or something superior to a commodity, whose value can be measured in noneconomic terms (98-99). To accomplish this, professionals in a capitalist realm of value alienate labor and mask social relations. One compelling example here is Western European classical music, which, according to Taylor, was “sacralized” in the early twentieth century, when newly mass-produced classical recordings were marketed by record labels deploying “promotional strategies surrounding music recordings, invoking every conceivable discourse of noneconomic value in attempts to consecrate these commodities” (105). Taylor also discusses branding as “a concerted industrial effort to use the apparatus of advertising and marketing . . . to attempt to create personal connections between consumers and commodities” (110). The eye-opening data here is evidence of huge marketing and promotion budgets that labels use for brand building, along with merchandizing and music licensing. Here Taylor’s sources include trade publications such as *Billboard Magazine* and an interview with a publicist.

The fifth chapter examines the indie rock scene in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. There, musicians and small, independent label owners work in ways that produce very little money, but their cultural production is sus-

tained by other forms of exchange and reciprocal relationships. To that end, Taylor theorizes that while the members of this community barely make a living in music, they “serve, in a way, as the reserve army of labor for the music business” (119). This “enclaved community” is located outside the capitalist music business, but is both maintained and simultaneously destroyed by it through the exploitation of community members’ labor. For example, many of the musicians in question are casual about their meager earnings, but others, such as label managers who use their own resources for bands (e.g., in hiring publicists), and musicians who work hard to promote their visibility, especially on social media, do so in the hopes of one day “making it” in the music business. Because of this kind of dependence between noncapitalist and capitalist value regimes, Taylor theorizes that the indie rock scene is eventually drained of talent as the musicians who currently maintain it leave it behind (137).

The sixth chapter assesses values ascribed to music both before it enters a capitalistic value regime and after it departs from it. This chapter examines music called “world music,” a marketing category invented by music industry insiders in the 1980s. The purpose of the category was to bring “many disparate and unrelated musics into the main regime of value of the Western music business, an economic regime” (139). Taylor is well-versed in the topic, having authored pioneering works of scholarship—such as the book *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997)—which has been helpful for students and instructors like me when I taught the course “An Introduction to Music and Cultures of the World” at the University of Helsinki. In this chapter, Taylor concentrates on Irish traditional music sessions, which bring together amateur musicians to play music. Taylor, who also plays in these sessions, shows his nuanced understanding of interpersonal dynamics between participants. Based on extensive ethnography collected in

Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1991, and in Southern California in 2013, Taylor convincingly argues that these communities place high value on “sociality.” Additionally, Taylor describes how musicians in Southern California keenly take photographs during sessions. Those photographs serve to store the value of sociality, which then can be amplified by posting on social media.

The seventh chapter examines musical performance as a medium of value. According to Taylor, musical performance carries values accrued by prior actions of musicians and others in rehearsals, instrument preparation, and making costumes, etc. These activities transmit values that are concretized when music is performed for an audience aware of value priorities. Such an audience is necessary for the idea of a performance. According to Taylor, the varied “performer-audience interactions reveal the conceptions of value that are on display and being (potentially) transmitted or realized, or, if expectations are not met, diminished or not realized at all” (157). The case study here is the South African isicathamiya tradition in the context of local competitions. Isicathamiya is a music style based on four-part harmony sung a cappella. It originated in mining communities and it is performed locally in competitions. Taylor posits that the competitions display, along with the Zulu value of competition, the value of excellence. In comparison, isicathamiya as a world music style resides in a different value regime, for example when it is commodified on recordings such as Paul Simon’s *Graceland* album, which features isicathamiya sung by the famous singing group Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

The final chapter elucidates how values play an integral role in the global circulation of cultural goods and practices. Taylor builds on earlier studies that treat the circulation of goods as “flows,” furthering the idea that people’s actions generate value, thus propelling the movement of goods and practices; in turn, people exchange

goods that they value. Here, radio serves as a case study. Drawing on interviews with a manager and an artist, Taylor shows how radio is a valuable channel for advertising and disseminating music to potential music consumers, who then generate demand for music and give attention to musicians. Hence, circulation also creates value. Then Taylor expands this view of circulation to the idea of “public culture” (Appadurai and Breckendridge [1988]). Taylor concludes with a statement that could be seen as one of the book’s principal arguments: “If something is valued, it will be exchanged, and when something is exchanged, it acquires value” (189).

