

Stages of Whiteness: Marking Power and Privilege in U.S. and German Popular
Performance

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Abstract

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Performance examines white, male playwrights, television evangelists, and game show hosts and producers on what I am defining as three “performance stages” found within 21st century American and German popular theatre and entertainment. These performances have remained unmarked as white to white people; they remain opaque to them and have persisted into this century as spaces not affected by constructions of race. They remain “just performances.” The dissertation explains how everyday people— audiences— learn to see, hear, and protect whiteness as a universal subject position, as represented through the patterns of storytelling, narrative structure, and binaries of winning and losing. Each “performance stage” has specific audiences that encapsulate lower, middle and upper-class white consumers. These stages, I contend, are used to distribute narratives that warn new audiences against the changing racial, economic, and socio-cultural conditions that have challenged white male patriarchy.

This project is a result of four trips to Germany to visit theatre spaces in Berlin, multiple visits to New York archives and theatre spaces, a visit to Joel Osteen’s Lakewood church in Houston, Texas, and a visit to Los Angeles to attend tapings of game shows, including *The Price is Right*, on which I was a contestant. Methodologically, as I engage with archives and live performance, I lean upon auto-ethnography where I use my own subject position as a white, Queer man from Southeastern, Pennsylvania to see these places anew and to describe how whiteness, once invisible to me in work as a theater artist, emerging scholar and consumer, became racialized to me as “white.” I am marking my position as a white, Queer male to

unsettle impulses towards objectivity and universality associated with white male playwrights and their stories which dominate American and German theater landscapes . In addition to my own subject position, I analyze these performances through theories of race and performance and dramatic analysis. The dissertation identifies comparable sites in theater, religious television programming, and game shows in the U.S. and Germany that source their values in tropes from the Germanic Enlightenment. I track how totalizing Enlightenment binaries of good and bad, inside and outside, God and the Devil, and ultimately winning and losing migrate across national borders and have become reproduced and preserved in new spaces.

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(SFX: Grand orchestral music sendoff)

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Introduction

Like many white, Western Europeans who arrived to North America, they needed a way to stabilize their way of life and consolidate, or re-consolidate, their power. Ta-Nehisi Coates contends, in *Between the World and Me*, that these people who believe they are white are a modern invention. He writes, “they were white— Catholic, Corsican, Welsh, Mennonite, Jewish — and if all our national hopes have any fulfillment, then they will have to be something else again.”¹ The impulse towards individualism and work ethic was not merely constructed out of nothing after having arrived in this new world; Coates explains that these individual pursuits were only made possible when these white people wed themselves to criminal power. This includes the genocide of indigenous peoples as Europeans began to colonize the United States — to the enslavement of African men and women as forced migrants via the transatlantic slave trade — as land owners who were desperate to thrive in this new world.

Although these people, white people, remember the very act of fleeing Switzerland and Germany, in the instance of my ancestors, as an act that justifies the idea that from nothing to everything is possible, this common story amongst many white European immigrants is only possible at the expense of those people of color who were murdered and robbed of their historical mattering as their human value was reassigned as inferior in relationship to whiteness. The histories of how these expenses were calculated are often unmarked or understood in the context of individual stories of survival. My goal in this dissertation, by reconnecting unmarked white stories to contemporary performances, requires that I identify how the residual “truths” found in an ideology of whiteness developed and continue to provide a structure for white masculinity to maintain power and privilege in contemporary performance practices.

By including the story of the people of southeastern Pennsylvania I do not intend to establish that this study is explicitly about them but that their collective story represents the kind of story shared by many Americans historically understood as white as well as those belonging to populations and communities who have more recently “[become] white.”² This default story – in many ways coterminous with whiteness as a socially constructed and understood identity – has produced, replicated, codified, and reified ideas central to existence and identity, not for people ostensibly like those of southeastern Pennsylvania, but also for individuals not marked by commonality, whiteness, and all those markers entails. Individuals therefore marked by the absence of whiteness, are broadly understood as “the other.”

Stories about individual white Americans from southeastern Pennsylvania are representative of many stories that work to be *only* “stories” about individuals and their lives; despite the centrality of whiteness as a category of identity and personhood, such stories ironically remain unmarked by, and thus not about, race or other people who share a racial identity. Such stories are about people – understood *as* people, individuals, and citizens – who have, some time ago or more recently, become white because their practices, morals, ideals, politics, and desires are understood by legal, social, and political institutions as the only legible representation of humanity. These representations, in turn, defines all others, via its absence, as “not white” and thus inferior by default.

I grew up in southeastern Pennsylvania, in a small farming community in Lancaster County. This location is defined by agriculture and a very particular kind of tourism because this county is where the majority of Amish in America reside. Living without electricity and automobiles, the Amish and their old-world lifestyle have themselves become a tourist attraction;

the county attracted 7.9 million visitors in 2013 and generated 1.9 billion in direct spending.³ One explanation for this tourism is that this geographical place is what the contemporary imagination of white families across the United States claim dreams are made of: blue skies, rolling hills, and, around every corner, road-side farm stands selling shoo-fly pie, meadow tea, and baskets of fresh strawberries.⁴ This place is not only visible through farmland, but through other places – and on theatrical performance stages – in the contemporary United States and Germany. This place in Lancaster, constructed from and according to the imagination of a few, represents a simpler life, a truer, more peaceful existence than that enjoyed by many of its visitors. To visitors – most of whom are white, working-class families of faith – this place symbolizes and represents the truth about the way the world was and should be.

Upon returning from my first visit to Germany in 2008, my grandmother commented on my photos of Bavaria in this way: they reminded her of the world she grew accustomed to know and believe to be true in Lancaster. I grew up next to my grandparent's dairy farm, located in a region where its residents define their identity by the tenets of individualism and faith in a Christian God, which results in a *carte blanche* distrust of government; it results in conservatism. Many see few reasonable explanations for taxation and legislation that encroaches upon the ideology of the individual. In many respects, these are religious people who are connected to faith communities and have been so for generations.

However, the notion of individualism that is understood as being self-evident for the people of this region creates a shadow definition of “otherness” for those who do not fully meet requisites for individualism; these “others” threaten their community and allow the individuals of Lancaster County to understand themselves as victims. To take as a cue from the communities I

grew up in and around, as well the partiality of the world they've created, this study will examine their protectionist beliefs that remain threatened by non-whites and that defined by a fear that the removal of their Christian God will challenge their formula for accessing a safe and prosperous life. This study will interrogate popular entertainment that reflects the values and stories told by transatlantic white people and, by extension, ideals of whiteness. There are totalizing binary values first formed in the Enlightenment such as good and bad, inside and outside, God and the Devil, definer and the defined, and autonomous and not autonomous. Pierre Bourdieu's terminology of cultural and societal capital is useful as autonomous individuals are exposed to and collect cultural capital as a strategy to acquire societal capital and ultimately, obtain ultimate whiteness.

The goal of this dissertation is to reconnect the unmarked and undetectably white stories – the stories that individually and collectively define their identity according to individualism and faith in a Christian God that is a moral authority – to the popular American and German performances in this study. These stories are usually presented *as* American in a U.S. context seemingly without racial signifier, or German without racially defining hyphenate signifiers; they are about white people. People of color know that these are white stories. White people, for the most part, refuse to see their stories as “white,” but more so “just stories.” People of color face the fact that their experiences of Americanness and Germanness is always qualified by a racial signifier marking them as differently American or German than their fellow white citizens. Marking the theater shows and television programs that I discuss in this project as white may appear obvious in the daily struggles against inequality that people of color experience daily both in the United States and Germany. The performances examined by this study demonstrate the

threads of connection between a European past in the United States, a U.S.-based protectionism that finds its re-articulation in renewed nationalism in Germany, and a renewed interest in American nationalism based on securing whiteness as central to American identity in the United States. Additionally, whiteness remains not only as a racial signifier but a system of inequality that has a structured relationship to power.

Germany is a country forever scarred by its past visible marking of whiteness and the strategic annihilation of Jewish people, whereas the United States is a country perpetually unwilling to admit that its own racist past has created any scars. The U.S. carries its scars of slavery and the annihilation of “others” while Germany’s scars include a history of genocide and annihilation of “others.” What exists is a give-and-take cycle of transatlantic whiteness: a ‘protection class’ of U.S. whites forged out of historical Europe, which in turn, re-empowered and redefined German nationalism. This nationalism is spreading throughout Europe again and has returned to the United States and other countries around the world.⁵ It is a self-perpetuating cycle of reinforcement. In this dissertation, I locate the place of intersection between these histories in three popular performance sites that bear the often-invisible traces of their ongoing social, cultural, and political negotiation to become white and to maintain that whiteness. These performance sites are located in the United States and Germany and include theater, tele-evangelical programming and game shows.

I begin this introduction with my history, because as a Queer, white male who grew up as a middle-class American, I am a product of this space and people.⁶ In some respect, as I examine whiteness, I am examining myself. As I use my personal narrative to mark ways that I became conscious of whiteness and its capacity to conceal and protect itself and its power, I am working

to awaken my own unconsciousness to the fact that the people who think they are white, create performances that codify whiteness – both as a natural fact and as a component of identity that demands value of the individual as an individual – and circulate ideologies perpetuating fear regarding the rise of “others” in order to define their stake in the American Dream as inevitable and self-evident, thereby keeping it for themselves.

Statement of Purpose: Key Research Questions

This dissertation asks two key questions. First: how is whiteness constructed, performed, and marked by white, male playwrights, game show hosts, and television evangelists in performance work in the 21st century? Second: how do American and German theatrical stages, game shows, and evangelical television programs reflect acts of protectionism that reinforce whiteness as a non-racialized subject position that reifies expectations of privilege? In other words, the dissertation identifies and examines ways in which German and American popular entertainments incorporate strategies to maintain whiteness that was itself learned through the cultural production of theater and television. I trace the ways in which the American Dream narrative has operated in German translation. Because the theatrical stage was originally viewed as and used as a medium through which to spread ideals of the nineteenth century Germanic Enlightenment Project, I frame these “performance stages” of the United States and Germany as spaces that originated separately but dependently, linked by the necessity and capacity to spread these values.

By identifying patterns of storytelling and narrative structure in representative examples of popular performance, I contend that these “performance stages” of whiteness offer a dialogic

between an assumed white audience and the author and subject of each staged performance that reifies and protects white privilege as a construct and performs representations of whiteness that correspond to American dream narratives and ideals of winning as power and privilege. I track these moments of protection in representative examples of popular entertainments in theater and television that script and celebrate the cultural myths of white Americans and white Germans of the 21st century. I contend that each site that I have selected to interrogate in this dissertation promises its audience a means by which average white Americans and Germans can enrich their economic and spiritual lives so that they can maintain or gain access to “the good life.” I have selected American and German performance stages on which to present a diversified sample of white spaces that use theater, popular game shows, and televangelists to mourn notions of white masculinity that have been ostensibly lost or defeated by changing racial, economic, and socio-cultural conditions that have challenged white supremacist heteropatriarchy as inevitable, natural, divinely ordained, and, paradoxically, not worth notice or comment. Although these spaces are mourning loss and celebrating paradigms through which to attain success, this is not intentional. These spaces are merely distributing stories about the common man, playing a game, and inspiring millions to have hope.

White masculinity, as given power by the acts and performances of white men, shifts to protect itself, and therefore shifts its acts and performances, when it, or the men who are striving to be white, perceive to be losing.⁷ These three sites of performance demonstrate those shifts and signify new strategies regarding how narratives of whiteness can be staged and performed in order to protect the expectations of white privilege. The television evangelist speaks to countless viewers weekly and makes claims that seemingly transcend race, class, and ability with eternal

answers that are ostensibly not raced because they are simply “universal.” Becoming like the white evangelists is how congregations win. The game show form also trains the spectator to win. Both are vehicles that have been shaped by white men, and later occupied by people of color who have been promised access to privilege by “following in the footsteps” of white male winners. To watch Bob Barker and Billy Graham clones without linking to their fears of losing their privilege and power, is a missed opportunity to study these stages as formulaic constructions that seek to reproduce particular American Dream narratives. White masculinity is not actually losing, but just appears to be.

Rationale of Study

I have chosen representative works in theater and television that are legible and popular amongst a diverse population within contemporary Germany and The United States, works and sites that are not commonly read as representations of whiteness and hegemony simply because they are so dominantly represented as representing the status quo in both nations. These popular works of theater, games shows, and religious television programming possess a certain kind of opaqueness, and therefore require marking. This project works to identify the characteristics within performance that work to keep whiteness invisible. By selecting American and German performances in a comparative transnational frame, I seek to map the ways in which a wide and diverse demographic of entertainment makers strive to maintain whiteness, and thereby protect themselves as they hold the means of production to determine what counts as “universal” and “mainstream” in popular entertainment.

By exploring two national perspectives of maintaining and protecting whiteness in popular entertainment, I argue that the artistic works explored in this dissertation directly mimic game show host formulas that privilege binaries of winning and losing as a sole judge and arbiter of one's humanity. As a result whiteness functions as real, but constructed; invisible to white people, obvious to Black and non-white people of color. Whiteness in this project does not possess a consciousness capable of perceiving threats and defending itself, rather those invested in this construction's survival create a set of conditions that allows for its defense. This performance of white privilege and the expectation of "winning" is the link between all three "performance stages" examined by this project.

As I hope to show, these popular entertainments disseminate a series of rhetorical strategies and ideals that seek to maintain white male heteronormative patriarchal standpoints that foreshadow the rise of conservative agendas that have currently taken hold in both the United States and Germany. A convergence of these ideas has taken place as white men across the world perceive to be losing and have brought into the material right wing populist nationalism. Explicit in Donald Trump's U.S. campaign was the promise that he alone would fix the country's problems, whether real or manufactured, and make real people "win so much, [they will become] so sick and tired of winning."⁸ Trump promised to graft the past onto the present in order to "Make America Great Again." In translation, Trump promised to "Make America White Again."

Subjects of Study

On the theatre, television evangelist, and game show performance stages I will be using notions of winning and losing as an organizing principle that intersects with totalizing binary values first given power in the Germanic Enlightenment project. These binaries include notions of good and bad, inside and outside, God and the Devil, definer and the defined, and autonomous and not autonomous. In the three plays I examine from the United States, I have set forth a series of rules or criteria, which I believe unify them and set them apart from other plays. Firstly, I am defining “contemporary” as theater that has been staged within the past ten years, from 2008 - 2018. Although all three plays were written over the past ten years, all are staged “now.” These plays present stories with central characters whose sex, gender, and racial markers are not identified and whose Broadway performances were performed by actors who read as white men. In the context of whiteness scholarship, these plays are presented as contributing to the canon of storytelling that presumes it possible for a character to have no marked or markable intersectional characteristics. This is how whiteness remains invisible and not commented upon in these plays. Class is commented upon and evident. *The Humans* is about a middle-class man about to retire, *November* is about an American president who is out of cash, and *Hand to God* is a story about a teenage boy from a middle class family who, in order to save his soul, must escape the hold the white devil has on him. Although they span different economic classes, they are all faced with the imminent threat of losing privilege. I chose these plays as I believe whiteness remains more difficult to mark in these subjects. They must be situated in this space that has been constructed to benefit working class white men. As a result, this white space strives to look backward for ways to further protect its interests.

Chapter 1 – “All of the Lights”: Enlightenment Ails and White Loss on U.S. and German Theatre Stages

Although each central character is white, Karam is from Scranton, Pennsylvania and was born to a Lebanese-American family and enjoys the privilege of being a white identified Arab person in America, Mamet is a white man born in Chicago and identifies with Reform Judaism, and Askins is a white man who was born in Cypress, Texas. The writers of these plays can hardly be categorized as a monolith. Their diversity of age and upbringing serve to strengthen this chapter, as each subject is not a product of one space. By identifying their specific ethnic identities, I also unsettle notions of a monolithic whiteness. Although they may personally be products of whiteness or have aspirations to become white, we cannot assume that each author is writing characters in the image of themselves, if that is an accurate assumption to begin with.

These plays are stories that reflect the hegemony of whiteness and resonate with white, working class people. Former NY Times Theatre critic Charles Isherwood, who is white, explains that because “the bright promise of an improving future, or even a stable present, has faded for many Americans,” there remains an incentive to consume these stories. Even though the lives of the working class have been thriving on Broadway stages for much of the 21st century, in 2016 Isherwood wrote about a series of Broadway plays that from his view are concerned about “financial anxiety and the sense of an uncertain future.” These three plays, which read as a collective anomaly to Isherwood, all discuss financial anxiety and unstable future projections of white American households.⁹

The Humans - Stephen Karam

After having seen *The Humans* for the first time, I remember feeling like I had just watched family and friends from my own life. Perhaps because I grew up about two hours south of Scranton, I felt like the conversations I had witnessed in this play, I had also experienced. Other white friends from other parts of the country have expressed similar sentiments. Stephen Karam was born and grew up in Scranton, Pennsylvania in a Lebanese-American family of the Maronite faith. He had success with *Speech and Debate* (2008) prior to *The Humans* (2015) first debuting off-Broadway at Roundabout and then moving to a Broadway house. Just like *Humans*, *Speech and Debate* was incredibly funny and incredibly tragic. He explained that he “specifically aimed to create characters who “push through their pain... I think that’s what we do in our lives. [We] try to find some laughs and love.”¹⁰ This pushing and striving is what links these two plays together and with the other subjects of study in this chapter. Incorporating Karam is tricky because he is writing about real people who have faced similar problems to the characters on stage. However, if we situate this play in the larger context of whiteness scholarship, economic loss, and uncertainty of non-white people of color, this play’s continued and wild success becomes attributed to more than just creating a real story with real characters. To whose story and characters does this play belong?

November - David Mamet

David Mamet was born in 1947 just south of Chicago in Flossmoor. He began writing plays in his twenties and found quick success doing so. By 1984 he had received the Pulitzer Prize for *Glengarry Glen Ross*, a play about capitalism and masculinity in crisis. We see the

system that has led these salesmen to their depraved state, and we see how they in turn use their positions to take advantage of others. This play, along with Mamet as a theatrical figure, at one point enchanted me. It is pleasing to hear characters speak as his do, and the conflict that he presents takes the audiences to places exciting and terrifying and where few others are able. I remember having additional uncritical reactions to Mamet. His characters were witty, quick, and they were vulgar. As I began to question my own Evangelical upbringing, I began to resist that community's apprehension about Mamet because of vulgarity alone. During my tenure as assistant professor of theatre at Oral Roberts University, it was standard practice to censor scripts with language, and produce what was left over. Many Evangelical Christian spaces do this. These institutions either violate copyright or produce a pre-1960s theatre season. For me, Mamet was at one point a way out of that conservative space. My growing interest and experience with his plays had me asking more questions than I initially anticipated. Why is he asking his audiences to sympathize with straight, white, men who are or perceive to be losing? I do not mention loss in the classical tragic sense of the word. We mourn with King Oedipus because he did not know that he has slept with his mother and killed his father. He did not intentionally commit those acts. Mamet writes central characters who are intentionally racist, misogynistic, and homophobic. They intentionally cheat, lie, abuse women, and evade taxes. And in many of his plays, like the classical structure of tragedy, we are asked to sympathize with these central characters. In Mamet's plays, we do not feel sadness and anguish because these once great men fell to tragic depths. It is as if they have already fallen, and have no other place to go. This traditionally works for comedy, which is why I have chosen to analyze *November*.

Hand to God - Robert Askins

Robert Askins, a white man, was born in Cypress, Texas, attended Baylor University, and grew up in a church where his mother led a puppet ministry, a version of the ministry he writes about in *Hand to God*. While a teenager, Askins remembers himself as “rebellious, conflicted, and confused” after the death of his father.¹¹ He was 16 years old.¹² He grew up in a conservative German Lutheran family. They moved to Cypress, Texas from Oklahoma for work in lumber and construction. What his family did reflected what many oil executives did in the 1980s: they moved into Cypress, gentrified it, and created a wealthy suburb.¹³ Askins admits that his inspiration as a playwright comes from David Mamet, Sam Shepherd, and Sarah Kane.¹⁴ Askins’ own words reflect what Isherwood wrote in 2016, that he believes his play turns his personal “pain into something [that] is actually cathartic for all of us”. Whatever the result of his play, he is attempting to “hitch a horse to a cart and pull it somewhere.”¹⁵

Germany

The German theater has historically been used to spread ideals first articulated in the German Enlightenment project. These values bypassed the horrors that unfolded under Hitler’s Third Reich and traveled to the U.S. theatre stage. This chapter connects the strategies used to protect contemporary whiteness in U.S. commercial theater storytelling to those strategies that were first articulated through the German Enlightenment project. Askin’s *Hand to God*, Mamet’s *November*, and Karam’s *The Humans* are examined in this chapter; each play asks audiences to mourn white loss. These American plays are examined in the context of the contemporary

German theater: whiteness in both spaces defines the central characters and which subjects must be mourned.

In 2012, Berlin drew attention to itself when the Deutsches Theatre attempted to produce white American playwright Bruce Norris's 2011 Pulitzer winning play *Clybourne Park* (2010), a spin-off of Lorraine Hansberry's monumental work about racial discrimination against African Americans, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). *Clybourne Park* begins in 1959, as a Black family moves into a white neighborhood outside Chicago, and takes us to 2009 as that same neighborhood is becoming gentrified and a white family begins to move into the Black neighborhood it had become.¹⁶ Norris withdrew permission after it was discovered the theatre had planned to "experiment with makeup." Because the Deutsches Theatre claimed there were no Black actors in Berlin to cast as African Americans, this theatre intended to implement blackface into their production.

Also in 2012, Berlin's Schlosspark Theater performed the 1987 Tony winning play *I Am Not Rappaport* (1985) about forty times with blackface. In 2012, The Deutsches Theatre in Berlin staged German playwright Dea Loher's play *Innocence* (2005), one of the most popular plays in Germany, using blackface. *Innocence* is a story of migration where non-white outsiders struggle to assimilate into Germany. Although white German director Michael Thalheimer was attempting to produce a post-race aesthetic, his production revealed the inherent whiteness of so called "universal" assumptions as always preferential to whiteness and exclusive to blackness.¹⁷

In 2016, racial diversity and representation on the German stage was examined by the Muenchner Kammerspiele Theatre in Munich as part of a symposium called "Body Talk/A Festival of Bodies and Markets, Gender and Visibility in the 21st Century." Here, the organizers,

predominantly white, acknowledged that German theatre has been and continues to be dominated by straight, white men. Recognizing that the German body politic is much more diverse than that, they set out to ask why German theatre consistently falls short of representing the reality of German identities which are increasingly diverse, thereby – perhaps intentionally – misrepresenting the German body.¹⁸ Because theatre was raised to the “rank of an instrument of the Enlightenment” in the eighteenth century, this sentiment haunts all theater production and evaluative structures (critics, production, finances, etc,) in the twenty-first century in Germany and beyond. As this project connects the residuals of the European Enlightenment ideals in the United States theatre system, and in turn the ideals manifest in plays and practices on those stages over time, I underscore my argument that we can see intersections and rearticulations of those European ideals in the current moment. It becomes clear, then, why there is resistance to transforming contemporary German theatre into a space that does not resemble the white “Enlightenment”-wrought theatre of the past in the present in order to protect and promote traditional notions of white German culture¹⁹.

American and German theatrical spaces, and the plays they accommodate, provide an opportunity to explore how the privileged voices of straight, white men grappling with their fears of “loss” continue to dominate mainstream theater in both countries as they continue to set the aesthetic bar for other non-white and non-male playwrights.

Chapter 2 – Weißer Jesus/White Jesus?: Deconstructing the Stage of U.S. and German Christian Television Evangelist Entertainment

This chapter focuses on tele-evangelical programming as another site of whiteness. Twenty-first century Christian evangelical programming shares commonality with the game show genre. There is a host or pastor, there are contestants or congregants, and there are prizes or eternal rewards. What is unique about this white “stage” is the way it fails to offer solutions to the political and economic structures contemporary Americans and Germans face. Television audiences and church congregants view and attend in search of answers for their intersectional existences. Weekly, they show up to listen to straight, white, male, Christian television personalities of Rick Warren, Reinhard Bonnke, and Joel Osteen. Although all are speaking to different audiences, both sites are working to give their followers strategies to participate in the American Dream within the current neoliberal moment, not to disrupt it, as that would be counterproductive. Disrupting neoliberal whiteness would unsettle the system through which these evangelists are currently benefitting.

Chapter 3 – Show Me the Money: Staging Winners on US and German Game Shows

This chapter examines how the game show genre has been explicitly constructed to distribute contemporary U.S. and German hegemonic values as originally articulated in Germanic Enlightenment thought. Like the myth of the American Dream, as defined as a quick and speedy movement from nothing to everything, *The Price is Right* reflects this myth and promises its contestants an opportunity to make the myth a reality in their lives. This myth presents itself as unraced.

One of the most successful representations of a real everyman is straight, white male Bob Barker, host of *The Price is Right* from 1972-2007. Barker was born in Darrington, Washington, in 1923; he spent much of his childhood in South Dakota as he is a member of the Sioux tribe.²⁰ His family moved to Springfield, Missouri in 1931 and he ultimately attended Drury University on a basketball scholarship and graduated with a degree in economics. In light of his humble upbringings, he is a living example of what it could be like to access the American Dream. In an economic sense, Barker went from nothing to everything as Barker's net worth is valued at \$70 million today.²¹ Barker insists that others can experience what he did. In a recent interview with *Closer Weekly*, Barker said, "People always like to win prizes, and they can win them without knowing who discovered America or anything in the way of history... All the contestants have to do is have Lady Luck give them a break and hope they walk away with a lot of money."²² His point is taken, that this show is not like *Jeopardy*, which does require historical knowledge; however a different type of prior knowledge is necessary if one wants to guess the "actual retail price" necessary for success on his show. In both spaces, winning is the goal.

Straight, white male Drew Carey began hosting *Price* in July 2007. Formerly, he was a stand-up comic and was the star of *The Drew Carey Show* (1995-2004) and host of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* (1998—) for nine years.²³ Carey was born in Cleveland, Ohio and was once a waiter at Denny's.²⁴ More than Barker, Carey not only went from nothing to everything, his greatest satisfaction in life is to embody the role of distributor of wealth and prizes in the game show form.²⁵ In *Price* he is sole distributor. Both Carey and Barker are positioned as mere entertainers facilitating a game, transcending class hierarchy that exists outside of the Bob

Barker Studio in Hollywood, California. This chapter marks how the game show genre serves as a metaphor for this paradigm.

Conclusion – Winners and Losers: An Imagined Future

In light of W.E.B. Du Bois's call for white allyship and solidarity with Black humanity, this conclusion seeks strategies to see that dream realized. Instances of whiteness reproducing itself and individuals resisting those reproductions abound. Du Bois's words remain true, that the inability of whites to "assume that close sympathetic and self-sacrificing leadership of the blacks" remains a reality of our time.

Literature Review

The work of perceiving and understanding "whiteness" as an organizing principle inseparable from many traditions and institutions growing out of the humanist and Enlightenment traditions began to emerge through the labor of African American scholars and are exemplified by such texts as W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folks" (1920) and "Dialogue with a White Friend" (1940), Langston Hughes' *White Man* (1936), and the writings of James Baldwin from 1945-1985. More recently this work appears in bell hooks' *Representations of Whiteness Through the Black Imaginary* (1992), Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), and Cheryl Harris' "Whiteness as Property" (1993). The labor of marking whiteness has always been placed on the shoulders of the oppressed by white people in order to protect themselves. Whiteness Studies emerged in the early 1990s in the academy through white social activist academics and their work, such as

David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters* (1993), and Richard Dyer's *White* (2013). I add to this conversation by marking the white male game show host as a raced construction of white masculinity that must be unpacked in order to understand how whiteness maintains hegemony in these three popular but unexamined "stages."

Within commercial U.S. Theatre, there exists a kind of narration that positions itself as universal and unraced. In his article, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (1980), white author and scholar Hayden White explains that the impulse to narrate is natural by asking the question, "Has any historical narrative ever been written that was not informed not only by moral awareness but specifically by the moral authority of the narrator?"²⁶ The stories told on the theatre stage continue to privilege an Aristotelian "beginning, middle, and end" structure to their plays and musicals. The creators of the plays on this "stage" ask their work to come to an end, to a moral conclusion about whom their audience should sympathize with. As White explains, "only a moral authority could justify the turn in the narrative which permits it to come to an end"²⁷. The moral authorities in this project embrace closure in an attempt to create a "passage from one moral order to another:" a shift in order.²⁸ This study is not critiquing the existence of a moral authority or the notion that stories come to an end, but the ends to which these stories come and the whiteness these stories are working to protect.

Examining representation is another strategy for revealing how whiteness remains invisible. In her essay, "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination" (1997), Black author and activist bell hooks further expands our understanding of the consequences of contemporary representations of race and ethnicity within our white supremacist culture. She

describes a kind of contemporary paradox within whiteness, where it wants to disavow slavery, but it also fights for notions of sameness, which ignores the inequality for which it is not only historically responsible but also continues to perpetuate.²⁹ This explains precisely how the response to attempted blackface in Berlin in 2012 operated. Three theatres attempted to wield blackface but also advocated for a sense of sameness, suggesting that representation does not matter. Specifically, they were perpetuating a tradition with a deeply racist history in service of ostensibly colorblind politics that assume a universal individual and therefore equal identity without realizing they were defining that identity as implicitly race-less, which exists for no one, but specifically not for people of color. hooks writes, “Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think they will make racism disappear.” She goes on to describe that in spite of this impulse, their actions continue to reflect “the primacy of whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think.”³⁰

There exists a paradox where white institutions desire to appear diverse, at least in part to serve capitalist endeavors. White author and scholar Peggy Phelan writes about representation in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) and explains that in order to mark whiteness, social justice demands that blind spots are exposed “within the theoretical frame itself, [so that] it may be possible to construct a way of knowing which does not take surveillance of the object, visible or otherwise, as its chief aim.”³¹ In responding to criticisms of his work, Roediger explains that W.E.B. Du Bois’s idea of a “white blindspot” is central not only to his scholarship surrounding the white male working-class impulse to protect their racial and class construction, but to identify his own white blindspot and its effects on his work.³² Marking the unmarked

within performance is Phelan's aim, which is not an easy task if performance is defined as only existing in the present moment. She writes, "performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participated in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."³³

Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), how these hierarchies of goodness and morality persist to protect white spaces.³⁴ She writes, "Race as a category was linked to human reason and morality, to science, to colonialism and to the rights of citizenship in ways that produced the racialized discourse and racist practices of modernity."³⁵ Her project works to identify when imperialism and colonialism are cloaked behind ideals like reason, morality, and moral authorities, which undergird the value of this dissertation. Likewise, in her book *Staging Blackness and Performing Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century German Drama* (2016), Black author and scholar Wendy Sutherland sets out to "race" the gaze through which we look at and read German texts and argues that these ideas were merely a "veneer of universality" in order to establish "a humanity that is ultimately Eurocentric."³⁶ In other words, Germanic culture has not been concerned with humanity as a whole; substituting an incomplete depiction of the universal as universal has been a primary strategy used to protect white Europeans as default, "logic" used to justify the extermination of non-white Germans.

The German state first began to wage war against the Herero and Namaqua people. This experiment by Germans to stage themselves as superior to Africans in an attempt to reinforce white rule began in 1904 in Southwest Africa (Namibia).³⁷ Laws surrounding miscegenation that were developed outside of Germany, by German colonists in Southwest Africa, later traveled to Germany after the First World War. Hindering the procreation of Blacks in Germany, while

protecting the purity of white German blood, began before the Nazis came to power in 1933.³⁸ Anxiety surrounding white German's attempts to protect their blood from "contamination" of non-white blood persisted into the Third Reich. Hitler used this anxiety to systematically murder six million Jews – roughly two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe – from 1941-1945.³⁹ Over the course of two-hundred years, notions of humanity and citizenship and who had the agency to define were being formed and folded into the narrative of the German nation in various ways, and resulted in the execution of humanity in the midst of white Germans. Today, race remains a complicated conversation in Germany— often a feared one— as the country has attempted to reverse the course and ensure genocide and racial categorization never happen again. Yet racism and anti-otherness stays alive in a space that is working to disavow its history of state-sponsored genocide against Jewish people. The very ideas that asked white Germans to equate notions of German citizenship to whiteness remain alive today. White Germany is not clean of their racist past; it merely remains hidden from sight.

Alon Confino, white author and professor of history at the University of Virginia, defines the notion of memory as "the ways in which people construct a sense of the past."⁴⁰ He explains that it is a subjective experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power." In other words, who wants whom to remember what and why.⁴¹ He explains that individual memories alone do not "offer any true additional explanatory power."⁴² The 2012 series of blackface performances in Berlin contribute to the study of collective mentalities in Germany as the narratives and feelings of a nation's people are motivated by how they remember the past. Confino writes that because memory tends to be fragmented as a result of focusing on individual, distinct memories, "memory as a study of collective mentality provides a

comprehensive view of culture and society that is often missing in the history of memory.” It would be a mistake to merely pick one historical event or one vehicle of memory, analyze it, and then draw conclusions about that memory.

White scholar Katrin Sieg, Professor of German and European Studies at Georgetown University, is clear in her article “Race, Guilt and Innocence: Facing Blackfacing in Contemporary German Theater” that blackface in Germany is a “common and unremarked-upon practice” in German theater and popular culture.⁴³ She writes that blackface in Germany serves “to link the colonial past to the culture of commemoration securing post-fascist narratives of German history and identity.”⁴⁴ Defenders of blackface argue there are not enough Black actors for the Black roles that exist and that it is only stigmatized because of its racist legacies in American history. These are white narratives that choose one memory, analyze it, and then draw conclusions to support that white memory. According to Sieg, the history of blackface must be considered and not dismissed in order to understand German identity. Therefore, understanding memory that is recognized by the German nation is understanding its local and national discourses. Because instances like the 2012 series of blackface performances prohibited Black people from speaking and representing themselves, this study works to identify those “moral authorities” who have silenced them in contemporary German popular culture. German acts of genocide and the consequent acts of white protectionism are historically linked and remain so today.

Black British writer and academic Paul Gilroy is concerned with the political problems that arise when nationality intersects with the underpinnings of fascism. He argues “the concept of culture and the affinities and affiliations which link the blacks of the West to one of their

adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the enlightenment.”⁴⁵

Gilroy defines the Black Atlantic as Black people in “various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship.” Mapping “roots and routes” provide “a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory.”⁴⁶ Following Gilroy, this project’s intent is to take these various stages of performance as a complex transnational unit of analysis and use it “to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective.”⁴⁷

Equally important to my analysis are the ways that popular performance is used to create a cultural community that assumes a desired audience. In her book *A Concise History of Germany*, Mary Fulbrook, a white British academic and historian, explains that the “impetus for policies has less to do with the impact of philosophical ideas” in eighteenth century Germany, but more to do with “immediate economic, social or military and political objectives.”⁴⁸ Although Fulbrook is working to establish that the philosophical and immediate objectives had the ability to operate independently from each other within Enlightenment German culture, she explains that there was work done to stress the notion of a cultural community as a result of the Enlightenment, a *Volk*. This rally around community, she writes, “ultimately brought in the more virulent forms of later German nationalism.”⁴⁹ Therefore, in order to understand the persistent impulse to protect German culture in the 21st century, the work of the Enlightenment cannot be ignored.

The game show seeks to protect a racial construct of masking whiteness. Because whiteness remains in search of purity and “the real,” this study works to establish theory for understanding white loss and the anger that results. It will lean upon Phelan’s work to find a theory of value for that which is not “really” there. What the construction of whiteness seeks to

protect is a fabrication, a fake reality intent upon rigging the game for a few players over everyone else. That is the only way winning within this construction is possible, given that most players lose. Necessary for this study is white French author and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's use of habitus, as defined as a feel for the game. Only those players who are constructed, raised with, or embody a specific kind of habitus will "win". Identifying the unconscious 'habitus' through which white men are operating is a necessary component to marking whiteness. Black author and scholar Toni Morrison describes her book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), as "an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served."⁵⁰ By defining each "stage" of television game shows and televangelism as a space where its white spectators can be entertained, can escape, or can find salvation, we must ask who is able to strive and achieve the dreams these stages promise? By drawing our critical gaze to the white, racial subject controlling the theater stage, the game, and the religious standpoints theater undergird white male Christianity, I seek to mark the work of whiteness and to create spaces for internal critique by white males such as myself that can empty its power. If an ideology of whiteness only has life and meaning as a result of Blackness, then Morrison's project is necessary for this dissertation as hers is "interested in the strategies for maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it."⁵¹

In his book *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), David Roediger engages in the work of exposing the materiality of whiteness and its operational power by attempting to take "the agency of working class people seriously."⁵² He argues that the formation of the working class and whiteness, and therefore blackness, were interconnected.⁵³ The theater, game show, and TV

evangelist programs live in this working class space as they consume notions of success as tethered to hard work and the American Dream narrative. Although Roediger is critical of scholars who privilege class over race, he explains that studies of race often do not explore “the role of the working class in creating popular cultural treatments of race nor the specific meanings of racism in popular culture for workers.”⁵⁴ This study understands the borders of intersectionality to include race, gender and class as part of the theoretical approach to marking whiteness in popular performance.

In light of the 2016 United States presidential election, media bureaus posed the question: is Germany, who appears to be a sanctuary for Syrian refugees, now the leader of the free world? The assumption behind this question understands a Donald Trump presidency to be a threat and assault to the values that many have worked hard to procure for generations. In examining these three principal “stages” of whiteness in popular performance, I seek to disrupt U.S. centered scholarship in this field of transnational performance studies scholarship. The texts and voices concerning race and the transnational turn are concerned with decolonizing methodologies in light of the strategic exclusion of people of color on the international stage. These writers examine how whiteness uniquely and specifically operates and remains invisible in different ways and in different times and places in contemporary Germany and the United States.

Incorporating historiography is essential to this dissertation and provides an overarching frame to examine how history is told and remembered as well as who is telling and remembering history. In *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (1997), white German-born author and scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte writes that it is impossible “to pursue theatre historiography without applying theoretical and analytical tools; to analyze performance without

theoretical and historical context; to theorize on theatre without drawing on historical material and the analysis of one's own aesthetic experience of theatrical performance.”⁵⁵ This prevents the totalizing of historical ideas and concepts. It resists essentializing the subjects of one’s study. She argues, "It is nowadays a truism that we cannot presuppose a universal concept of history...nor do we follow the theory of modernization as elaborated in the Enlightenment, which conceived of the historical process as a process of never-ending progress and perfection of the human race.”⁵⁶ This study cannot examine the contemporary moment without understanding the Enlightenment project from which it came. The United States and Germany share a history of ideas that gave birth to white supremacy and created a culture and ideology of whiteness, and continues to categorize humans.

This particular “performance stage” seeks to understand how whiteness performs and remembers in order to protect and replicate itself through white scholar and professor Joseph Roach’s understanding of surrogation in transnational spaces. It will examine how the creators of these shows utilize story and narrative, themes, and dramatic structures that assume white privilege as a device that both protects and critiques changing conditions of whiteness. Roach argues that we must first look to the past by taking up the “three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution,” or “how culture reproduces and recreates itself” in order to understand how whiteness operates today.⁵⁷

W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the forefathers of African American Studies and the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard, offers a transnational perspective. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts in 1868. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) describes him as “an American civil rights activist, leader, Pan-Africanist, sociologist,

educator, historian, writer, editor, poet, and scholar.”⁵⁸ He was one of the founders of the NAACP in 1909 and served a consultant to the United Nations founding convention (1945) where he was “active” in placing the grievances of an African American before the UN.⁵⁹ Du Bois was a man of hybridity, who migrated between the U.S., Germany, Ghana, and Asia. He is a Black man who is a product of many spaces and ideas. In “The Souls of Black Folks” (1903), he reminds this project that whites must accept race prejudice as a fact and as “deplorable in its intensity, unfortunate in results, and dangerous for the future.”⁶⁰ This project aims to fill the void of white voices and leadership that Du Bois describes when he writes, “We cannot hope, then, in this generation, or for several generations, that the mass of the whites can be brought to assume that close sympathetic and self-sacrificing leadership of the blacks which their present situation so eloquently demands.”⁶¹

Methodology

In an attempt to trace Du Bois’s indictment of white absence regarding the issue of Black solidarity, the project’s methodology requires direct observation of these white spaces in order to make visible what white Americans and Germans cannot see and to make plain what remains hidden and obscured. This project will use ethnographic methods of observing live and recorded performances of theater, games hows, and tele-evangelical performances in field work. I will use textual analysis of plays and television programs and archival analysis of previously recorded television and play productions from an intersectional performance studies standpoint that is theoretically informed by critical race theory.

Auto-ethnography

My project reflects my own subject position as a white, Queer man from Southeastern, Pennsylvania. I am marking my position to unsettle impulses towards objectivity and universality. I do not include my personal experiences for the purpose of re-centering the conversation onto whiteness, but to disrupt whiteness and assumed ways of understanding white people and their relationships with Black and non-white people of color. White author and professor Sarah Stahlke (Wall) explains that autoethnography emerged from postmodern philosophy as a strategy to unsettle dominant assumptions of science and research. This new practice works to broaden our understanding of experience and collect new knowledge.⁶² Incorporating my personal experiences is useful if it is wielded in similar ways as I attempt to join the conversation on race, whiteness, and the American Dream.

In *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (2012), white author and professor Jill Dolan works to unsettle the expectation of the identity of an ideal theatre spectator. She explains that the motivating assumption behind the discourse of feminist performance criticism is the theatre that “creates an ideal spectator carved in the likeness of the dominant culture whose ideology he represents.” Identifying this spectator in popular entertainment is the catalyst to denaturalize their positions “as a representative of the dominant culture.”⁶³ Her writing is concerned with social change, cultural production, and work that attempts to make the ideal spectator appear strange and unnatural. It is Dolan’s intent to examine how performances deliver ideological messages, including those that go unnoticed and “perpetuate cultural assumptions that are oppressive to women and other disenfranchised social groups.”⁶⁴ Dolan’s work marks whiteness.