Taylor’s book and its focus on the action-based valuation of cultural goods and practices provides a captivating picture of how the business of music operates. Scholars, lay readers, and aspiring artists can find much to enjoy in this book. Furthermore, the conceptual tools that Taylor presents can be applied to studies in various contexts and disciplines. As such, the book is highly recommended for scholars, as well as anyone interested in the ways in which values are ascribed to cultural practices, whether in arts, sports, fashion, or other cultural fields.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Daphne Lamothe. *Black Time and the Aesthetic Possibility of Objects*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2023. 190 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4696-7532-9.

Theorizations of Blackness and the examination of its expression in various artforms have at times been myopic in the sense of limiting their scope to a certain geographical or temporal context. Such approaches risk overlooking the heterogeneity and broad spectrum of Black art and the way it (occasionally) interconnects, overlaps, or, conversely, contrasts and contradicts. Within this context, Daphne Lamothe's *Black Time and the Aesthetic Possibility of Objects* proffers a different perspective. Structured around the concept of "aesthetic time," Lamothe's monograph is largely disentangled from strict historical contexts and set conceptualizations of time. The liberty afforded by this approach allows Lamothe to examine a wide breadth of Black creative endeavors from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries without the constraints of viewing Black art as "definitive/defining acts," but rather as "partial attempts" (2). The stylistics of the book similarly go against the grain, as Lamothe writes in an essayistic style in order to facilitate innovative ideas within an infrequently employed framework.

The notion of thresholds (re)surfaces repeatedly in the book, and Lamothe's overall approach to artistic expressions of Blackness may best be described as similarly existing on a threshold. That is, throughout the book, Blackness and Black art are posited as (un)constrained by history (Chapter Five), as existing between "liveness" (111) and death (Chapter Six), as well as between optimism and pessimism (Chapter Three).

Lamothe's methodology expressly seeks to avoid suggestions of homogeneity and a rigid, monolithic sense of Blackness by emphasizing "potentiality" and embracing Andrew Benjamin's notion of the becoming-object of the work of art (24). This approach, combined with the wide range of artistic representations Lamothe analyses, posits Black art as capacious and multitudinous. At the same time, the essayistic format and the absence of a chapter dedicated to outlining the theoretical framework of the book at times hinder its coherence and the clarity of its argumentation. Structurally, Lamothe's monograph is divided into two sections consisting of four chapters each. The first four chapters provide analyses of case studies that negotiate what the author views as "the interrelated concepts of aesthetic time and optimism" (2). Section Two, meanwhile, revolves around a variety of works which emphasize the value of art by imagining and interrogating the notion of Blackness.

Chapter One focuses on Stromae's album *Racine carrée* (2013), particularly the track "Formidable" and its accompanying music video. Positioning Stromae's music as virtually uncategorisable due to the plethora of cultural influences it draws on, Lamothe argues that the unmoored and fluid characteristics of Stromae's stage persona and his music "make his work representative of contemporary Blackness" (6). Lamothe positions the music video for "Formidable" as a nexus connecting various geographies, societies, and temporalities by virtue of its aesthetic

qualities. She subsequently connects Stroma's "Formidable" with theories by critics such as Édouard Glissant and Nicolas Bourriaud, which emphasize the role of relations and connections; in this way, the music video can be regarded as an unattached and free-flowing aesthetic manifestation able to transgress varying "social and affective geographies," facilitated by "spatial, social, and subjective" entanglements (12). At times, the theories employed by Lamothe and her subsequent analysis incorporate notions which resemble concepts such as Achille Mbembe's entanglement (2001) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's globalecological approach (2012). Regrettably, however, neither scholar is mentioned in the book.

Chapter Two is framed as a reading of Tracy K. Smith's memoir *Ordinary Light* (2015). However, Smith's text is largely utilized as an entry point for discussing a range of critics and theorizations on writing and Blackness. Notions ranging from Toni Morrison's "invisible ink" to the concepts of "was-ness" and "is-ness" (28) are discussed. Lamothe impressively and intriguingly presents and brings into dialogue myriad concepts. At the same time, the recurring argument of literature/art as a joint effort between writer/artist and reader/audience struggles to convince this reader as distinctly innovative, given, for instance, Roland Barthes's well-known notion of writerly texts. The same arguably applies to the conclusion to Chapter Three, which largely revolves around questions of Black optimism and pessimism. Here, Lamothe argues that "the aesthetic realm is uniquely endowed with the capacity to hold and express multiple, sometimes competing, truths about Blackness without having to organize those realities according to a hierarchy of value" (50). The ability of art to express or interrogate complex notions by virtue of its aesthetic capabilities can hardly be viewed as a new insight.