I grew up watching game shows, but just as a game. I grew up in Evangelical spaces, but saw them as able to transcend markers of difference and just an inspirational message. As I discovered theatre as a young actor, constructions of race were always absent from the conversation unless used to mark the position of non-white “others”. This project is marking what may be obvious to some. To most white people, they have not come to an understanding that these “performance stages” are white spaces.

Performance Observation - Fieldwork

I attended performances of *Hand to God* and *The Humans* over the past two years. I visited the Performing Arts Library in New York to watch *November*. I spent the last four summers visiting Germany and speaking to artists familiar with contemporary German theatre. I visited LA in the spring of 2018 to attend tapings of *The Price is Right* and others game shows and TV evangelist programming. I attended live broadcasts of Joel Osteen in Houston, Texas, in spring 2018.

Archival Research

I visited the UCLA Television & Film archive, Museum of Television & Radio, and the Hammer Museum. I visited the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago in November 2017. After reviewing cursory archive holdings, I viewed most television performances that I have not witnessed online and at these archives. I also visited the The *Deutsche Kinemathek*, a film and television archive in Germany during the summer of 2018. Contemporary archival spaces like Netflix, Hulu, and HBO Now was also used to observe the subjects of this project. An

IRB has been submitted and approved for this project as of summer 2016 and I revised the IRB as I continued to conduct research.

**Chapter 1 – “All of the Lights”: Enlightenment Ails and White Loss on US and German
Theatre Stages**

Introduction

In 2010 American singers Kanye West and Rihanna released their single “All of the Lights.” In the song, the light desired – or the darkness that exists and which calls for light – is reflected by both public and private spaces. In this way, a living dichotomy between light and dark is on full display.

Turn up the lights in here, baby

You know what I need, want you to see everything

Want you to see all of the lights

The subjects in this story are in darkness and require illumination in order to be seen clearly. The kinds of lights we see are explicitly connected to the kind of darkness they are illuminating.

Cop lights, flash lights, spot lights

Strobe lights, street lights

The call from Kanye to “turn up the lights” presumes that this world has remained hidden from the audience; as if lights are required to illuminate a reality that is not easily seen; an existence that remains opaque and shrouded in darkness.

Turn up the lights in here, baby

Extra bright, I want y'all to see this

Turn up the lights in here, baby

You know what I need, want you to see everything

In the final verse, I am reminded of communities within Black America that are adversely affected by Modernism and ultimately by values once forged in the Enlightenment. Binaries of light and dark, good and bad, and white and black were created in the Enlightenment, distributed by Modernism, and remain a strategy through which we can understand the totality of American experiences. Of course, this binary, where whiteness remains invisible to white people and Blackness is relegated to the margins, is not an enlightening thought to Black and non-white people of color. “All of the Lights” exists as a result of the persistence and downright resilience of people across skin colors invested in whiteness to enforce this paradigm.

“All of the Lights” continues the work that Black British historian and professor Paul Gilroy requested when he asked for the experiences of Black people to be told to help give context to our contemporary moment.⁶⁵

You know what I need, want you to see everything

Want you to see all of the lights

Whoa, whoa, oh

I tried to tell you but all I could say is oh

Whoa, whoa, oh

I tried to tell you but all I could say is oh

Whoa, whoa, oh

I tried to tell you but all I could say is oh

Whoa, whoa, oh

I tried to tell you but all I could say⁶⁶

In an attempt to connect the stories that are told today on three “stages” in contemporary American and German culture—the theatre stage, game shows, and evangelical television programs—to narratives of whiteness that remain undetectable to white people, today’s stories must first be placed into proper context. This context includes identifying a transnational lineage of storytelling, narrative, and assumptions about whose stories in this chapter are being told and how they originate from Germanic Enlightenment thought. Within this context exists a binary where white people and spaces win and are perceived as winners and Black people and spaces lose and are perceived as losers.

The Black world to which Kanye and Rihanna are directly speaking is inherited. Binaries of winning and losing began to take shape during the Germanic Enlightenment project. These ideas of exclusion stretched across nations and were spread by thinkers such as Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In her book *Staging Blackness, Constructing Whiteness: Race in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Black scholar and professor Wendy Sutherland sets out to “race” that gaze in order to change the way we read German performances and texts.⁶⁷ She explains that because the human person was categorized into hierarchies along with other species, Enlightenment ideas such as “beauty, intellect, feeling, morality, and ultimately

humanity, implicitly codified in skin color, reveal the close connection between the construction of blackness as backdrop for the formation of a universal and normative whiteness.”⁶⁸ Blackness did not meet the requisites for humanity in Eighteenth century Germany as it was associated with badness, darkness, ugliness, and everything not associated with whiteness, such as goodness, light and beauty.

Gilroy writes that in England ideas of “race” were consequentially placed in opposition to ideas of national belonging. He explains that “blackness and Englishness appeared suddenly to be mutually exclusive attributes.”⁶⁹ Gilroy examines ways in which ways “race” is associated with ideas of national belonging and wonders if it is possible to embrace all of modernity, even though it has worked and is working to erase distinctions between all of us; is it possible to reclaim that which has been erased and embrace and celebrate those distinctions that unify us and make us stronger? It is not productive to join the conversation of anti-humanists who continue to debate the merits of the Enlightenment, but rather interrogate strategies to privilege the nationality, location, identity, and historical memory of Black and non-white people of color while deconstructing binary ways of viewing identity.⁷⁰ The project of the Enlightenment and its ideological ties to racism, serve as a backdrop to the contemporary moment in Germany and, likewise, illustrative of how the U.S. has inherited these values

Eighteenth-century bourgeois drama was used as a didactic tool by German dramatists in order to teach bourgeois morality. They did this by creating a binary where good was located within white bourgeois circles, family, and home, and bad was located outside.⁷¹ Because this constructed reality created blackness and whiteness as antithetical to each other, Sutherland views the Enlightenment as a non-neutral and non-universally inclusive space designed to

privilege some humans as individuals while excluding others. However, there was resistance to normative whiteness within the eighteenth century Germanic Enlightenment. In England, John Locke wrote *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689) in response to Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), which had legislated toleration for a Protestant minority in France for almost one-hundred years. He spoke in support of "freedom of conscious as a natural right" for Jews, Muslims, Pagans, and Unitarians.⁷² Voltaire denounced the torture and execution of Protestant Jean Calas, as described by white scholar and professor H.B. Nesbit, "in all his skill in satire."⁷³ Nesbit goes on to explain that Gotthold Lessing's claim in his drama *Nathan the Wise*, that Judaism, Islam, and Christianity can all three remain true, reflects a German tradition of pluralism.⁷⁴ Over the course of two hundred years, notions of humanity and citizenship were folded into the narrative of the German nation as a result of the Enlightenment project. Although contested, Sutherland explains that those values which privileged whiteness "presented a 'vener of universality' while establishing a humanity that is ultimately Eurocentric and the foundation of Western philosophy."⁷⁵ This perspective helps guide this essay; to understand a nation's memory is to understand the history of collective mentality.⁷⁶ This perspective of universality is at the heart of *The Humans*, *November*, and *Hand to God*.

Key Questions

The key questions of this chapter ask, how does each play examined work to protect white male expectations of white privilege, or how do white men win and what happens when they lose? Secondly, how does the theatre stage function as it always has, a tool of the Enlightenment? Finally, can we call these examined subjects "dramas of privilege," a kind of staged reality that is

only true for the white whole? When light is directed to white masculinity losing, anger and fragility are illuminated. These are stories about white American's inability to acknowledge their role in the pain and trauma that defines the lives of too many everyday Black Americans. These plays demonstrate that white people have no idea who Black Americans are. In "All of the Lights," Kanye and Rihanna show us a world where Black men and women are trying desperately to survive in a world constructed for them to fail. In the shadow of the Trump presidency, this chapter examines how Karam's *The Humans*, Mamet's *November*, and Askins's *Hand to God* centers the conversation on white American loss as accidental and unnatural at the exclusion of Black American loss, which has been orchestrated and constructed.

The Humans

Erik Blake is the father and protagonist in Stephen Karam's *The Humans*, which ran on Broadway until January 2017. In this first U.S. example, we experience a story of characters from Scranton, Pennsylvania, working class parents, who visit their youngest daughter and her boyfriend in their Chinatown apartment for Thanksgiving. Erik and his wife Dierdre intended to purchase a second home and speak about doing so up until the end of the play. Throughout the play there is tension, an angst at the state of things. His daughter Brigid and boyfriend Richard are winning. Although we do not know it until the end of the play, Erik and his wife are losing. As the play concludes, we discover Erik was fired from his position as a result of sexual indiscretions, which has consequently placed them in serious economic trouble.

Critical response

I attended a production of *The Humans* in 2016 and watched the July 24, 2016 production that was recorded for the New York Public Library on January 6, 2018. Charles Isherwood uses the word 'posturing' to describe Blake's performance. Behind the posturing is pain. A kind of pain that can be directly connected to the loss of the dream that whiteness once promised. It is as if this play serves as a microcosm for what's happening in America on a much larger scale.⁷⁷ I can hear my mother saying the exact words of Deirdre. I can hear the exhaustion with the state of a changing world that comes from Erik in my father and uncles and grandfathers. White Chief Theatre Critic for the *LA Times* Charles McNulty agrees when he writes for the Los Angeles premiere, that Karam "captures contemporary American domestic life in such wincingly accurate detail that something at once eternal and urgently of the moment is achieved."⁷⁸ White Theatre Reporter Maureen Lee Lenker echoes this sentiment when she writes for *Entertainment Weekly*, "It is this that makes the play almost unbearable in the best possible way at certain moments, its exposed wounds hitting all too close to home."⁷⁹ There are assumptions that come with whiteness. When those assumptions don't manifest materially, even as a result of posturing and playing the role, a deep sense of loss, pain, and anger result. This is a phenomenon that continues to take place, to a small or greater degree, all across the country. That loss becomes most material when Erik is left alone, in the final moments of the play, to process the loss he is experiencing. As Erik processes that loss, it presents itself as familiar to the audience, whether they've actually experienced a similar loss, or whether they can understand his loss because, like Erik, they are from a culture of whiteness; he is speaking to an assumed white audience.

Michael Billington in his review of the 2018 London production describes the play as “hyper realistic” and describes a fear of “poverty, unemployment and ill-health” as lurking underneath.⁸⁰ White Arts Editor Sean Nelson who reviewed the play for its Seattle Rep debut describes that play as “You see the daughters bristle at their mother's misguided attempts to be close to them, the mother's small heartbreak when she overhears them making fun of her, the father's efforts to seem chummy and patriarchal when it's increasingly obvious that he has something terrible to disclose.”⁸¹ This play wants to be an ensemble piece, where each character has something to say, speaks from autonomy, and is simultaneously reliant upon and independent from the others. But this idea of an ensemble falls apart when Erik Blake reveals his secret. McNulty reflects this sentiment when he describes a shift that he perceived from *The Humans* first production Off-Broadway to the latest production he saw in Los Angeles. He writes, “When I first encountered Mantello’s production off-Broadway at the Roundabout Theatre Company, I was blown away by the seamlessness of the ensemble. On Broadway, I was gripped by the confrontation with middle-class struggle.”⁸² Although we could say it’s an ensemble piece, it is the choices made by Erik that affect everyone. This cannot be said of any other character.

New Yorker Theatre Editor Michael Shulman gets closest to describing how this play functions when he describes a recent study of white men in his review of the play. The study finds that “the death rate of middle-aged white Americans, unlike that of their counterparts of other ethnicities and in other well-off countries, was going *up*, for reasons that have something to do with substance abuse, particularly with alcohol and opioids. Suicides among this group have also increased at an unprecedented rate. ‘Only H.I.V./AIDS in contemporary times has done anything like this,’ Deaton told the *Times*.”⁸³ This is a play that represents real people in real

spaces. But in order for these people to be best represented, playwrights and critics need to write truthfully. For instance, most critics appealed to notions of universality and sameness when they referenced this play. White Drama Critic Chris Jones for the Chicago Tribune does not use the word “white”. He writes, “Like all great blue-collar plays, it captures the sense of how hard it can be to control our existence — once you have enough years under your belt, you know that everything can, and does, change on a dime. Without regard to deserving.”⁸⁴ Shulman writes, “Karam’s play is not alone in its bleak assessment of American life.”⁸⁵ Isherwood, another white male, writes, “The fragility of human life and all it contains is a recurring theme, and it accelerates as the drama darkens.”⁸⁶ The assumption that this is a story about a straight, white working class protagonist is assumed. The audience is expected to sympathize with his loss of privilege as a normative exercise in the theatre. These critics are complicit with whiteness by not mentioning Blake’s position in a stratified economy that disproportionately benefits men like him over positioning the play as one about all of us.

Drama of Privilege

This is not a tragedy, but a form I will define as “drama of privilege,” a kind of staged reality that is only true for the white whole. When compared to classical tragedy, like Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*, there appear to be differences. At the end of *The Humans*, when the audience discovers that the father, Erik Blake, has been terminated from his job, we also discover that this will prevent him and his wife from retiring in their second home. The play has established successfully securing a second home as a marker of success in the narrative of the American dream. The tragedy is not that neoliberal, one-percenter elites raised taxes, shipped

jobs overseas, and sacked the children in the play with student loan debt. The tragedy we are sold in this play is that of a straight, white man, who worked hard his entire life, deserved to be rewarded, but at the end of it all, cheated on a his wife with a teacher and lost it all. In *Oedipus Rex*, the king did not intentionally kill his father and sleep with his mother. Upon hearing from the Oracle that this was his fate, he did everything in his power to escape that prophecy. In light of all of that, the prophecy is still fulfilled. In *The Humans*, Erik brought his loss explicitly upon himself as a result of his choices. This is also not a story of an anti-hero. These are stories of protagonists who break norms, laws, and generally navigate the landscape of our world in a way that is inappropriate at best and unlawful at worst. But they do this for some greater good. Because the laws and norms have failed the protagonists in their worlds, we sympathize with them as they work to resolve an unfair situation.

The Humans is a play about the deteriorating moral authority (which has been a privilege to possess) of the protagonist. White author and professor Hayden White explains that narrative is not objective. He asks, "Has any historical narrative ever been written that was not informed not only by moral awareness but specifically by the moral authority of the narrator?"⁸⁷ It is not enough for an author or playwright to conjure the most dramatic situation they can imagine and place it onto the page. This will merely create the most dramatic situation from the position of that one author. It redefines the word "author." Playwrights and authors "author" actively and direct the course of events their characters encounter, whether they believe they are doing so or not. White writes, "only a moral authority could justify the turn in the narrative which permits it to come to an end."⁸⁸ Authors cannot escape narrative that creates a "passage from one moral order to another."⁸⁹ Authors must therefore not neglect their authority and position as they write

Historical and dramatic narrative because it is linked to the function of the author. In *The Humans*, the laws and norms of this world have not failed Erik Blake, just his privilege. By obscuring the fact that Blake is a white man mourning his “loss,” Karam is marking his position as a moral authority reproducing white loss stories as representative of the American whole.

Even though there appear to be differences between this tragedy and *Oedipus Rex*, I would like to consider whether this play actually deviates from classical tragedy, or if the formula of classical tragedy was created for protagonists in his position. In both plays, the flaws of *Oedipus Rex* range from anger to hubris and Erik Blake misses the mark because of hubris. In *Oedipus*, he clearly attempts to avoid the prophecy of the Oracle. We are asked to lament his fate and choices. In *The Humans*, we are asked to lament his fate and not necessarily his choices, which I believe tacitly approves of them in some way. Beyond this we cannot ignore that Blake has the Kantian identity necessary to even be able to make the moral decision necessary for an Aristotelian tragedy. This play is not entirely a failure to use moral authority or tragedy properly, but using both exactly as our current state of affairs would suggest they should.

White author and professor David Theo Goldberg in his book *The Threat of Race*, can help us understand how Blake’s identity remains the only identity legible as human. Goldberg expounds upon how identities are held in this Kantian grip by demonstrating how Western civilization was constructed as an explicit result of racism. He brushes aside notions that racism is merely a byproduct of our modern existence. He argues the Neoliberal push to privatize industry and property, under the guise of greater freedom, is coterminous with a push to privatize race, “removing conception and categorization in racial terms from the public to the private realm.” He explains that the State is not purging racism from its purview, but rather supporting

“racially driven exclusions in the private sphere” where the State has no authority.⁹⁰ In Goldberg’s view, not only did the West define humanity, but in the twenty-first century the State is pushing the responsibility to define to the private white sphere. Blake becomes the tragic figure is for who tragedy was designed. When a protagonist, who meets the requisites of humanity, loses, the assumed white audience not only mourns the circumstances in the play but the means by which Blake rose to such privilege from the start. The assumed white audience mourns his whiteness.

The Humans requires marking because whiteness has power not only because of the actions or thoughts of people with white skin. On October 30, 2018, I attended a talk at Public Library in Lawrence, Kansas that helped to elucidate the pain people like Blake and his family are experiencing. White authors and professors David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch and Black author and professor Tony Bolden presented a panel to promote Roediger’s new book *Class, Race and Marxism*. Roediger shared that he has been a Marxist for 50 years. Together they explained that Marxist theory can help us understand why seventy percent of folks in a town in upstate New York wish for their community to be more diverse. It can help explain how to move past that feeling of wanting economic and social equality but feeling helpless to do so. It can explain why capitalism needs a divided workforce in order to thrive. It can help explain why white working class men, who have been conditioned to expect a job, a salary, and a family by just showing up, are now experiencing loss. It can help contextualize their loss in relation to non-white working class loss. Bolden explained that we often hear the question, “What is Race?” He said, “We’ve all heard that it’s a construct. But it usually ends right there. Race is a construct, that facilitates class exploitation in various ways.” Since capitalism is unable to address the

miseria it creates, Marxism is a strategy to envision a society beyond it. Esch said, “Everyone knows that capitalism sucks. We’re all exhausted. We’re all spread out over the country. Families have been separated. Working people know that. Regardless of who you voted for, you know that. We’re in a time when we are feeling overwhelmingly powerless.” This panel explained that Marxism can help explain that capitalism does not just produce things, it produces difference.⁹¹ Capitalism in *The Humans* assumes that white people have privilege and that a balancing of opportunity along with a susceptibility to loss of privilege must be mourned.

In his book *The Wages of Whiteness*, Roediger expounds upon these miseries. The book as a project argues that working class formation and the development of a sense of whiteness were systematic.⁹² Because of this linkage, he argues “the pleasures of whiteness could function as a “wage” for white workers.”⁹³ Race or class is not privileged over the other in his analysis, and he is critical of scholars who do. Although this wage may have been more easily identifiable during segregation in public spaces, Roediger believes there is value in examining whiteness through this paradigm today. Since segregation has been criminalized, whiteness has become more difficult to mark. To show Blake as benefitting from whiteness is more difficult in this context, particularly because whiteness is never commented upon.

Black author and activist Toni Morrison, asks in her book *Playing in the Dark*, “What does positing one’s writerly self as un-raced and all others as raced entail?”⁹⁴ In other words, just as Erik Blake is presented as unmarked, what does it entail when a writer or central character in these plays does not come with their race marked and explained? One strategy remains certain, if “whiteness alone is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable,” then Blackness is that which gives meaning to whiteness.⁹⁵

When examined together, Blackness gives whiteness company, speech, meaning, makes it fathomable, gives it a point, unfreezes it, unveils it and pulls back the curtain upon it, is no longer dreaded, makes sense, and is now able to be placated. Loss as a result of the economy may be shared by all Americans, but *The Humans* is a story explicitly about white American loss. In light of the critical response to this play and a racially unmarked protagonist, Black people cannot hope, as Du Bois writes, “then, in this generation, or for several generations, that the mass of the whites can be brought to assume that close sympathetic and self-sacrificing leadership of the blacks which their present situation so eloquently demands.”⁹⁶ Whiteness as a system connected to class exploitation continues to preserve his words as haunting and relevant to the early 21st century in the United States.

Resisting Drama of Privilege (The Well Made Play)

In *A Concise History of German*, white British author and historian Mary Fulbrook confirms this history of privileging white humanity. She explains that the work of the German Enlightenment tended “to sustain rather than criticize the role of worldly rulers.”⁹⁷ This reminder is useful to understand how Kantian whiteness has remained visible over Blackness as Enlightenment thinkers introduced the world to “critical reason as a means of questioning, analyzing, and exploring.”⁹⁸ Resistance also exists in this group of white German men. In addition to Locke, Voltaire, and Lessing resisting narratives of nation and whiteness as the Enlightenment began to gain traction across Europe in the Eighteenth century, Alexander von Humboldt resisted. Humboldt used his human faculties to show his disgust for slavery and often criticized colonial policies.⁹⁹ He always acted out of a deeply humanistic conviction, also born

by the ideas of the Enlightenment.¹⁰⁰ It is clear there remain multiple legacies and remnants of values produced by the Enlightenment project.

Examining white scholars and white Enlightenment philosophers alone is not enough to understand the expanse of these ideas. Although the story of the Enlightenment usually begins by recounting the ideas of straight, white men from Western Europe, just like I did in this dissertation, these ideas existed elsewhere over a century prior on the African continent. Zera Yacob (1599-1692) was born to a poor family of farmers just near Axum, the capital of Ethiopia at that time. After learning rhetoric, poetry, critical thinking, and the Bible, as understood by Catholics and Copts, he found himself fleeing apprehension as a result of declaring that Christianity was no more right than any other religion. Since Catholicism was the official religion of that region, he fled and came upon a ‘beautiful cave’ and set out to live ‘only the essential facts of life.’¹⁰¹ White, Norwegian male Dag Herbjørnsrud, historian of ideas and founder of SGOKI (the Center for Global and Comparative History of Ideas) in Oslo, explains that Yacob’s position “opens up an enlightened discourse on the subjectivity of religion, while still believing in some kind of universal Creator.” Yacob also writes about “the perspectives of solidarity, women and affection in his philosophical argument.”¹⁰² Privileging Yacob’s ideas works to unsettle the historiographical record of the Enlightenment period as remembered by many white historians and scholars.

Along with Yacob should be mentioned Anton Amo (c1703-55) who was born in Guinea, today’s Ghana, and studied and taught in German universities. Black historian and scholar Marilyn Sephacle describes Amo as “the African philosopher of the 18th century who became one of the greatest German thinkers.”¹⁰³ According to white historian and scholar Justin E.H.

Smith, Amo's view was that African kingdoms were all recognized under Roman law, and therefore as Smith explains, "all Africans in Europe have the status of visiting royal subjects with a legal protection that precludes their enslavement."¹⁰⁴ However, Yacob and Amo are not names routinely mentioned along with Kant, Locke, and others.

It is worth noting that some of these white men who are celebrated as champions of liberty and freedom 'for all' ultimately remain complicated characters for white, well-meaning revisionist historians, like myself. Herbjørnsrud explains that "Locke was secretary during the drafting of *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* (1669), which gave white men 'absolute power' over their African slaves." He was also financially invested in the Royal African Company, and therefore profited from the English Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Voltaire is another white man, who although critiqued the Catholic church and advocated for freedom of religion and speech, described Jewish people in anti-Semitic terms when he wrote, "they are all of them born with raging fanaticism in their hearts," which marks his position as one invested in race as a biological construct. The narrative with the greatest threat, as explained by Gilroy, is when the slave experience is ignored in order to protect Eurocentric rationalism. Privileging resistant narratives like Yacob's and Amo's expands the Enlightenment and allows for a path forward to liberate all of humanity.

Conclusion

Without asking the audience to sympathize with Erik's whiteness, we have no play. Every character intersects with his character arc. Because of this, when we discover that he cheated on his wife, the audience is strong armed into sympathizing with him. This drama of privilege asks

us to sympathize with the man who has no reason to be sympathetic. This story has value in that it reflects the feelings of men like Erik. They perceive to be experiencing loss, as if the system that exists is no longer working for them. That system has disproportionately worked exclusively for them. Therefore, only with Erik, a straight, white working-class man, can *The Humans* be possible and remain as a legible tragedy in the Aristotelian tradition.

The Humans remains a play about how white winners are no longer winning to the disproportionate degree to which they have grown accustomed. This is a play about straight, white men who perceive to be losing. In this respect, *The Humans* protects white male expectations of white privilege as the play asks white people to sympathize with loss of privilege. The loss that Blake is mourning, is that he must function by a set of rules that apply for everyone. The only way for Blake to “win” is to not receive economic and familial punishment for his sexual indiscretions. As a result of this “loss,” that he does not receive expectations of privilege, the family is ripped a part and the presumed white audience is presented a tragedy. The Enlightenment stage has always been sympathetic to teaching “bourgeois morality...by creating a binary where good was located within white bourgeois circles, family, and home, and bad was located outside.” It is not that there can not be play about a straight, white man who suffers from hubris in order to warn the presumed white audience about their privilege, but in this play, constructions of whiteness remain concealed from the presumed white audience. *The Humans* as “dramas of privilege” — a staged reality that is only true for straight, white men— works to disguise a system of inequality that has structured relationships to power from the powerful assumed, white audience.

November

November is about white President of the United States, Charles Smith, a desperate man of relative morality, whom we discover will do anything to remain in office and prevent ultimate power from being taken from him. Smith begins with no money or popularity and crafts a plan to raise campaign funds from the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers by holding the Thanksgiving Day turkey hostage. Even though he has no moral compass, is bankrupt, and deserves to fail at raising funds and securing a reelection bid, and even though we look forward to watching him fail in this American political farce, he ultimately succeeds at raising funds and we presume will go on to win the presidency for another term. The playwright David Mamet, describes his play as being about “a president who is self-interested, corrupt, suborned, and realistic, and [about] his leftish, lesbian, utopian-socialist speechwriter.”¹⁰⁵

Critical Response

I did not attend a production of Mamet’s *November* in 2008, but watched the April 5, 2008 production that was recorded for the New York Public Library on January 6, 2018. When asked by Matthew Roudané in 1984, just after *Glengarry Glen Ross* had received its premiere at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, if he sees himself as “a writer, as one who shatters illusions, or as some kind of truth-teller,” Mamet said, “No. I am just a storyteller...[I] know as little about what we do as anyone else...It just so happens that society rewards some of us in extraordinary ways because society is desperately betting that one of us is going to say something that might offer some comfort. Our job, as writers, is to do our jobs.”¹⁰⁶ Although Mamet’s worldview is not

immune from changing, as he has done recently, it has remained industrial. There is a job, it needs to be completed, and therefore that is all a writer needs to be concerned about. But from which position is he doing this job? What are the consequences when Mamet just does his job?

In 1994, David Mamet sat down with Charlie Rose to be interviewed live on television for the first time.¹⁰⁷ These are two white men who have the power to control who is successful in theater. The most startling confession over the entire exchange was when Rose asked Mamet what he wanted to say in *Oleanna*. Mamet replied, “I didn’t want to say anything. I wanted to write the, I wanted to write the play.”¹⁰⁸ He continues to explain that he understands many may find this difficult to comprehend— that a play that has produced such a polarized response was birthed from a playwright with no intention to say anything. Mamet goes on, “I’m trying to write a, write a story, to try to follow a provocative grouping of individuals to its logical conclusion to see where that goes.”¹⁰⁹ Although this kind of talk takes us back to Aristotle when he writes that tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, it also serves to circumvent the question.¹¹⁰ Writing a compelling story is certainly an admirable characteristic. It is no surprise that Mamet’s plays and screenplays have received multiple Tony and Oscar nominations, and that *Glengarry Glen Ross* received the Pulitzer Prize in 1984. In all the stories of the Western tradition, a great story is one that resembles Mamet’s description: “a protagonist who wants something vehemently and [sets] out to get it.” When the audience cannot help but ask, ‘what happens next?’ Mamet argues that is “when we really understand what the character wants, and we understand what they’re going through to get it, [and] that’s what keeps us in our seats.”¹¹¹ But what kind of storytelling does this produce? If authors are only concerned with ‘what happens next?’ are there kinds of stories that are excluded? Are there kinds of characters that are

tossed aside and left unrecognized in the world of the play? Yes, an action is complete when there exists a beginning, middle, and end, or as Mamet said, when it concludes logically, but why does Mamet have nothing to say? Mamet believes that when audiences read into his process or intentions beyond his strategy of following “a provocative grouping of individuals to its logical conclusion,” they react because he has not offered them “some comfort.” White contends that authors like Mamet cannot escape their authority and position. Mamet is responsible for permitting the narrative to come to an end. Restraining oneself from marking their subject position, or denying responsibility for functioning as a vessel for distributing truth does not make his subject position or truth disappear.

This impulse to ask audiences to sympathize with straight, white men is deeply woven into how Mamet tells stories and teaches others to tell stories. In what has been titled “A Letter from David Mamet to Writers of *The Unit*,” Mamet offers unsolicited advice for his writers, whom he led, for the CBS show *The Unit* from 2006-2009. He writes, “Every scene must be dramatic.” In almost twenty instances, he mentions the need for drama to exist in each scene.¹¹² Here Mamet seems less interested in writing a scene that has drama and most interested in writing the most dramatic scene one can imagine; that he can imagine from his position. Perhaps more clear, he asks his writers to create whatever is most dramatic to each individual. This call to be dramatic is sent without regard for the social, cultural or political perspectives of his writers or the characters they are writing. In his call, there is an assumption that winning and losing only matters when it is the “most dramatic”. For Mamet, characters are not “raced” or situated socially, they only exist to serve the dramatic effect that he wishes to create on stage.

It is also worth noting that Mamet, in more recent years, has rediscovered his Jewishness and it informs his subject position. Aluf Benn, editor-in-chief of Haaretz Newspaper interviewed Mamet in 2012. Mamet said, in reference to the State of Israel, “How, I wonder, can I not be here; and how is it possible that I did not come here (as did Michael Oren) in my youth, and 'grow up with the country,' instead of wasting my time in show business?”¹¹³ The world was first introduced to Mamet’s changing worldview after he published “Why I Am No Longer a Brain-Dead Liberal” in *The Village Voice* in 2008. In this piece Mamet recounts that it was as a result of writing *November* that he began to think about politics. He then comments on this point, “This comment is not actually as jejune as it might seem.¹¹⁴ *Porgy and Bess* is a bunch a good songs but has nothing to do with race relations, which is the flag of convenience under which it sailed.”¹¹⁵ Mamet feels free to critique a musical about the social inequity between Blacks and whites in the United States, yet positions himself on the “white” side of the oppressive narrative. He does not identify with nor make any connections to, the oppression shared by Black and Jewish people historically. Mamet’s position deserves further investigation as it is situated in the history of Jewish people becoming white, which I will write about in more detail in chapter three. Meanwhile, African American author and activist James Baldwin writes about white moral authorities. He describes Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (1934) and describes in which ways he believes this show *is* about race relations. He first describes the show as wandering into the “melodramatic and the exotic” and as representing a white man’s vision of “Negro life”; Black life imagined through a white lens. However, what he describes as missing from this musical “is what the situation of Porgy and Bess says about the white world. It is because of this omission that Americans are so proud of the opera. It assuages their guilt about Negroes and it attacks

none of their fantasies.”¹¹⁶ In this piece Baldwin describes white America as separate from “Negroes” thus marking Americanness as always already understood by Black people as “white.” Mamet is mourning a Jewish identity that he did not grow up experiencing. It seems, in order to encounter Jewish identity as he has described, that he must also embrace a contemporary political conservatism that conflates any resistance with the State of Israel as resistance with Jewish people and therefore anti-semitic. In his interview with Benn, he restates what he has elsewhere: “I was just writing plays, that's all. That's all there is. That's what I am, some guy with an idea, not some guy with an idea about to change somebody else.” To Mamet, the order of things cannot be changed. Writers must then do what they can do, and write their ideas.

Drama of Privilege

Mamet’s play is invested in notions of universality that ultimately work to erase human distinctions, social constructions of race specifically, that oppress all non white subjects and protect the privileges of whiteness. In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, Māori) writes about the fight to make visible human distinctions.¹¹⁷ This fight must often navigate around “the appeal to human 'rights', the notion of a universal human subject, and the connections between being human and being capable of creating history, knowledge, and society.”¹¹⁸ Deconstructing whiteness and making humanity, which is only presumably deemed “visible” when it is white, must be seen as part of an anti-colonial analysis of imperialism. Colonialism is merely a history of dehumanization. As Smith writes, these processes of dehumanization “were often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism, which were clothed within in ideology of humanism and liberalism

and the assertion of moral claims that related to a concept of civilized 'man'."119 It is in the context of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work, that I would like to situate Mamet's play. In *November*, every character but Charles Smith is "present while [their] history is erased before [their] eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people."120 Therefore, an analysis of Mamet's *November* is an analysis of the play's topic and its relationship to colonialism.

In his "Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations," English Restoration playwright William Congreve (1670-1729), describes comedy as a kind of story whose purpose is to cause the audience to laugh at the fool out of his folly. In *November*, Mamet has constructed a central character who mocks indigenous war crimes, patronizes his lesbian assistant's desire to marry her partner, and reproduces misogynistic commentary. If we believe that the central character is a bumbling fool, then the playwright has permission to construct a character who does or says things like this. It is the defeat of the central character's views that we celebrate, not the embrace or existence of them. It was Aristotle who believed comedy to be an imitation of the worse sort of people. As Congreve explains, the central character is "to be exposed after a ridiculous manner. For men are to be laughed out of their vices in comedy; the business of comedy is to delight as well as to instruct; and as vicious people are made ashamed of their follies or faults by seeing them exposed in a ridiculous manner, so are good people at once both warned and diverted at their expense."121 Under the rules of a Congreve or Aristotelian comedy, Mamet's audience is given permission to laugh at what would otherwise be the worst kind of behavior we could observe in someone under these circumstances.

Congreve's comedy was certainly political in that it warned the presumed white, English audiences of the "lesser sort of livers" in order to divert their paths. But constructions of race and proximity to power were absent from Congreve's criticism and plays. Brecht takes this paradigm of theatre as a political medium further. It was by alienating the audience that Brecht was able to highlight power and his audience's complicity with it. Brecht was also trying to warn and divert his audiences, but he did this so by heightening the spectator's participation in the drama they came to see.

What is remarkably successful about this play, from the outset, is Mamet's ability to poke fun at this straight, white man losing. Smith is seeking a Presidential re-election within a climate of politicians and voters who want him to leave office. In Act One, in an attempt to sway votes for the upcoming election, Charles tosses ideas into the conversation to his advisor:

CHARLES: The panic level: raise the panic level!

ARCHER: They don't care about the panic level.

CHARLES: They don't care about the panic level?

ARCHER: No.

CHARLES: After all our work?

ARCHER: Nobody cares. They hate you. Everybody hates you, and you're out of cash. Go home.

CHARLES: I would hate to think. That the people were deprived of a choice. Because one side... simply ran out of cash.¹²²

Smith's commentary on losing continues. After receiving devastating news that he faces insurmountable challenges to winning reelection, Smith hangs up the phone and says, "Fucking

Bernstein! Sinking ship!” Lane then slaps the presidential flag. The audience laughs. Smith also says, “Do I understand the world? Who does?” He then takes a beer out of a floor mounted globe bar. The audience laughs again. In Act Two, Smith says sardonically, “Women have rights like other human beings.” This line receives another huge laugh. In this world, we laugh because we perceive him to be a fool, a loser, and someone who should not get what he wants. Presuming these assumptions are true, the audience laughs. Their laughter is evidence and the external manifestation that they have been warned of this terrible character.

As the play reaches its climax, Charles finds himself in need of two-hundred million dollars from the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers in order to buy advertising so that he can win reelection. The only way he is capable of giving a speech and pardoning the turkey, thus securing the two-hundred million, is if his speechwriter writes one for him. Unfortunately for Charles, Bernstein, his speechwriter, will only give him the speech if he agrees to marry her and her partner on national television before pardoning the turkeys. However, if he marries this lesbian couple on television, no amount of money can win him the election. At this point in the play, the only way he can receive money is to give a speech, but the only way to give a speech is for his assistant to write it for him. Therefore, in light of the rules Congreve and Aristotle have established, the following remain his options:

1. Charles attempts to give his own (or some other incompetent writer’s) speech, fails to receive the money, because he cannot write speeches, and loses his reelection bid. In this scenario, he marries no one, receives no money, does not win another term, and loses the loyalty of his assistant and her partner. Although this conclusion would illustrate how deeply homophobic and misogynistic Smith is, it is satisfying because Smith is not

rewarded with another term. In this scenario, the audience is justified in laughing at his expense. And the world of the play punishes him.

2. Charles could come to a kind of knowing of the error of his ways and choose not to give the speech. He could have a change of heart that asks him to give up his reelection bid and just marry the lesbian couple privately. He would not receive the money, and would therefore lose, but we would take with us a sense that, in light of his failure, he learned something. This would not be a complete transformation as he would choose to conduct the ceremony privately, but nonetheless he is making a concession. When the audience does laugh at Smith, they would be justified as they would be laughing at a Smith before he undergoes a change of heart.

3. Charles chooses to marry Bernstein and her partner on television. In this scenario, he does not receive the money because the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers will not finance his campaign in the shadow of a lesbian wedding. He would then lose the money and his reelection bid, but would establish boldly that there are consequences for racist language and behavior and that one does not have to cling to power and privilege to have worth and value as a white male citizen in the United States.

The stakes are the highest in this third option, the conflict is the greatest, and would provide for an outrageous and satisfying ending for this farce. As long as Smith's character changes in some way, because it is the function of the central character to garner sympathy from the audience, their laughter is appropriate under Congreve and Aristotle's model. The audience would leave the theatre both warned and diverted at Smith's expense.

As Mamet resolves the story, Charles, who desperately needs Bernstein's speech in order to get reelected says, "How do I *marry* the broads?" Archer, his assistant who is described by Mamet as "a man in a suit," explains that marriage between two people of the same gender is only legal in Massachusetts, and that it would be illegal for him to do so on National television.¹²³ The representative of the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers, or "The Turkey Guy", explains to Smith, "If you marry those two women on TV, we will not give you the money." Smith responds, "That is not the spirit which made this land what it is." Turkey guy says, "I do not *give* a fuck."¹²⁴

Unlike the scenarios I described, we are not privy to the election results or whether Smith receives two-hundred million from National the Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers. Bernstein and her partner arrive to the White House at the start of Act Three to be married. Smith really wants to marry them because he really wants to win the election. Archer suggests telling the cameramen not to actually film the ceremony live, but only pretend to. Smith suggests dressing up Bernstein's partner like a man in order to fool the American people. Mamet seems to comment on same-sex marriage in a way that is ambiguous. He chooses not to condone it, yet use it as a novelty to undergird white, heteronormative ideas of marriage. When they are out of ideas, Smith erupts with rage and says to Bernstein, "You are willing to sacrifice the happiness of actual flesh-and-blood "people" to protect some cockamamie, dumb idea of "justice"...and so you want to save the world...and all that happy horseshit."¹²⁵ Smith remains firm, but Bernstein breaks down and explains they named their adopted Chinese baby after him and that she wrote him a beautiful speech. In that moment of defeat, she just gives him the

speech. Smith wins. Except what is announced seconds later is the death of the turkeys. The television lights were so hot they exploded.¹²⁶

In order to force Smith into a moral conclusion, or as Mamet has described his function, to “follow a provocative grouping of individuals to its logical conclusion,” Dwight Grackle, who Mamet describes as “a Native American,” bursts in demanding, “Where is he?”¹²⁷ Smith had a phone conversation with Grackle in Act One as he was brainstorming ways to pardon another kind of animal for Thanksgiving. At that moment, he was looking to extort money from the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers and they would not pay. Smith called Chief Dwight Grackle of the Micmac Nation, in his words, “to announce that, as may be the case, you have discovered that the original Thanksgiving was celebrated not with ‘turkey,’ but with codfish.”¹²⁸ In exchange for this, Grackle asks Smith to give his tribe the Federal Nature Preserve on Nantucket. Smith refuses. As they raise their voices, Smith says, “Why don’t you fucken ride *down* here, Dwight, and *present* your complaint?... Hey I’ll leave a pass at the gate... (*To Archer*) Leave a pass at the gate for Chief DWIGHT GRACKLE of the Micmac Nation. (*To phone*) Yes, yes, Dwight, I *did* use that term disparagingly... (*To Archer*)...a “hate crime”...(*To phone*) Oh, really, well, well, Dwight. I CAN’T SAY I CARE. You know why? Because I can’t be *convicted* of crimes.... Yes, while *you*, “Tonto,” are on a plane to nowhere. And I hope your second wife gets eaten by a walrus... (*Listens. To Archer*) In Micmac, that’s apparently the worst thing you can say... He’s going to send his braves down to extract revenge.”¹²⁹ In Act Three, Grackle has arrived for revenge.

In short order, Dwight fires a poisonous dart at Smith, Bernstein jumps in front to shield the President while shouting, “Stop! He’s the leader of the Free World!”¹³⁰ As she is dying, she

confesses to Smith, “We were going to vote for you.” Smith looks to Grackle, “*You sonofabitch. YOU JUST COST ME TWO VOTES!!!*”¹³¹ Bernstein ultimately does not die because the dart struck her Chinese amulet, which symbolizes love, that she purchased when she adopted her Chinese daughter. Charles says, “I betrayed you, and yet, you risked your life for me.” Archer says, “You had your life saved by a lesbian. Great.”¹³² As Charles explains he thought his legacy would be getting impeached, the following exchange unfolds:

SMITH: wash your face— you’re getting married.¹³³

ARCHER: It’s not legal.

SMITH: Let the next guy figure it out.

ARCHER: It’ll cost you the election.

SMITH: Damn job’s a pain in the ass. Too much stress. Too little opportunity for thefy. I’m broke, I’m tired, and I’m going home.