Unlike the other chapters, Chapter Four is not framed around a case study. Instead it takes a more reflective approach as it considers post-soul aesthetics and the notion of "*Black time*" (51). Among other things, Lamothe considers the functioning of Black time as inherently tied to history (slavery, racism, oppression), yet simultaneously as possessing a freedom and potentiality by virtue of post-soul aesthetics, making it "no longer possible to uncomplicatedly index Blackness according to historical time" (66). Lamothe's emphasis on the way an attunement to aesthetics offers a sense of freedom and a means to capture Blackness in its capaciousness and complexity resonates strongly throughout the remaining chapters of the book. The same goes for the notion of the (un)timeliness of Blackness, which comes to the fore in a variety of cultural manifestations discussed in the monograph.

Section Two opens with a chapter on works by the visual artist Toyin Ojih Odutola. Ojih Odutola's exhibition *To Wander Determined* encapsulates Lamothe's aforementioned emphasis on the imaginative and liberatory potential of art. Adopting Tavia Nyong'o's concept of untimeliness (see p. 72), Lamothe views Ojih Odutola's exhibition of drawings as "represent[ing] a world beyond the historical determinations of coloniality" (79). Perhaps paradoxically, Ojih Odutola's work is also argued to acknowledge these very histories, as Lamothe asserts that they are "simultaneously invisible yet felt and known presences too" (82). *To Wander Determined* exemplifies Lamothe's intriguing use of the notion of thresholds to conceptualize Black art as ambiguously and paradoxically poised between an anchoring and an imagination of an "alternate geography of Blackness in which subjectivity exists freely" (82). Lamothe's analysis of visual art alongside the other forms of cultural expression examined in the book displays the impressive range of her analyses.

In the remainder of the monograph, Lamothe again turns her attention to written work. Chapter Six centers on Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *Daughters* (1991). The former is read as an exemplar of aesthetic optimism, as Lamothe mobilizes the overarching tenets of her book to read *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as conceptualizing "Black past and future not as a binary but as a spectrum" (94). Lamothe subsequently observes a clear shift in *Daughters*, which, she argues, is characterized by a "melancholic tone" (97). All the same, *Daughters* is read as similarly challenging a straightforward conceptualization of time, specifically by framing it as a dialectic. Both novels are posited as providing significant reflections "on Blackness and its shifting meanings across time and space" (102). Similar notions recur in Chapter Seven, where Lamothe discusses Dionne Brand's work in the light of "the dialectical nature of death and aliveness, from which Blackness derives its meanings" (112). In addition, she expertly manages to reintroduce the notion of thresholds in relation to Brand's poetry by pointing toward the central role they occupy spatially and ontologically. Lamothe's decision not to discuss Brand's work from a literary trauma studies perspective may be considered surprising, however, given that Brand's work would seem to call out for such an approach.

The final chapter revolves around Zadie Smith's novel *Swing Time* (2016). Here, Lamothe skillfully sets up Smith's novel as an exemplar of work which encapsulates the "complexities of being Black and its multiple and ever-changing feelings and meanings" (133). Lamothe's analysis of *Swing Time* works excellently as the book's final chapter, as Smith's narrative embodies most of the key elements that resonate throughout *Black Time*; it points towards the entanglement, capaciousness, and the complexity of Blackness, time, and aesthetics and, like *Black Time* itself, counters a myopic, monolithic, and rigid view on these matters.

An ambitious book, *Black Time and the Aesthetic Possibility of Objects* features a wide range of authors/artists from different contexts. Its essayistic style and incorporation of a variety of concepts make for a compelling read that provides an innovative and unburdened perspective on Black art. Lamothe's stylistic decision can be seen as a double-edged sword, however, as the book arguably lacks a clearly defined theoretical foundation. More importantly, the general lack of engagement with previous research on the case studies Lamothe analyses does not allow for fruitful interaction of scholarship and obscures to what extent the book provides new or contrasting perspectives. Overall, however, Lamothe's monograph provides an impressive array of engaging and wide-ranging analyses that are testament to the value of focusing on art and aesthetics in a way unconstrained by strict categories and, in so doing, provides an important contribution to the field.

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Book Reviews

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