BERNSTEIN: ...what will you *do*...?

SMITH: I’ll have Thanksgiving at the kitchen table, Bernstein. I’ll sit out on my front porch, and I’ll watch the sun go down...on a life of Public Service.

BERNSTEIN: Sir, may I kiss you...?

SMITH: In the Oval Office...? Get the fuck out of here.¹³⁴

Bernstein kisses Smith and Archer asks, “What about the Indian?” Smith says, “Oh, yes:

Dwight? United for an instant in this accident called “time,” our paths converged. Now we must part, each to his own fate. I, a failed politician, am dismissed to poverty, you, an assassin, go to

torture and death. Farewell.” Dwight responds, “Sir? Wyntcha just *pardon* me, give me Nantucket Island, you ’n’ me’ll build a casino.” And with that, Charles says, “*Jesus* I love this country.”¹³⁵ The play abruptly ends. The racism in this exchange is never addressed by Mamet in the play. Smith is not punished but rewarded for using the Native American character and making him the point of a joke.

In Act One, when Smith is told that he is down in the polls and told to go home, his wife calls and asks if she can “take the couch.” Archer says she can’t take it, but asks, “Why is the couch so important to her?” Charles says she wants it for the Presidential Library. When he is told he has no money for a library, running for office and extorting money from the National Association of Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers to build a library and secure his legacy is the only reason he seeks reelection.

Resisting Drama of Privilege

Mamet gives readers a clear representation of a protagonist with privilege who must not lose it, along with what Mamet thinks of him. White explains that “truth claims of the narrative and indeed the very right to narrate” is based upon a relationship to authority.¹³⁶ Identifying the authority of the protagonist and the play author can contextualize the kind of moral ending in front of us. Although President Smith decides to marry Bernstein and her partner, he does not willingly choose to do so. Because the turkeys died and he lost the two hundred million dollars and the opportunity to buy ads and win the next election, this man of relative morality had no reason to resist marrying them any longer. Although he did not win the presidency, he did not

lose. He remained a winner within the order of this world. He was not punished and we can presume now has the funds to pursue his initial objective of building a presidential library.

This positive denouement celebrates the protagonist. This is a comedy that ends happily, not tragically. Comedies are permitted to end happily if the central character's journey provides him or her with growth and the will to realize something flawed about his or her nature. I wonder, how are audiences both warned and diverted at Smith's expense? Mamet wrote a play and completed a job where the protagonist does not change and the action still resolves in his favor. I continue to want to laugh at this play, but by doing so, I become the fool by laughing at a protagonist who receives no punishment for his behavior.

Mamet is trying to rewrite the rules; to rig the game. While the comedic traditions of Congreve developed before whiteness, or in the process of whiteness developing, I do not want to take his writing at face value. Punishing folly requires identifying it. In Congreve and Mamet, that identification is assumed and left to the audience to recognize. If Mamet were attempting to warn and divert his audience, as Congreve's definition requires, from the follies of the protagonist, we would be witnessing a playwright who sees himself as storyteller evolve into a truth teller, which Mamet has already explained is not his intent and which would require a marking of the fool. If Mamet viewed theatre as Brecht did, as a strategy to awaken spectators to power and ultimately societal change, we would be witnessing a different play and moral conclusion.

Conclusion

November protects white male expectations of white privilege as the play asks us to celebrate privilege that is salvaged, and almost lost, in Charles Smith. The president “wins” when he uses his position of privilege to gift the Federal Nature Preserve on Nantucket and fund his Presidential Library. Since whiteness functions as a system of inequality that has structured relationships to power, those without power by lose by default. By the very existence of the system, they are born unequal. Whiteness as linked to power and class exploitation remains “invisible” to the presumed white audiences of this play. Sutherland’s words remain relevant, that “good” found within Enlightenment narrative is located in proximity to power and bad is located outside, at a distance. White men of privilege in today’s American theatre continually work individually to preserve this stratified system of whiteness. They are also benefactors from their position within this hierarchy. Mamet continues to reveal himself as a different kind of truth-teller, one that aligns his priorities with those of white masculinity losing.

Hand To God

From the outset, this is a play inserted into the canon of contemporary Broadway theatre, about Jason, a protagonist within a conservative, Christian space. *Hand to God* is described by Adam Hetrick, white Editor in Chief at Playbill, who reviewed the 2014 MCC Theater production, as an “irreverent puppet comedy.”¹³⁷ Askins explains that the phrase “hand to God” is a Southern regionalism that is an expression about honesty.¹³⁸ This is a play where Jason, an actor who is to read as a fifteen-seventeen years old, pursues honesty to tragic ends. His father recently died and the pastor of the church asks his mother Margery to run the church’s puppet

ministry. Once Jason wears the puppet we come to know as Tyrone, we know instantly that he is a force of something much darker. This is evident in Tyrone's deep, sinister voice, as performed by the actor who plays Jason, and in what Tyrone says and asks Jason to do. In scene two, it seems like Tyrone is a voice for how Jason feels and what he really wants to say. Jason and his friend Jessica are sitting outside on a set of swings and the battle begins.

TYRONE: He thinks you're hot.

JASON: That is enough.

JESSICA: You think I'm hot?

JASON: No... Yes. I don't know.

TYRONE: So hot. So hot he can't keep from touching himself.

JESSICA: Jason.

TYRONE: Touching himself in the dark.

JESSICA: Jason stop.

JASON: Tyrone.

TYRONE: The things he thinks about you.

JESSICA: Jason this isn't funny.

JASON: I know.

TYRONE: Thinks about doing to you.

JASON: Tyrone.

TYRONE: What.

JASON: Stop.

TYRONE: You can't stop it.¹³⁹

Over the course of the play, Tyrone confesses he is the devil, Margery seduces Timothy, a teenage boy who attends the church and attempts to hide what she has done, and Pastor Greg comes onto Margery. All characters have secrets that are ultimately exposed. In the end, before the adults can perform a Lutheran exorcism on Tyrone, Jason and Tyrone lock themselves into the church basement.

In these final moments, Tyrone takes on a life that we have not seen and Jason attempts to rid him of Tyrone once and for all. He tries to pull off the puppet from his hand, he head butts it, and he bites his own fingers in failed attempts at exorcising Tyrone.

JASON: I see bone.

TYRONE: Might be the last thing you see. *(He goes for Jason's throat.)*

JASON: AAAARRGGHHHH.

TYRONE: You didn't think it'd be easy, did you?

JASON: No. No. No. *(He slips his hand under Tyrone's shirt.)*

TYRONE: You'll never get rid of me. *(Jason slips the puppet right off. It falls to the floor.)*

JASON: Jesus. *(He takes a deep breath. He walks over to Pastor Greg's tool box. He reaches in and gets one of the shop towels. He wipes the blood off of his face and hands. In the process his left hand becomes covered by the cloth and...Tyrone appears in the cloth covered hand.)*

TYRONE: NEVER. *(Jason see Pastor Greg's hammer.)*

JASON: Oh yeah?

TYRONE: You can't beat me.

JASON: I don't have to beat you. Just shut the fuck up. (*He raises the hammer high. He brings the hammer down on his cloth-covered hand.*)

TYRONE: Fuck you.

JASON: No fuck you. (*Raises the hammer again.*)

TYRONE: Noooooo.

JASON: Yes. (*Brings the hammer up again. He turns it over. Claw side.*)¹⁴⁰

At this moment Margery and Pastor Greg enters and Jason begs to be left alone. They ultimately go get medical help for Jason. As the play resolves, the presumed, white audience is reminded that to “win” in this space, you must love Jesus. To lose is to allow the devil to have a hold of you.

Critical Analysis

I attended a production of *Hand to God* in 2013 when it was playing on Broadway at the Booth Theatre and watched the March 26, 2012 Ensemble Studio Theatre production that was recorded for the New York Public Library on January 6, 2018. In an interview with the last Broadway cast, the playwright says, “I was in a Christian puppet ministry, and self-destructive.” And so [the play is] a strategy to acknowledge the war “within the individual”.¹⁴¹ The Ensemble Studio Theatre explained that Christian puppet ministries are “a great way to teach children about the Bible” in fundamentalist Christian congregations.¹⁴² According to MCC Theater, the “good children of Cypress, Texas are taught to obey the Bible in order to evade Satan’s hand.”¹⁴³

Charles Isherwood describes the play as a “black comedy about the divided human soul.” He explains, “Pick up a newspaper and you read another grim report about men and women little older than Jason succumbing to far more destructive passions. Maybe if more of the world’s troubled youth discharged their demons with the help of sock puppets, things might not look so grim.”¹⁴⁴ To Isherwood and those companies that have produced this play, it is just a story about a boy whose obsession with puppets gets out of hand. Because from their vantage point, we are all the same, in ideology and in actuality. The “war within the individual,” the children learning about the Bible, the divided human soul, and the demons of troubled youth are all universal statements, appealing to anyone who reads the play or purchases a ticket to see it performed. However, Askins admits the central character is a reflection of his own experiences as a boy from Texas who grew up going to church and participating in a puppet ministry. Askins is a white male from Cypress, Texas.

In his personal life, Askins gets close to critiquing the system in which he works as a playwright. He describes contemporary theater as “one of the most elitist, exclusive and alienating art forms in America right now.” He begs his listeners, “Get your friends together. Write until it’s good. That’s all you have to do... Write the play. There’s a deep perversity in theater people: we love a good play. A lot of things will be forgiven and forgotten if you make a good play— suddenly doors will swing open widely.”¹⁴⁵ Again, there exists an assumption that there is no need to think any critically beyond writing a “good play.” Just like David Mamet asked his writers to create a dramatically interesting scene over anything else, so does Askins advocate for something similar. Karam also did not set out to mark his own position as white or not white. He explains, that he was feeling “really anxious and fearful” about money, his health,

his career, and about “losing the romantic love of someone I cared about.” He did not set out to write a political play about a dying middle class, but to write about the things that were keeping him up at night.¹⁴⁶ He wrote a play about exorcising whiteness from one's identity but also fails to mention that. In all three of these plays, each playwright has chosen, intentionally or not, to write stories that are unmarked and that appeal to the values of people who identify as white will consume. These are plays about them and for them.

Drama of Privilege

White journalist and Presbyterian minister Chris Hedges describes white, Evangelical conservative spaces as controlled by Christianized Fascists.¹⁴⁷ In 2017, he gave an interview where he predicts the Christian Right will fill an ideological vacuum that he argues does not exist in Trump's administration. He says, “They are no more Christian than the German Christian church was Christian. That's why 81% support Trump even though he makes a mockery of the values they claim he holds sacred.”¹⁴⁸ That is quite the charge against a group of people that Black teacher, author, and activist Drew Hart contends is defined by “civil” culture.¹⁴⁹ Hart explains, “white racism has always been veiled by “civil” culture,” even though his own Christian college campus was one of the friendliest places he has ever seen, filled with waving and smiling around every corner.¹⁵⁰ According to Hart, racial hierarchy is always present, and whiteness always matters.¹⁵¹ This kind of analysis of a uniquely American space reflects what James Baldwin wrote in 1963 when he explains that the will of the people can be found in the will of State institutions. He writes, “There was not, then, nor is there now a single American institution which is not a racist institution. And racist institutions -- the unions, for one example,

the Church, for another, and the Army -- or the military -- for yet another, are meant to keep the (n-word) in his place.”¹⁵² A paradox seems to exist. White Christians are civil but also complicit with whiteness.

It is within this space and context that this drama of privilege takes places. Humanity is often only accepted when civility and niceness are simultaneously dispensed. This reproduces a humanity that remains tethered to "vener of universality" while demanding every person perform their humanity identically.¹⁵³ This play is not explicitly about Black people, but it takes place in a white, conservative, Christian space that has historically protected whiteness and first politically organized as a group in 1975, just after the IRS threatened to revoke the tax exempt status of racially segregated schools like Bob Jones University.¹⁵⁴ Black and non-white people of color are not represented in the world of this play. This play is not about non-white people, but white Texas masculinity.

At work in this play is a paradox where whiteness remains unmarked to the presumed white audience and remains a story of sameness; about everyone. Sutherland writes about this erasure of Black people in the Old Testament. She writes that Black skin was relegated to the margins long before Eighteenth century Germany. The Old Testament spread ideas first found in Genesis and “were used to claim that Blacks were descendants of Cain.”¹⁵⁵ Although this was not the intention of the writer of Genesis, writers of the Middle Ages “connected the curse of Canaan to Blackness” as the slave trade began to take shape.¹⁵⁶ It was in Germany, where regional identities began to search for a national one, where ideas concerning race began to form during the Enlightenment.¹⁵⁷ That which is good and evil, natural and unnatural, beautiful and ugly, “and ultimately white and black” could be determined within the worldview of the German

Enlightenment product.¹⁵⁸ Those subjects that were determined to fall onto the inferior side of any of those binaries needed salvation; a savior.

The play is bookended with monologues by Tyrone. In the Epilogue, Askins attempts to critique the world we just witnessed through the eyes of Jason and Tyrone. Tyrone says, “That’s the thing about the devil, you want him, you need him, and then you want him to go the fuck away.” He goes on, “Maybe someday we won’t need a savior. Maybe someday we’ll finally let ourselves off the hook. For everything we’ve always done, and everything we always needed to do. The things about a Jesus — you never know where to look— it may be where you saw the devil before.”¹⁵⁹ Binary oppositions as once articulated in the German Enlightenment are found in this play. Notions of good and evil, light and dark, and God and the devil frame the world Jason is attempting to navigate. Here exists an opportunity by the playwright to address problems as he sees them within white Christianity, but leaves that responsibility to the audience. According to the performances and the script text, this is a play for everyone. Although *Hand to God* critiques this binary, it also fails to mention that this is a story about white people. Consequently, it also erases Black people and preserves a system of inequality that has structured relationships to power.

Resisting Drama of Privilege

Hand to God is certainly a story situated within the tradition of Southern, white, Texas Christianity and its expectations. Because the play and playwright ignore how this space is white, it reproduces narratives of sameness for its presumed white audience, as if this is a story for all of us. But what also remains true is that Askins presents a story that does meaningful work to

critique binaries that shape this space. Because this white evangelical, Christian world also left me abandoned and traumatized as I came to embrace my own Queer identity, I too was caught within a binary: a socially constructed world and the possible existence of a real devil luring me into homosexuality on one hand and God waiting to punish me for my humanity and complicity with this devil on the other. Although this is a story about white characters, for white spectators, it is not my intent to reproduce the binaries that I set out to examine, Fischer-Lichte warns of “totalizing...historical concepts,” which is not what this study attempts to do regarding people with white skin.¹⁶⁰

If whiteness is a system that protects power, then critiquing binaries is a strategy to identify how power is protected, as Askins does. Jason’s journey through the binary to a point where he hammers the devil to death, which is his hand, illustrates how impossible it remains to escape from this Southern, white Christian Texas space. Jason’s participation in this story is not malicious. In fact, Jason is caught, as Joseph Roach writes in his book *Cities of the Dead*, in the middle of “how culture reproduces and re-creates itself”.¹⁶¹ Jason is in conflict with the performance of being a Christian and what that demands of him.

Conclusion

Jason’s struggle is not one of avoiding being marked as Black, but one of becoming white. The very existence of Sunday School is a strategy by white Christianity to reproduce values of legibility in their children; values that will be read as white, and therefore human. Central to this work is the question, who possesses humanity and the right to be free and who lacks it? Sutherland concludes chapter one by writing, "The role of a "European education" as a

means to civilize "the Black" by purifying both her senses and her morals seems to function as a means to grant freedom".¹⁶² Twenty-first century U.S. Education and Sunday School has come a long way from eighteenth-century Germany, but in light of *Green v. Connally* in 1975, and the Christian School movement that began as a result. The tenure of Betsy DeVos, current U.S. Secretary of Education, has been defined by activity that removes opportunity for students in Black and Latino neighborhoods to have access to quality education. In August 2018, she confirmed what many suspected, that Black students do not have the "capacity to understand" what she is doing in the Department of Education.¹⁶³ Here this impulse to purify students and make them white appears as a function of educational systems found in the U.S.

Whiteness does not operate in this play like it did in *The Humans* and *November*. It is not about an unsympathetic working class white protagonist like Erik Blake, with whom we are to sympathize. It is also not about a straight, white, wealthy man like Charles Smith who asks us to sympathize with his perception of losing, even though no loss ever really occurs. This is a play that uses appeals to universalism, protected in the construct of American Christianity, to tell a white success story without marking it as such. In *The Humans* and *November*, whiteness is protected in the political and working class arenas. In *Hand to God*, I am interested in the strategies that remain hidden and unmarked within Christianity to protect whiteness. What remains absent, in the spirit of Roach's scholarship, is work to fully "excavate the past that is necessary to account for how [Jason] got here and the past that is useful for conceiving alternatives to our present condition."¹⁶⁴ Although whiteness is not explicitly marked, the play does necessary work to examine, as Tyrone says, that "thing about the devil, you want him, you

need him, and then you want him to go the fuck away,” and how that has damaged and traumatized children who grow up in those spaces.

Within the binary of this drama of privilege, Jason, the white, male protagonist wins when he allows God to save him. When Jason chooses to resist that salvation the presumed white audience is asked to mourn that he has become a victim of the devil; an outsider. According to Sutherland, this binary is a function of the Enlightenment, to locate goodness within white circles, families, and homes. To resist and vacate these spaces of safety is to be equated with that which is bad and of the devil, where Black and non-white people of color start by default in this system. The greater tragedy of *Hand to God* is that Jason loses, not because he does not receive expectations of God’s salvation, and by extension privilege, but that the family is torn apart because Jason resisted God and the devil; the entire construct upon which their worldviews were based.

Germany

In 2012, when Berlin's Schlosspark Theater performed the 1987 Tony winning play *I Am Not Rappaport* (1985) about forty times with blackface and when white, German director Michael Thalheimer staged German playwright Dea Loher’s play *Innocence* (2005) at the Deutsches Theater using blackface, values forged in the Enlightenment that once traveled to the U.S. re-emerged in Germany, but changed. White men in power have the authority to define, Black men without power are objects to be defined. *Innocence* includes a story about Elisio and Fadoul, two African immigrants who notice a woman in the ocean drowning. It is a story about their choice not to save her and the guilt that develops as a result. Michael Thalheimer attempted

to use blackface to universalize the characters in the play as everymen. However, as the white actors performing African immigrants become guilty for not saving the woman, their black faces begin to wear and fade and the audience sees them as white, like the presumed German, white audiences for whom this play was intended. Only when these white actors playing African immigrant characters have guilt and reveal themselves as white Germans can they be considered “real” Germans. The only way this specific production could see “beyond” race to identify an underlying commonality of humanity was to erase difference and African people, which presented a universalized German subject as always already white. This lip service towards a post-race aesthetic revealed the inherent whiteness of so called “universal” assumptions as exclusive to blackness.¹⁶⁵ In Thalheimer’s production, it is the assumed white German public that are framed as the winners. They win when their own guilt, connected to a nation that exterminated over six million Jewish people and their complicity as part of that culture, even as they work to reconcile with the past, is assuaged. The losers in this story are the African migrants. The only way for them to “win” and become white is to know what it is like to be German. That sentiment alone is troubling and asks for sympathy with power and the tossing of African immigrants to the margins.

Critical Response

White historian and author Katrin Sieg, in her article “Race, Guilt and *Innocence*: Facing Blackfacing in Contemporary German Theater,” describes this recognition of German suffering as situated on “the murky grounds of ethical equivocation.”¹⁶⁶ Sieg sets out in this article to examine “the assertion that blackfacing in German theater, in contradistinction to other national

traditions (especially the American one), serves to deconstruct racial identity and difference.”

This argument was at the forefront when German theater artists attempted to invoke a postracial national culture.¹⁶⁷ In one respect white German artists defended this production as a strategy to comment on constructions of race, but simultaneously explained in another respect that there were no Black actors to cast into these roles, as if that functioned as a catalyst to employ blackface. On opening night forty-two members of Buehnenwatch (Stage Watch) in attendance walked out in protest as their mission as a group is to end racist theatrical practices on the German stage.¹⁶⁸

Sieg goes on to examine the critical response to this event, when critics took the time to address it. On February 16, 2012, white German author Matthias Heine wrote in *Die Welt* that those outraged by the use of blackface are doing so by drawing upon the U.S. tradition of blackface, a tradition that never existed in Germany. He explains that in the American tradition, "Blackface means that white comedians put on make-up in order to regale white audiences by portraying stupid Negroes."¹⁶⁹ On March 26, 2012, white, German Hans-Dieter Schütt wrote in *neues deutschland*, that the practice of blackface does nothing more than to recall “US cultural customs to discriminate against the colored population by playing ‘bimbos.’”¹⁷⁰ Sieg is clear that although both journalists were quoting activists in their writing, "stupid negroes" and “bimbos” were not mentioned by Buehnenwatch, but from their own imagination.¹⁷¹

Drama of Privilege

Notions of winning and losing as a strategy to identify dramas of privilege in Germany can be found in the way Germans remember their past. Confino alludes to the idea that narratives

and stories that are remembered reflect those who have the power to tell a nation to remember the past in a certain way. In Germany, memory is best identified by articulating, as Confino outlines, “connections between the cultural, the social, and the political, between representation and social experience.”¹⁷² These connections converged in 2012 at the Deutsches Theater. When Black British writer and activist writes that white people wearing blackface has more to do with the fantasies of white people than their lived experiences, white people are calling forth past narratives and what those narratives continue to say about Black people.¹⁷³

These “commingled beliefs, practices, and symbolic representations” helped to shape the perceptions of those people who came before those living today. White Germans. Confino posits that memory should aim at “reconstructing patterns of behavior, expressive forms and modes of silence into which worldviews and collective sensibilities are translated.”¹⁷⁴ In this way, the humanistic narratives formed as a result of the German Enlightenment can be pulled out of the racist construction in which it still exists today, reconstructed, and salvaged by becoming actually representative and universal. But that will not happen as long as “those who identify as, or are considered to be, white” insist on defining the identities of Black people and continue “to make assumptions about the homogeneity of [their] audience.”¹⁷⁵

In his essay, “Performing the Archive: History and Memory in Recent German Theatre,” white scholar and professor Matthew Cornish explains that, “German historians shaped the history of their nation in a new way following unification.” Prior to 1989, most historiography emphasized the Holocaust and the division between the East and West that followed. Germany is a clear loser, in the context of this binary. As a nation they were responsible for the extermination of six million Jewish people and remained divided until the fall of the wall. Following

unification, great skepticism emerged towards ideas of the existence of a German “national identity.” It is unification that is now structured into history as a “final turning point in a teleological process,” on their way to embracing free-market capitalism and liberal democracy, in order to establish the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as normal and no longer responsible for actions of the past.¹⁷⁶ This distancing from the past, and positioning Germany as winners, is also seen elsewhere. Germans will not necessarily hesitate to admit certain facts and that events took place, but there is an impulse to distance themselves from discourse of any kind that speaks of “race.” This serves to contribute to the public narrative of Germany and in turn support the actions of white German men when they decide to employ blackface.

Resisting Drama of Privilege

Those voices within the German nation who appear to resist or complicate the 2012 staging of *Innocence* as a “drama of privilege” do so for a variety of reasons. For instance, Daniel Brunet, a white American theatre maker who is currently the Producing Artistic Director of the English Theatre Berlin completed the English translation for *Innocence* and provides some necessary context of Loher's work in Germany. In 2012 he writes, “in a country dominated by post-dramatic theatre, Loher continues to create characters with which her audience can identify in some way, or form, and use them to ask hard questions, holding a mirror up to society.” He writes that her plays have taken place in so many diverse places, including “the slums of São Paulo, the war-torn ruins of Kabul, a prison cell, and a doorman building on Fifth Avenue in New York City.” To Brunet, Loher has always concerned herself with “the stories of the

downtrodden, the down-and-out, those fallen between the cracks and forgotten by the powers that be.”¹⁷⁷

He believes this is the reason for her success and why seventeen of her plays have been translated into a total of twenty-eight different languages.”¹⁷⁸ Although his voice is difficult to find in the piece, he does believe that the 2012 protests will “likely...serve as a positive force for greater representation of the current demographic realities of Germany on its stages.”¹⁷⁹

Although Brunet is accurate to observe a rift between Germany's cultural institutions and a populace that has been “undergoing incredibly rapid demographic change,” his statement should not be read as only a recent phenomenon.¹⁸⁰ Germany has always been a geographical home to Black and non-white people. They have always been there.

In his book *The Theatrical Public Sphere*, Theatre and performance scholar Christopher Balme, who is white and born in New Zealand, provides further context and perspective on the greater German public sphere. In his recounting of the events surrounding the production of *Innocence*, along with Brunet, he posits that the “public sphere” is to credit for intervening at this instance of blackfacing, which caused Thalheimer to use whitefacing, which Balme explains “draws attention to the impasse of representing alterity on the German stage in a society with a large foreign population and people of colour.”¹⁸¹ Although blackfacing happened, the greater public sphere intervened and, akin to what feels to me like the invisible hand of the market, the public sphere adjusted, or as Balme writes, “the public sphere functioned as an alarm system or perhaps even as a corrective.”¹⁸² Reading Balme alone, one leaves with the sense that although blackface and whiteface are rooted in specific traditions, and that the 2012 event can be connected to both, the vague and ambiguous public sphere was Berlin's salvation.

There exist, in addition to these artists and scholars, theatres in Germany actively working to unsettle normative whiteness. In September 2018, I saw a production of Oliver Frljić's *Gorki: Alternative für Deutschland?* at The Maxim Gorki Theater. Gorki is described as a public space where today's human condition and conflict of identity are "reflected through the art of making theatre and watching theatre, in order to contribute to a thorough and patient debate about living together in today's diverse world."¹⁸³ This production served to define this theatre's role within contemporary Berlin, as well as within the history of Germany.

From the outset, Frljić highlights perceptions of his actors that have been identified, according to the actors, by other German people. We come to discover these German people are presumed to be white. His actors were Black, working class white, white from privilege, immigrant, and gay. The actors were playing characters, but these characters were themselves. Consequently, the lines between fiction and reality were blurred. We heard from a Black actor who shared that his Black grandfather was a Nazi, and therefore defied expectations and assumptions. We heard from the moderator who self identifies as gay, German, and Turkish, who asked the other actors "to makeout" with each other. As they each transitioned into this moment, he took the opportunity to comment on the physical stature of each women and carouse them sexually, including their butt and breasts. The production played to our assumptions that because he identifies as gay that the rules regarding sexual boundaries are different. They are not. The moderator was not punished for his actions in the world of the play. I do not believe this was a blindspot of the show but part of a larger strategy to confront the audience about their own biases and assumptions.

The show also presented narratives of two white women and asked the audience to vote for the most tragic and sad of them. One woman told us about growing up poor and that her brother was killed during the Christmas market suicide truck in 2016. This jars the audience from her story to something we know to be true for the sake of the game they are playing. I wondered whether it was ethical to use the deaths of those people who were killed at the Christmas Market when I did not understand the function of the scene at this moment in the play. Alternatively, the story may be true. We did not know. When it came time to vote on which story was more tragic and the M.C. asked the audience to raise their hands to place their vote, the audience mostly obeyed. I was shocked that the audience laughed when the gay actor touched his female colleague and participated in voting for the most tragic women. In these moments, the audience had marked their position a group, which was partly Frlić's objective. At the close of the show, when the audience is asked, "Would you die for Deutschland?" a child boy asks, "Warum?" Frlić's message is clear. The Enlightenment project lives on today and he is asking the presumed white audience to first mark their positions in order to resist

On October 16, 2018, I attended a production of the Deutsches Theater's *King Ubu*, directed by Hungarian-born Andr  D m t r, his debut production at the theater. This is the same theatre where Thalheimer directed Loher's *Innocence* almost seven years prior. *King Ubu* was adapted in order to mark Germany's present political position. *Ubu Roi*, first produced in Paris in 1896, is often remembered as a wild, vulgar, and at one point offensive assault on morality and norms. What this production did was take the traditional narrative and thread contemporary authoritarians into the story. Ubu still leads a revolution against the King of Poland, but he also beheads cardboard cut-outs of right wing nationalists around the world, including Donald Trump.

This version of *King Ubu* ends with the King and his wife floating by Germania. They stop, turn to the audience and say, “Hallo.” Jewish, Austrian-French novelist and psychologist Manès Sperber is quoted in the program. In 1937 he wrote, “tyranny promises a completely new situation. The historical proof has been provided that no tyranny can bring about a fundamental change in the social situation. Each tyrant boasted a whole new era, each ending as an episode filled with bloody oppression and bouffon.” In a contemporary moment where support for Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the anti-immigration party, is nearing 20%, this play is a warning to the presumed German audience that tyranny is coming for them.¹ The Deutsches Theater is making an explicit connection between ideology of Nazi Germany and that which we see on the rise across the world today. They are negotiating their places between nations of Germany and their relationship to other national spaces across the globe.

Balme’s reference of “the public sphere” is helpful when individual positions and intersections are marked. Mere evidence of Germany’s reaction to the U.S demonstrates in which ways they are connected. German performance stages are not immune from critique. Whiteness has been reified and critiqued on the same physical stage in the last decade. In both instances, these German stages illustrate in which ways enlightenment values are perpetuated and resisted.

Conclusion

What continues to remain disproportionately absent from narratives of nation in the U.S. and Germany are the Black and non-white voices and bodies of color. Whiteness remains invisible, normative, and unmarked. Theatre in these spaces privilege stories of white people, but do so under the guise that these stories are about a universal subject position; they could be about

anyone. Balme, for instance, although appropriate in attributing the protest to the public sphere, would be best served to explicitly mark whose interests within the public sphere which are at stake: the positions, interests, and humanity of Black Germans. The absence of this marking serves as an unwitting appeal to universalism and sympathy for the German populace that has always been assumed to be white. Otoo explains, the whiteness of these characters are white “by virtue of the fact that their whiteness is uncommented. It is self-evident, a matter-of-course.”¹⁸⁴ Thalheimer and Loher, implicitly then, assume that all Germans are white. Although Loher explicitly writes in the script not to use blackface, she does write, “...if Elisio and Fadoul are to be played by black actors, then please, only because they are excellent actors, and not in order to force an authenticity, which would be inappropriate...”¹⁸⁵ Otoo explains, “Clearly, it is unnecessary for Loher to make the same recommendation regarding the other characters of the play: it is simply clear that the actors or actresses cast will be qualified for the role.” Otoo contends that it is Loher who set the tone for the entire play, that the theatre ensemble will be white.¹⁸⁶

Artists and activists in Germany and the United States have something to teach the other. As Germany watches the rise of Black Lives Matter in the U.S., and the international expansion of equivalent or similar activist organizations in cities such as Berlin and Munich, it can learn to see its own awakening as resistance to the normative whiteness of German identity. Notions of “Germanness” as always already “white” are being resisted daily by non-white Germans. In this way we can see a transatlantic exchange of values that has taken place over time and, in particular, illustrate the “rooting/routing” of particular white European ideals of white heteronormativity that Germanic people who immigrated to the United States in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries sought to establish that are manifest in so called universal ideals of family, whiteness, and success in the United States; these ideals continue to find visibility today in the American dream narrative that is articulated and re-invigorated through contemporary performances in American theater and television platforms largely controlled by white males.¹⁸⁷ The re-centering of whiteness that was observed in *Innocence* in 2012 continues to be seen in other parts of Germany and the U.S.

Innocence protects white German male expectations of white privilege as the play was written and staged and asks Elisio and Fadoul to become white Germans in order for their guilt to be assuaged. These African migrants can only win in this play if they function by a set of rules that remains impossible for them to follow: change their skin color. In all of this analysis about whiteness, the humanity of Elisio and Fadoul risks being lost. Because at the end of the analysis, what remains at stake is the humanity of people with Black skin. If Elisio and Fadoul preserve their own distinctions, they lose in Germany.

The Broadway stage of the 21st century assumes a white subject position in many ways. Presumed white audiences are asked to sympathize with privilege that Erik Blake loses, to celebrate privilege that is salvaged in Charles Smith, and to sympathize with an entire worldview that Jason attempts to escape. White men win when they are not punished, have access to privilege and follow a different set of rules. Whiteness, as understood as a system of inequality that has a structured relationships to power, continues to prescribe how stories must be told.

If whiteness insists on remaining a fiction, it allows a director to experiment with blackface and remain immune from criticism. Whether these playwrights, directors, and producers realize it or not, they are contributing to a public narrative of the U.S. and German nation. Together they

are placing themselves, as white British author and historian Geoff Eley writes, “in relation to one kind of ‘past’ or another.”¹⁸⁸ The public nature of this theatrical activity is then a “returning to earlier moments...returning home, revisiting the origins, reopening the stories that previously described the contemporary world.”¹⁸⁹ Confino writes, “the basic elements of [researching the history of collective mentality] are representations and images, myths and values recognized or tolerated by groups or the entire society, and which constitute the content of collective psychologies.”¹⁹⁰ It is because of this that Gilroy has asked for the experiences of Black people to be given context in our contemporary moment.¹⁹¹ A living dichotomy still lives and whiteness remains privileged on the U.S. Broadway stage and in German narratives of nation. The strategic exclusion of Black Germans from the national narrative remains a part of the public sphere. In the U.S., Kanye West agrees with Gilroy, “Turn up the lights in here, baby. Extra bright, I want y’all to see this.”

Chapter 2 — Weißer Jesus/White Jesus? Deconstructing the Stages of U.S. and German Christian Evangelical Evangelists

Introduction

On November 19, 2017, I attended the 11am service at Buckhead Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme for that week, which was found in the service program and which guided the service sermon, was “Be Rich.” In the program, it reads, “Let’s be rich together. Join us as we unleash a wave of generosity in our community and around the world.” At “berich.org,” one can find additional context for this program. Here, congregants are presented with three clickable web buttons that allow them to give money, volunteer, or send a note of appreciation to a public servant. What is also presented on this homepage is I Timothy 6:18 from the Bible, which reads, “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.” After only having received the program had I wondered why the theme was not something like “give richly,” “do good,” or “share generously.” I remain confused as to why the weekly theme “be rich” leads my imagination to ideas of wealth and money.

In light of the relentless, inescapable attacks on the one-percent in the U.S. by 2016 presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren, the word “rich” has been used as a strategy to label a group of people in this country as profiting off of everyone else. At its very best, this weekly theme felt tone deaf; at its worst, the church wanted its congregation to be materially rich, but stopped short of explicitly saying that. At the writing of this chapter, I do not know what their intentions were beyond how the program reads. The

program goes on to explain every way one can “be rich” except in the way that was most obvious to me: monetarily.

The sermon that week was given by guest speaker Bob Goff, a lawyer and *New York Times* best selling author who is recognized as an Honorary Consul for the Republic of Uganda by the U.S. Department of State. He runs “Love Does,” an organization dedicated to “fighting for human rights and providing education to children in conflict zones for over fifteen years.”¹⁹² On his website, bobgoff.com, one can find a captioned photo of him sitting and smiling in the middle of about twenty African students; the caption reads, “Change up your life. Bob has inspired millions to dream big and make life more awesome. He is driven by a desire to help others unlock their potential to love and be loved greater. What goals and dreams have you been putting off out of fear or the thought that you can't do it, that it's too hard? Chances are, Bob could talk you out of those thoughts and send you charging into your next adventure.”¹⁹³

During this sermon, Goff tells a story about not taking a malaria pill on a recent trip to Africa, which resulted in him contracting malaria. As he was telling this story, he would laugh hysterically between each moment or phrase. For instance, he would say something like, “I was in the ICU for a week and a half and with a bill of over 100k.” And then he would laugh. He would say next, “And insurance didn't cover it.” And he laughed again, and so on. Goff is described as an “encourager to millions” and, through his speaking presents a persona that appears to remain impenetrable to the obstacles of the material world, Goff is not a super human; in this service, he shared a series of terrible things that happened to him. However, he recalls these tragedies as if they had happened in a movie he had seen. He presents a persona that can endure tragedy upon tragedy and emerge wiser, funnier, and richer¹⁹⁴ (see fig. 1). One of Goff's

solutions to staying so upbeat and cheery is to go off the grid. He explained this allows him to be himself with God. At this point he showed a photo of him and his wife in front of a cabin he owns situated between two mountains. He said, “Here. Be like us.” Later in the sermon he



Fig. 1. Photo of Bob Goff speaking to Buckhead Church congregation next to “Be Rich” branding, November 19, 2017.

showed us a selfie he took with a Sudanese terrorist as an example of what radical love can accomplish; he also showed a painting by an African man who only used a spear and paint. Goff used this to say, “Figure out what you’ve got, figure out what you want, and then go get it.”¹⁹⁵ To Goff, “radical love” is doing the unexpected, going against the flow, and loving those unlike

yourself unconditionally. He was completely oblivious to the colonial narrative that he reinscribed by showing African people as primitive in this light. What remained uncommented upon is the degree to which these stories are “radical” to him as a straight, white man from San Diego, California. Notions of “radical” as described by Goff in this service were certainly possible for him. They are just not customary. It remains unclear if this kind of radical, uncustomary behavior is possible for individuals not like Goff.

At the conclusion of Goff’s message, the local pastor returned to the stage and said, “Wow. Well, I don’t think anyone knows someone like Bob Goff, but I don’t think there are any of us who don’t wanna be like him.” The congregation applauded and other details about his work were mentioned. If the congregation wanted to take their local pastor up on that offer, to be more like Bob, they could buy his book *Love Does* for \$17.99 or enroll in one of his “Dream Big” weekend seminars, which as of the writing of this dissertation, ranged from \$3,000 to \$4,200 per person and offered the choice of Atlanta, Nashville, San Diego, or Hawaii.¹⁹⁶ Goff is certainly telling stories that read as funny to me in an attempt to motivate his audience to go follow their dreams. They appeared to read as funny to that audience as well. Often these stories were delivered at his own expense. And that read as cool. Additionally, though, there is nothing that is intended to be racially marked about his stories, presentation, or call to action. Goff appears to be working to bridge gaps between people groups as he takes photos with terrorists and offers his “Dream Big” weekend seminars in Kabul, Afghanistan, at no cost to participants. Goff is just a guy who dared to dream big and to love radically. This is presented as the way through which others can also experience similar success.

Key Questions

In order to interrogate racial constructions of whiteness, I will examine the constructed identity of straight, white evangelists in mega-churches and online spaces. I will examine how these subjects perform a constructed white identity and how they navigate and maneuver in these spaces. I will examine how their positions can and should be marked as white as a result of this work. The service at Buckhead will serve as a benchmark to frame the chapter conversation. For instance, as exemplified in that sermon, Goff constructs an identity that is impenetrable to obstacles outside of himself and therefore, able to achieve whatever he wants. He performs an existence that is resilient, able to bounce back from the hardships of his world, whether incidental or a direct result of his actions. He marks himself as white because he alone defines the problems and offers the solutions. He creates a persona that lives in a world more desirable than that of his audience. He frames his position as one that anyone can duplicate. “Here. Be like us.” There is no reason to believe his experiences are not genuine and that his solutions to his position are not authentic and tested. But what “us” should we all be like? Goff’s advice for the 6,500 people who attend Buckhead every weekend is not for people who *are* like him: an attorney, professor, motivational speaker, and philanthropist, mostly all white. He is speaking to people who *want to be* like him and access more desirable spaces.

Beyond what is observable, there are intersections in narrative, the geography of space, and assumed subject position between 21st century Christian spaces like this, the game show form, and the commercial theatre stage. I am using Goff’s performance as a strategy to introduce this conversation and in order to demonstrate that the questions of this chapter have broad implications. This chapter will use Evangelical leaders Rick Warren, Reinhard Bonnke, and Joel

Osteen, three additional straight, white men with audiences and performances that stand in contrast to each other. All three are from different generations. Osteen is 55, Warren is 65, and Bonnke is 78 years old. Additionally, all three have different platforms through which to reach their audiences. Reinhard Bonnke is a white, German-born Pentecostal evangelist. He has been leading evangelistic crusades across Africa since 1967. His ministry has reported up to up to 1.6 million people in attendance. Rick Warren is the white, senior pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. He is best known for his book *The Purpose Drive Life*, which sold over thirty million copies. Saddleback is the sixth-largest mega-church and is considered a multi-site church, which has built campuses across the world. Joel Osteen, a white Texas-born pastor, has been doing so full-time at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas since 1999. Lakewood is considered to be the largest mega-church in the U.S. Lakewood sees a weekly attendance of over fifty-thousand and meets in the former Compaq Center, which seats sixteen-thousand at one time.

I will examine a service I attended at Osteen’s Lakewood Church in 2018, a service I attended at Warren’s Berlin Saddleback Church campus, along with his ministry’s website platform, and reporting on Bonnke, his rallies across Africa, and media coverage of his ministry. This chapter will ask: how does 21st century U.S. And German Christian Evangelists, as demonstrated through their platforms, protect racial constructions of whiteness?

Whiteness and autonomy

In November 2018, Black UK resident Guillmonger (@kokobutterfly0) tweeted, “It’s not okay to be white.”¹⁹⁷ He was responding to @rec_dougs, which tweeted, “Being white is a skin

colour. I'm not denying that dehumanisation of poc happens, but dehumanisation does not cause "whiteness". I'm not really getting the point you're trying to make. Kinda just seems like you're doing the whole 'all white people are racist' thing."¹⁹⁸ Guillmonger responded, "Whiteness is not about skin color. It's a relationship to colonialism. This is why Italians and Irish people weren't white until the 20th century. To be white is to benefit from colonialism, to profit off the dehumanization of most of the world."¹⁹⁹ This definition of whiteness comes out of a space that at one point had covered almost twenty-five percent of the world's land surface.²⁰⁰ In his article "The First White President," Ta-Nehisi Coates underscores this by explaining that there remains panic exclusively produced by white people that white people could one day be enslaved. He writes, "Black workers suffer because it was and is our lot. But when white workers suffer, something in nature has gone awry. And so an opioid epidemic among mostly white people is greeted with calls for compassion and treatment, as all epidemics should be, while a crack epidemic among mostly black people is greeted with scorn and mandatory minimums." To the white ruling class, Coates asserts "White slavery is sin. [N-word] slavery is natural. This dynamic serves a very real purpose: the consistent awarding of grievance and moral high ground to that class of workers which, by the bonds of whiteness, stands closest to America's aristocratic class."²⁰¹ To Guillmonger, whiteness profits off the dehumanization of the world. To Coates, whiteness benefits when it never becomes enslaved. Whiteness guards who is able to define and give meaning to otherwise autonomous individuals. Whiteness does not allow non-white individuals to define their existence; it will define them for them.

Whiteness wants to deny autonomy to non-white people and has made self-definition of non-white people a privilege. On June 27, 2018, I attended a talk with Philomena Essed, Black

scholar and professor of Critical Race, Gender, and Leadership Studies at Antioch University, who has written extensively on race and racism in Europe and spoke to a group of scholars and activists from across the globe at the 11th annual Black European Summer School (BESS) in Amsterdam, Netherlands. In her talk, she was clear that racism presumes non-white people have problems, are problems, and that white people have a right to express this in private or public.²⁰²

Black Early Twentieth-Century author and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois explains double consciousness in his book “The Souls of Black Folks”. He writes, "...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true -self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²⁰³ Essed is expounding on these perspectives that Du Bois observed in 1903. Although this dichotomy reflects how power is distributed, it does not account for all people and intersections between Germany and the U.S. Viewing these countries as mutually exclusive oppositions would just work to reinforce the dichotomy Du Bois observes and ignore individuals, like Du Bois, who find themselves living between nations, cultures, and ideas of Black Diasporic identity.²⁰⁴

In light of Guillmonger’s tweet, Essed expounds by defining three types of racism underneath this broad definition. These types are paternalistic racism, competitive racism, and entitlement racism. She defines paternalistic racism as “benevolent repression.” Racial-ethnic groups are expected to assimilate into dominant culture quietly or at least keep their own culture private. In this world, immigrants do not question the superior status of dominant groups. In fact,

the opposite remains true. The dominant culture perceives racial-ethnic groups as childish, uncivilized, and in need of white guidance. Because they are seen as culturally immature and as “having problems,” it is up to dominant culture to civilize the racial-ethnic group in this world.²⁰⁵ Within competitive racism, racial-ethnic groups are perceived as an explicit, hostile threat. This hatred and antagonism leads to the conclusion that these groups are aggressive, intruding, violent, or a threat to national culture. Within competitive racism, ethnic-racial groups are seen not just as having problems, but as causing problems, particularly when they go to the streets to protest their status within society and demand to be seen as equal and human.²⁰⁶ Essed described entitlement racism as potentially a new phenomenon, specifically one that we see manifesting across Europe and the U.S. In this kind of racism, the dominant culture no longer self-censors. They believe that telling the ‘truth’ about racial-ethnic groups outside of private spaces should be the norm. Within this paradigm, ‘tolerance’ has disappeared, anti-discrimination and anti-racism is off the political agenda, and the dominant culture feels they should be able to express themselves in whichever way they feel like.²⁰⁷ Within this definition, to censor would be to be deprived of liberty and therefore individual autonomy as a God-given right.

White protectionism

In March 2019, HBO’s *Vice*, a series that produces nightly and weekly news programs, and which won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Informational Series in its second season in 2014, hosted a roundtable between Black conservatives and liberals.²⁰⁸ Black host Lee Adams asked the group, “Do you believe that either the sitting President or his administration offer racist policies or that the party that conservative politicians fall under offer racist policies?” Black

Queer cultural critic George Johnson, sitting among the liberal contingency, jumped in to say, “I want to stop calling things racist.... I don’t talk anymore in like in terms of racism, like Toni Morrison said, ‘Racism is a distraction,’ she had a very good point about how it distracts us from doing the actual work we need to do. I work in my community. I do HIV testing. I physically work with the people who I talk about. I don’t tell people to pull themselves up by the bootstraps. I go buy the goddamn boots for them.”²⁰⁹ Johnson is referencing a keynote Black Pulitzer Prize winning author and teacher Toni Morrison delivered at Portland State in 1975. She said, “The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.”²¹⁰

White acts of protectionism must be specifically identified in order to see how it robs Black and non-white people of color definition and agency. The white Evangelical subject position is sympathetic to narratives of sameness that remain observed in broader conversations about whiteness. bell hooks explains, “Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think will make racism disappear.”²¹¹ These categories are not meant to be understood as existing in neat and tidy boxes, unable to move, shift, and exist simultaneously. Acts of white protectionism shifts, changes, and vacillates in order to avoid being marked.

Leaning on broad understandings of racism to understand whiteness is not specific enough to understand the field upon which people who are invested in protecting whiteness play.

Subjects of Study

White German-born professor and author Erika Fischer-Lichte, working within Theatre and German Studies, explains that totalizing narratives have origin points in Enlightenment thought of the 18th century. If every person is the same, then the German Enlightenment project posits that there can be totalizing narratives to address the pursuit of happiness among all people. Citing French philosopher Michel Foucault, Thomas Jefferson, and others, noted African American theologian and cultural critic Cornell West explains that “observation and differentness are the essential guiding notions in natural history.”²¹² Ideals like reason, beauty, and the imagination were constructed to remind whites that nonwhites were ‘naturally inferior to the whites,’ and therefore could not reason, could not possess beauty, and had no imagination.²¹³ Fischer-Lichte writes, "It is nowadays a truism that we cannot presuppose a universal concept of history...nor do we follow the theory of modernization as elaborated in the Enlightenment, which conceived of the historical process as of a process of never-ending progress and perfection of the human race."²¹⁴

There is a history to the formation of whiteness. If theatre began as a tool to distribute German Enlightenment values, Evangelical Evangelists inherited that mandate. This allows for this chapter to broadly define cultural production.²¹⁵ Western civilization was founded on Enlightenment ideals that called forth, as Wendy Sutherland, Associate Professor of German, Black European and Diaspora Studies at the New College of Florida, explains, a “vener of

universality” and marked humanity as only Eurocentric.²¹⁶ To mark white narratives in Evangelical work as white is to understand that performances take from performances that came before. As Fischer-Lichte writes, "Every cultural performance builds a net of relations between its own theatre and the foreign theatre traditions from which it has taken elements".²¹⁷ Examining the performances of evangelists is building off of her call to examine exchanges that have taken place “between theatre and other cultural domains.”²¹⁸

Performance that came before 21st century Evangelical performances can also be understood through Performance Studies scholar Joseph Roach’s understanding of “how culture reproduces and recreates itself” or the “three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution.”²¹⁹ Roach, who is white, explains how “interculture may be discerned...by means of...performances.” He explains that this is true because “performances so often carry within them the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions – those that were rejected and, even more invisibly, those that have succeeded.”²²⁰ In this way, using ideas of surrogation and substitution to examine Evangelical television programming can become a strategy to tether it to white performances and narratives that have survived for centuries. More specifically, juxtaposing “living memory as restored behavior” to “scripted records” is a more specific way Roach offers for accomplishing this.²²¹ In the context of this chapter, juxtaposing Evangelical experiences, which are reflected in their performances, with the words or scripts found in Enlightenment ideas, I demonstrate in which ways these performances protect historical constructions of whiteness.²²² This chapter will connect transatlantic narratives of success across continents in an attempt to identify strategies that are used to spread similar narratives.

Rick and Kay Warren's Saddleback Church

Rick Warren and his wife Kay began Saddleback Church in Saddleback Valley, California in 1980. Warren and his wife Kay are white, yet they are rarely referenced as such in any publicity materials, articles that discuss them, or by their congregation. Saddleback Valley Community Church's first service was on Easter Sunday with 205 people in attendance.²²³ Saddleback now sits on a 120-acre campus with twenty-five thousand in attendance every weekend. Warren has said that they have over 100,000 names in their church records.²²⁴ Saddleback has fifteen locations in California and four international locations. Saddleback describes itself as "one church in many locations." They have campuses in Berlin, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, and South Manila. Within each service, each church campus leads their own music and housekeeping but broadcasts founder and Senior Pastor Rick Warren to deliver the service sermon. Warren was twenty-six years old when he began the church; he is described today as "Papa Rick— a voice of wisdom, hope, encouragement, and vision."²²⁵

On November 18, 2018, I attended the 12pm service at Saddleback Church, Berlin. As I entered on the ground floor, I was greeted by a sign on a free standing easel that read, "Welcome. People from many nations will come and say: "Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For the Lord's word will go out from this city." Isaiah 2:3." This was not a surprising discovery, but rather an example of the kind of thing one can see at many Christian institutions across the U.S. There is a call to action in the statement, "come let us go" so that "the Lord's word will go out." But also it struck me as an appeal to something greater that has the ability to unite anyone who answers this call. It acknowledges difference, but asks worshippers to unite under the cause of what is known as the

great commission.²²⁶ It revealed a worldview with a master narrative that reinscribes the black-white binary and master slave dialectic.²²⁷



Fig. 2. Photo of Rick Warren speaking to congregants of his Saddleback church Berlin campus. November 18, 2018.

I walked up to the second floor meeting room and into a wide corridor where they were serving coffee and families were in conversation. I grabbed a cup of coffee and walked into the main meeting room. Upon entering the Saddleback Berlin entrance off of Johannisstraße, I was struck by the similarities across the space to many mega-churches found in the States. There were people from different backgrounds, a place to grab coffee and meet other people, and ushers ready to answer questions and guide congregants into the main meeting room. Upon entering the sanctuary, there were two large screens with countdown clocks to the start of the

service, there were band members tuning their instruments, and there was strip lighting and half a dozen par can lamps installed to illuminate the stage. The ceilings were low and there was a small stage and three sections of seating about eight yellow chairs wide and five rows deep. In the back of this meeting space was one long section of about two rows deep that stretched the entire length of all front sections²²⁸ (see fig. 2).

All of these elements felt like a direct mirror of what I have also experienced in U.S. Megachurches, but on a smaller scale. For instance, this reminded me of the physical and program transformations large churches underwent in the U.S. after hiring consultants. When I saw the countdown clock, a smart and efficient way to gather congregants into the space, instantly I thought, “I guess they spoke with the same church consultants everyone in the U.S. has spoken with.” As an example, Lamar Slay and Billy Goff founded the PCC Network, which is a church consultant group that helps small churches grow. On their website they quote Rick Warren, who once explained that churches will only ever be able to fill their physical buildings to about eighty-percent capacity. It is the goal of the PCC Network to help churches maintain eighty-percent capacity and ultimately expand. Slay and Goff offer strategies to keep their churches full. They write about hiring aggressive ushers to move people into the worship space quickly and efficiently, they suggest creating space between seats so they are easier for people to get into them, and they comment briefly on the order of worship, and how to best light the space.²²⁹ It was unclear to me in this moment whether Saddleback had spoken to a church consultant like PCC or if they remain the inspiration for church consultants, but what I saw at Saddleback Berlin mostly mirrors PCC Network recommendations.

As the service began, the local pastor Dave Schnitter, a white German-born man, gave the congregation an update on the health of “Pastor Rick” because he had recently undergone surgery. Since sermons are recorded a week before they are released to Saddleback campuses, this congregation was able to hear his message even as he was recovering. His message on this Sunday was about five spiritual needs. He explained that “we” adore rugged independence. Therefore, he emphasized the need for community. I was not sure who he was defining as “we.” Was it everyone who attended a Saddleback campus? Was it all people everywhere? Was he only speaking from his white, American position and failed to consider the German, Argentinian, Hong Kong, and Filipino perspectives? When I think of notions of “rugged individualism,” I’m reminded of my eleventh grade English class in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, “American Character,” which introduced notions of “Rugged Individualism” to us. In the 2018-19 Ephrata High School *Educational Planning and Course Selection Guide*, it describes this course as designed “to acquaint the student with the forces that have shaped a ‘national personality.’”²³⁰ Here we watched films like *Jeremiah Johnson*, *The Hustler*, and *Death of A Salesman*.²³¹ There was not an attempt in this course to interrogate the term “national personality” or unsettle it. The course presumed one personality and presented materials to demonstrate it. When Warren used the phrase “rugged independence,” even though he was attempting to challenge his own adoration of that phrase, I saw it as a moment where he presumed his audience to be like him; white and striving to access more desirable white spaces.

What was difficult to ignore in his sermon, was that he was sitting comfortably in a director’s chair, hair tossed in a light breeze, surrounded by greenery and the outdoors. It felt like he was doing something better than I was. Because of how he presented himself, I wanted what

he had. He existed in a more desirable space. His demeanor and carefree way of navigating the world was something I wanted. He performed the kind of white persona I once wanted to be. When he mentioned “rugged independence,” I sympathized. I once adored this idea because it was a value privileged in my upbringing. I now continue to do work, as Warren suggested we do, to think about the need for community, the group, and the whole. Although his message was meaningful to me, I am also a white man and evidently learned to value similar things as him. In this specific way, I believe he assumed his audience to be white, male, and American. Here I experienced the beginning of an assumed subject position. Warren is the default and his U.S. and German congregation are asked to follow his lead. In this moment I began wrestling with my own whiteness. I knew who was being erased and ignored, but I did not want to believe it. It seemed so obvious that Warren’s white, American, male subject position was the only position he was considering and it was never mentioned or considered. I felt deeply distraught and powerless.²³²

In 2003, Kay Warren launched the HIV/AIDS Initiative through Saddleback Church and remains the Executive Director today.²³³ As I began scrolling through pages of the Initiative’s website, I was reminded of the service at Buckhead Church, where the weekly theme was “Be Rich” and yet no one mentioned wealth from a material perspective, I remember feeling confused that the theme communicated one thing, and yet it was expounded upon in any way but that which was obvious to me. I wondered if this allowed the church to distribute notions of material wealth, without actually having to say it explicitly. It appears they wanted it both ways. They wanted to communicate “be rich” as a strategy to acquire wealth but they were also obligated to mention other notions of richness as cover for what they really wanted to say.

What I discovered on the Saddleback website was an HIV outreach ministry with no mention of gay, bisexual, or men who sleep with men represented on their site. The CDC is clear that this group of people in the U.S. are at the greatest risk for contracting HIV.²³⁴ Kay Warren, founder of this initiative, writes, “The HIV&AIDS Initiative at Saddleback was born out of the conviction that God cares about sick people” and “If we link arms together, united in vision and purpose, we can bring healing and hope to millions of people living with and affected by HIV&AIDS.”²³⁵ She describes the moment when she became outraged with this disease. She writes, “I was sitting in my comfortable living room reading a news magazine when I saw an article on AIDS in Africa... There was a little box in the middle of this article and it said ‘12 million children orphaned in Africa due to AIDS.’ I threw the magazine down in horror because at that moment, sitting in my comfortable living room drinking a cup of tea, I realized I didn’t know the name of a single orphan.”²³⁶ In 2002, Kay was horrified by AIDS in Africa but founded Saddleback with her husband in 1980. She still has yet to comment on the AIDS epidemic that unfolded in the U.S. in the 1980s and the lives of those lost as it spread.

I read every page connected to Saddleback’s HIV outreach program and the only acknowledgement of gay men was in the testimony of John Forbes on the “Featured Stories” page.²³⁷ Forbes, although he is a man who once has had sex with other men, never identified as gay. His testimony laments that the only organization that was able to help him was the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in 1995, which introduced him, as a man who describes himself as having engaged in homosexual behavior, as surrounded by others in a “lifestyle that doesn’t reflect God’s intention for our lives.” He tells the story of the woman who was caught in adultery.

According to the law, she should have been stoned. He called her to live a life of holiness and surrounded her with compassion. And in this moment he compares gay men to adulterers.²³⁸

Other individuals that are featured on this page include a woman who was raped, a man who used to be a heavy drug user, a pastor from Rwanda, a girl who was once an orphan in Rwanda, and David, an “AIDS Treatment Activist.” David grew up in New York, has been living with the virus for seventeen years, but does not mention his sexual orientation. This page also introduces us to Tim, who describes his life a year ago as “a mess.” The ministry films his testimony as his friend Evan, whom Tim describes as his “brother in Christ,” joins Tim for a visit to a doctor for an HIV test. Tim says, “it was drugs and alcohol, women, parties...I’m a little concerned about my health.” The doctor asks, “Any potential risk factors you may have for HIV?” and Tim responds, “A lot. Anything I can think of that would probably maybe give you AIDS, I’ve probably done it.” But he doesn’t mention sex with men. Additionally, Black and African Americans represent a higher proportion of new HIV diagnoses and people living with HIV than other races/ethnicities. In 2017, Black and African Americans accounted for 13% of the U.S. Population and a staggering 43% of new HIV diagnoses.²³⁹

What I witnessed was an attempt to define terminology on Warren and Saddleback’s terms. They attempted to control the narrative. Warren’s HIV initiative and his ministry use testimonies to replace realities of gay men in this country with stories that reflect anyone but gay and Queer men. Additionally, Black men and women remain most affected by this omission on Warren’s part. By universalizing this issue and erasing those most vulnerable, the problem of HIV is re-centered onto the white subject position and who they judge as worthy of help. If gay, Queer, and trans people are erased and those supporting his ministry approve, whiteness remains

protected and defined in unambiguously straight terms. Warren insists that he is for “equality,” but also believes gay marriage is a redefinition of the term “marriage;” he has therefore condemned marriage between same genders.²⁴⁰

The testimonies on the HIV Initiative page are important as they reflect how HIV affects more than just the gay population, and they must not be excluded from solutions to eradicate HIV from the planet. But by privileging straight-presenting people and ignoring the group of people disproportionately affected by HIV, it is clear that Saddleback, like Buckhead, wants credit for saying one thing and doing another. They want points for tackling HIV but also for not mentioning gay people. Nowhere on the Saddleback’s website is mentioned resources for safe sex, medical expertise, or the existence of gay, bi, and men who sleep with men. Similarly, Buckhead did not mention wealth. They only presented notions of “richness” that would not appear to mirror a morality of wealth and profit that increasingly defines U.S. hegemony. What we see happening within Evangelical Christianity are efforts to erase meaning and make substitutions for the current state of whiteness. We do not have to journey far, as Roach writes, for “the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions to be visible and found.”²⁴¹ HIV and notions of richness are being redefined so whiteness wins.

Reinhard Bonnke

White German-born male Reinhard Bonnke is examined by the 2001 HBO documentary, *A Question of Miracles*. In this film, which is a critique of Bonnke, we first see and hear him in a montage of moments where he first shout to a person off camera, “Get out of the wheelchair and walk!” Moments later he shouts, “Be healed from polio!” The camera cuts to a large crowd of

African people, as his rallies have been held across the continent for decades. He has regularly preached to crowds of half a million people.²⁴² In those first moments, we are introduced to what has defined many Evangelical ministers, a promise of something the participants and spectators do not have. These are participants with a problem and the ministers offer a complete transformation. The documentary ultimately concludes that Bonnke, along with Palestinian-born evangelist Benny Hinn, use hypnotic techniques, widely known and documented to cause people to behave in a certain way when in massive group settings.²⁴³

This documentary describes Benin City, Nigeria, a place where Bonnke held a rally, as a “center of Christianity.” This city has a long post-colonial history of white missionaries traveling there in efforts to “save the people”, which is code for “civilizing” African people.²⁴⁴ Like the Pope, Bonnke rides through crowd waving in a Mercedes as people reach out to be seen and touched. On the first night of this particular crusade, fifteen people were trampled to death as they attempted to leave the grounds. Some of the families were so poor, they couldn’t afford to retrieve the bodies from the morgue. One man, whose child was trampled, brought the child to the crusade the next night, believing Bonnke could heal the child. Upon being turned away, he laid the child on the Bonnke’s Mercedes as he was leaving town, in hopes his child could be healed. Bonnke’s Mercedes kept moving.²⁴⁵

This brings to mind the gospel story of Jesus about to enter the town of Nain and saw a dead man being carried out of the city. The gospel of Luke reads, that Jesus had compassion on the widow accompanying her son “and said to her, “Do not weep.” The he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they

glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”²⁴⁶ This is a story of a woman in the most dire of circumstance. As a widow who had now lost her only son, she had no one left to support her and would be unable to inherit their land. As a result, she would have to rely on the kindness and charity of relatives and neighbors.²⁴⁷

This man at Bonnke’s rally perceived him as a savior of some kind, or as the Bible reads, a prophet. This man did not know what to do other than follow the savior. Roach writes about popular behaviors, or displaced transmissions, that are “resituated in new locales.” He is clear that when these twice-behaved behaviors are performed, “no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance. In this improvisational behavioral space, memory reveals itself as imagination.”²⁴⁸ In the instance, of this father who just lost his son, Roach reminds us that “it is an opportunistic tactic of whiteness to forget.”²⁴⁹ Bonnke will play the role as savior, but will do it on his terms. By performing as a protagonist of gendered whiteness, Bonnke relied on an unnamed Black antagonist, as Roach writes, “who, like millions of indispensable actors in the dramas of the circum-Atlantic world, remains forgotten but not gone.”²⁵⁰ Bonnke cannot win as a savior in this recreated performance. He cannot bring the boy back to life. He can only engage in hypnotic techniques to win every night on a physical stage when, in a hypnotic state, the minds of people allow them to rise from wheel chairs and appear to behave in ways contrary to their everyday physical state. In this way, Bonnke can protect the illusion of being the white savior. Because this is where Bonnke wins and from where he can reproduce narratives of winning for his followers to consume.

I do not mean to suggest that Bonnke understands what he is doing. There exists themes of suffering and rejection in Bonnke's early biography. He was the fifth son of a Wehrmarkt officer, fleeing from the advancing Russians when he was four years old. He then lived in refugee camps until he was about nine years old.²⁵¹ As a young evangelist, he recalls having a dream where a large map of Africa, as he says, "became washed in the precious blood of Jesus." And he heard a voice that said "Africa shall be saved." Bonnke believes this was the voice of God as he had that same dream for four consecutive nights. He said to his wife, "I think the Lord is trying to tell me something." He brought this to the ministry where he was working and they asked him to not pursue these ideas. There were rules to how this German ministry was to be conducted, and in turn, Bonnke did not want to upset his German superiors. After more prayer, Bonnke believes God spoke to him again and said, "If you drop the vision I gave you, of blood washed Africa, I have to drop you and give it to someone else to bring it about."²⁵² Examining how narratives of whiteness are protected in Evangelical spaces is not an examination of sincerity and belief of the messenger, but of performing a specific narrative and meaning. As with the Buckhead and Saddleback churches, Bonnke controls what his spectators are supposed to see and attempts to escape those moments that are to remain unseen, uncommented upon, and not engaged with. In this German space, winning continues to occur in narrow, specific parameters that it defines.

Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church

On April 7, 2018, I attended the Saturday evening service of Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church. Joel Osteen is probably the most popular and inspirational preacher in America. He has

pastored Lakewood church since his father died unexpectedly from a heart attack in 1999. His father John Osteen began the church in 1959. Prior to 2005, the current Lakewood Church Central Campus was the Compaq Center and home to the Houston Rockets. Today Lakewood reports a combination of twenty million listeners and viewers each month to their television and radio broadcasts. Lakewood is the nation's largest Protestant congregation.²⁵³ Osteen is just a man on a stage. There are lights and cameras around him; he is in an arena that seats sixteen thousand people, preaching for a church that has an annual operating budget of ninety million dollars; he has a weekly attendance of over fifty-thousand.

However, these are not facts Osteen leads with.²⁵⁴ Osteen goes out of the way to discount these facts. He is a self-professed shy man from Texas.²⁵⁵ When his father died, he remembers dreading the idea of speaking in front of an audience.²⁵⁶ In a 2014 interview Osteen said, "My personality is quiet and reserved. My dad was always the person on the stage. I just didn't think it was in me. When I told my dad I would minister I wasn't looking forward to it. I just did it to make him proud. I was nervous. I spoke too fast. All I remember was how nervous I was and how much I dreaded doing it. It was THE worst week of my life!" He ultimately made it past his insecurities and discovered who he believes he was meant to be. Osteen believes his calling is "to plant a seed of hope."²⁵⁷

Upon entering the church, I was greeted by three escalators and a large staircase that led up to the sanctuary entrance. For those who choose the stairs, there is a bronze statue of Osteen's deceased father and still-living mother, John and Dodie Osteen. John is smiling, holding a Bible with his right hand as Dodie looks on, smiling, positioned slightly behind him, and embracing his left arm. These are the founders of Lakewood, Joel's parents, behind whom he has always

followed²⁵⁸ (see fig. 3). Today Joel has inherited the vision found in this statue as he is boldly moving forward with the word of God.



Fig. 3. Photo of John and Dodie statue in the lobby of Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas. April 7, 2018; The plaque reads, “Pastors John and Dodie Osteen, Founders of Lakewood Church, Mother’s Day 1959, Edd Hayes, sculptor, Gift from Craig Keeland.”

At the top of the stairs, guests arrive to the main concourse and entrance to the sanctuary space. In this wrap-around gathering space, there is information for visitors regarding membership along with a bookstore. Along the outer wall hangs ten large framed informational

posters that detail the history of the building along with photos chronicling Lakewood's restoration of the Compaq Center into a church. Accompanying these photos include Bible verses like Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish," and Psalms 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." The messaging was clear that God gave them vision and that this space exists because God built it. I arrived early on this evening to view the space. While wandering through the lobby, a man leading a tour group of about four others stopped and asked if I would like to join them. I accepted. This guide gave us information about the church history, space, programs, and membership information. A perk to joining the tour is that right before the start of the service, we were all seated in the fourth row of the right section. As I walked into the sanctuary space, I was overcome by how large and spectacular it really was. Although Lakewood does not promise spectacle and grandeur, that's what I encountered when I walked into the former arena. My eyes instantly looked up to what appeared to be about a dozen large, square, blue panels of light hovering over the space. Over the course of the service, these panels changed color as it mirrored the atmosphere found on the stage.

Over the course of the next two hours, I was struck by the similarities that exist between what I witnessed in Los Angeles attending game shows and what I saw in Houston, Texas at Lakewood. Although both game shows and Osteen's program appear on television, the similarities extended beyond that commonality. Directly in front of me was the stage with a slow-spinning, golden globe of planet earth²⁵⁹ (see fig. 4). The Great Commission was front and center, and on full, glimmering display. Since our group was seated a few minutes early, I observed two men shining the stage. In mere moments, Joel Osteen, one straight, white man who has mastered being inspirational, would walk onto the stage. And I was ready.



Fig. 4. Photo of golden rotating globe on the stage of Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas. April 7, 2018.

On either side of the globe were a stage right and left choir loft and twinkle lights that hung upstage of both banks. Positioned stage right and left of each choir loft were jumbo screens where announcements were featured, and later in the service, where the cameras are projected. Before the service, announcement slides help church members navigate events and directs them on how to get involved. One slide instructs members how to get baptized. It read, “Water Baptism. To sign up text Baptism to 77377 or visit LakewoodChurch.com/Baptism.” Another read, “Authentic Manhood. This series will help men deal with the challenges of manhood from the inside out. All men are welcome to attend.”²⁶⁰ In some respect, I appreciated the use of technology to engage the congregants. In another respect, I have only texted in this way when I

have wanted to donate money or vote for *American Idol*. I was consequently distracted by how quick and easy all of this felt. The slides represented a list of boxes the church offers its congregation to “check.” Like *Price*, the church is defining the problems, or creating the games contestants will play, and then providing the rules for how to play and win; implied in that is the promise of equal chances and the shared notion that we have been chosen.²⁶¹

Just before the service began, another visitor sitting to my left, a straight white male, shared with me that he is from a mega-church in the Colorado Springs area. He said, “And I thought my church was a mega-church. Now this is a mega-church!” He then called his wife and began sharing his excitement with her. I was struck by how excited he was, as if he was preparing to be a contestant on *The Price is Right* as I had a month prior. To this man, size mattered. The spectacle, shine, and grandeur of the place appeared to be how he connected to something greater. The service then began with a rock band performing within a semi-circle of lights embedded into the stage. These lights, which continue to bring my mind back to the set of *Family Feud*, which I had visited during my visit to Los Angeles in March, 2018, worked to focus the attention of the spectator to that enclosed space. I also witnessed men shining the stage before *Family Feud* as they had at Lakewood moments before the service began. Although I understand the necessity to remove dirt and smudges from the stage for the cameras, this is also a reminder that the content of what I was witnessing was not just for us in that room, it was being groomed and curated to be distributed. Millions of viewers were about to consume the product of this work. Everything was building to introduce the man who has just a few simple, inspiring words to say.

Having watched Osteen on television prior to this live service, this was a reminder that the television and online audience would not see the stage polishers and stagehands. They would not be struck by the size of the spinning globe. I certainly did not notice the semi-circle of lights until I was four rows removed from them. They may not notice the 40-50-foot shimmering curtain that hangs upstage of it all and that resemble the curtains that hung in the studios of *Let's Make A Deal* and the *Price is Right* over the years. Even after revisiting the taped service I was about to experience, I remain fascinated by how all of these elements worked to focus our attention solely onto Osteen. They served as visual design to move our eye to center stage. This is where we all will hear Osteen, among others, share and speak. Lakewood's band began the service in this space with American singer-songwriter Israel Houghton's "We Will Not Be Moved." As Joel and Victoria Osteen entered the stage, the musicians continued to underscore their introductory speeches. Because of the mixed spectacle of this performance, I found it difficult to step outside of the experience and think about what was unfolding. The space had been created for our attention to remain engaged for over two hours on whatever is presented to us within that semi-circle lights.

After the music concluded, Osteen reentered the stage and said, "The devil is trying to steal your joy. God's mercy is fresh every morning. All we have to do is receive it."²⁶² He then listed a few dozen ways in which the mercy of the Lord, if the congregant receives it, can be experienced and defined. Osteen said, "We are healthy whole, blessed, prosperous, redeemed, forgiven, talented, creative..." The list continued. In this moment, I was struck by how much responsibility he placed into the hands of his congregation and television viewers. One of the first mega-churches I attended was Rhema Bible Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2002 when I was

a student at Oral Roberts University. In that service, I remember pastor Kenneth Hagin, Jr, son of Kenneth Hagin, asking someone from the congregation to come join him on stage and he proceeded to give the man a book.²⁶³ He began to explain something similar to this man about notions of receiving that I was hearing through Osteen. The man reached out and accepted the book. Hagin's point was that salvation and the blessings of God can be viewed like a gift. God has given it to this man, but he will be unable to receive it until he chooses to reach out and accept it.²⁶⁴ One cannot receive salvation, blessings, and a good life without taking the first step. In the context of what Osteen was saying, he explained that we are unable to experience joy, mercy, and similar "blessings" until we first step out and receive them. What remained unclear was how to receive these blessings. Must I just believe I have these things? If I want to be prosperous, is "believing" all it takes? I continued to ask, what work was required of me to receive?

Joel's wife Victoria entered the stage and followed up on this theme of receiving. She said, "I receive the increase. Sometimes we feel like we need to get something from God. But he just wants us to receive it."²⁶⁵ She then tells a story about having a compassionate heart for the people around us and the pain in their lives. She said, "It says in John 3:17, if anyone sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart of compassion, how can the love of God be in him?" She then directed the congregation to "Open your hearts of compassion and let his power flow through you." She told a story of inviting the oldest daughter of a neighbor woman who just died from cancer to church. Although this was eight years ago, she explained the family stopped attending and moved away. A week prior to this service, she shared that she was putting on her makeup, about to leave the house, when out of the blue, God dropped this oldest daughter on her

heart. And she thought, “Oh wow, I wonder where she went?” She said that she felt “like it was his divine love and compassion for her.” Victoria began to pray in that moment, “Lord I don’t know where she went, but you do. Lord, I don’t know what she needs, but you do. So Father I ask you to give her wisdom, give her strength.” At this moment the congregation begins to applaud. Victoria continued, “Father whatever it is she needs, God show her your favor and show her your strength.” In an attempt to find this girl, she shared the story with Joel, she looked on Facebook, and she asked some friends about her. Even though it appears she is still looking for this girl, she explained that her feeling was one of “Oh man, I wouldn’t want to be in their shoes.” She then said that Jesus did the same thing. He healed blind eyes. She explained that reaching out – presumably in the way that she did – can open blind eyes and change perspectives. She left the congregation with the assurance, “You have miracle working power inside of you today.”

I was hopeful that in this moment Victoria was going to give the congregation strategies to connect her positive thinking and hopeful worldview to some kind of action plan or to put our compassionate hearts to use. What she offered the congregation was the reminder to pray, have open hearts, which I saw as a kind of mindfulness, and to do a Facebook search. I was uncertain how those items could help the wellbeing of this girl. She was also clear to quote John 3:17 as “if anyone sees...” But the verse actually reads, “But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart of compassion against him, how does the love of God remain in him?” Other translations read, “if anyone has the world’s wealth,” “Whoever has earthly possessions,” and “If someone has enough money to live well.”²⁶⁶

The Osteens certainly qualify as individuals who have “enough money.” When Victoria had invited this friend to church eight years prior, it is unclear which neighborhood they resided. It was around that time in 2010 when they purchased their \$10.5 million home in River Oaks, Houston. They had moved from a \$2.5 million home in Tanglewood, Houston.²⁶⁷ In this service, Victoria decided to rephrase the verse and leave that part out. By doing so, she was able to universalize the “anyone”, “whoever”, and “someone”. She was able to take a verse about a person of wealth and turn it into a verse for everyone. By doing this she also made the conversation about doing something anyone listening could do and not about how much money the Osteens have. The Lakewood congregation does not need money or material possessions to pray or think about other people. At this point in the service, Victoria introduces Pastor Craig Johnson who is the founder of Champions Club, a ministry that provides special needs programs for families who are “feeling rejected in society and feeling rejection from the church” because they have children with special needs.²⁶⁸ He explained that when he and his wife first arrived to Lakewood, they discovered their son Connor was on the autism spectrum. He explained that this was devastating. And then one day his wife said to him, “Craig, Craig, come up here!” Connor had begun to speak and had not said anything in three years. Craig asked his wife, “What did he say?” His wife said, “Connor, say it for mommy and daddy, say it again.” Craig then describes that moment, “And my five year old boy looked up at us and said, “This is my Bible, I am what it says I am, I have what it says I have, today I’ll be taught the word of God.”²⁶⁹ At this point, the congregation erupted in applause. Craig went on to explain more about this ministry and gave one more example of a young girl with a disability at their ministry location in Africa. He said, “Just recently she took her first steps and walked for the first time because of what this church

has done because of what these pastors have done. It's now helped a child in Africa and changed the world." As the congregation was applauding, I was struggling to hold back tears. The story Johnson shared was just so powerful.

In the case of every white subject in this chapter, they are doing work in Africa. Goff is an Honorary Consul for the Republic of Uganda; Warren's HIV initiative only exists because his wife read a story about suffering children in Africa; and Reinhard Bonnke's entire ministry was centered in Africa, which began with a dream where God appeared to him and asked him to go. Africa remains the standard for ministry success because whiteness has come to represent notions of purity, while Blackness has been defined as heathen, dirty, and in need of a savior. White British author, film critic, and scholar Richard Dyer explains, "What is absent from white is any 'thing;' in other words, material reality. Cleanliness is the absence of dirt, spirituality the absence of flesh, virtue the absence of sin, chastity the absence of sex and so on."²⁷⁰ Because whiteness is the absence of "the other," Dyer argues that it needs to baptize, cleanse and wash away that which is not white in order to give itself meaning. Returning to the continent of Africa continues to reinforce to ministry supporters that they are doing God's work. This work is whiteness and that whiteness does not read as racist because it cares about black and brown people. In the non-Western space of Africa, white Christians can continue to find and purify unsaved Africans and return home as Christian heroes. This remains an opportunity for white congregants to participate in white spaces: by saving the unclean. Furthermore, they insulate themselves from criticism of whiteness at home where systemic racism policies bodies of color differently.

Victoria returned to the stage and presented one more positive moment as ushers begin to take tithes and offerings. She explained that when the congregation gives, they are helping girls like this in Africa. She said:

He's got a miracle for you. You can say I don't need to give, but let me tell you, God says you do need to give. He doesn't want to change everyone else, but not allow his hand to change you. You see, God wants to mold you and make you and it is part of this molding and making that is learning to trust him with your tithes and offerings...you need to invest in what is good. You wouldn't invest in a stock that wouldn't perform...I encourage you to invest here because God always gives an amazing return.

In this moment, the theme of "receiving" emerged again. On the surface, it appeared that God wants to change lives in big and prosperous ways if one first gives, which instructs God to do good things for the giver. Although I know from speaking with friends and church congregants over the years from spaces like these that most do not view their faith this formulation; I do not know what it is they take from rhetoric like this. I suspect there is symmetry between giving and receiving and Joel's personal mission to "plant a seed of hope." There is no guarantee that anything good will happen by giving money or opening one's heart of compassion, but the speaker and listeners remain confident that something will.

After the offering was collected, Joel returned to the stage²⁷¹ (see fig. 5). The sermon that followed had two components to it; something negative and something positive; something bad and something good; a problem and a solution. In just about everything he said, this binary can be identified. Although his sermon was full of the expected positive affirmations that he is known for, like "You're too blessed to be angry. You're too blessed to remember that it didn't



Fig. 5. Photo of Joel Osteen praying over congregation at Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas. April 8, 2018.

work out,” along with, “You won’t wake up thinking about the haters, you’ll wake up thinking about how blessed you are.” His sermon did get specific. He spoke of Joseph as mentioned in the Christian Old Testament book of Genesis and the trouble and pain he had undergone. When he had his first son, he was named Manesseh, which means “to forget”. So the theme Osteen pulled out of this story was concerning forgetting about past pain, just like God brought Joseph out of

his struggle in a way where he forgot. Osteen said, “God is going to cause you to forget. He’s going to turn it around in such a way that you are overwhelmed. You don’t have time to think about the hurt. You’re so grateful for the goodness of God.” He implores his congregation to get ready, because “Manasseh is coming.”

Victoria’s story universalized the mandate for Christians with money to help those in need and erased wealthy individuals. Johnson’s story also attempted to appeal to a common audience by championing Africa as the default geographical location for measuring whether they have reached the world. Joel continues in this vein to take a story about Joseph, a man referenced in Genesis, whose father was Jacob and whose grandfather was Abraham and the patriarch of the patriarch from which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam developed. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and through a series of events became the highest official in Ancient Egypt. He lived in the fifteenth century BCE. Osteen uses this specific story to speak to a 21st century audience. His broad adaptation of stories seems to resonate with his congregation if listening to “Amen” and applause is any indication. But this story that took place over three thousand years ago was about a specific person who found himself in a specific and terrible circumstance. Osteen often speaks of specific circumstances that his congregants may face, such as the loss of a job, a personal sickness or one in the family, and all-around failure of dreams and life goals.

The story of Joseph is one where his brothers wielded their power to remove him from their family. They had wanted to kill him, but decided to sell him into slavery instead. His brothers who were full of jealousy and rage and brought back his coat to their father with the blood of a goat on it so as to fool him. As Egypt experienced seven years of famine, Joseph encounters his brothers requesting grain from the Pharaoh. Joseph ultimately confronted the

power that sold him to slavery and reunited with his father and family. In the Genesis account, more is described than a man who was sold into slavery. A specific power relevant to a specific person is introduced and ultimately confronted. When Osteen speaks, power is omitted. The challenging and sometimes tragic circumstances he mentions could happen to anyone. Anyone can have a job outsourced, face rising debt from a hospital bill, or fail in a variety of ways.

If power were mentioned in any way, the veneer of universality and the notion that we all experience these problems together would disappear and the congregation would see Osteen's sermons differently. In other words, if Osteen attempted to unpack who benefits from automating a congregant's job, or explain why healthcare costs remain high and preexisting conditions still exist, or illustrate why Black men are incarcerated at a rate five times higher than white men, he would no longer be able to speak generally and to everyone who listens. He would be shaking the foundations of the system from which he benefits. If he explained those problems, perhaps he would incite division and lose viewers and congregants, but it would shine light directly on how he is able to afford a 10.5 million dollar home. It is in his interest to give his viewers general solutions and strategies to the problems they face that result from the way power and wealth is distributed today, and in no way is his interest to fix the disproportionate distribution of power and wealth today.

Even though it is in Osteen's interest to give his congregants strategies to address their problems that do not threaten to unsettle power, I have no evidence to suggest he is doing so intentionally. Osteen's worldview is not constricted to what is or is not possible in the United States. He is not interested in limiting what is possible for any person's intersections. In a general sense, Osteen relies on supernatural power in order for his congregants to experience change. He

wrote in a blog post on October 19, 2018, “Don’t discount yourself...On your own it may not happen, but you’re not on your own.²⁷² There is a supernatural blessing on your life put there by the Creator of the universe. It will cause thing to happen that you can’t make happen. It will cause opportunity to find you. Good breaks will chase you down. You won’t have to go after it; the blessing will cause it to come to you.”²⁷³ Although Osteen is asking his congregants to look past the systems of the world and rely on a higher power, the performance I viewed still reproduced “the liberal belief [of] a universal subjectivity,” that we are all just people.²⁷⁴ Both exist in tandem.

In all four performances described in this chapter, narrative is constructed via the terms of the white subject position. In the words of all four Evangelical ministers, we see resonating ideas that were put into writing at the foundation of the United States, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”²⁷⁵ Goff presents an identity that can achieve anything and that is impenetrable to the obstacles of the material world. Warren’s ministry does work to essentialize and presume all people are equal and that all problems are shared by the collective. Bonnke’s performance distributes blessings of God to those who attend his rallies, but on his terms. Osteen reproduces narratives of universality as well, and does not acknowledge intersectional identities in his sermons. All four appear to be invested in notions of sameness that function like the equal odds of winning that I witnessed in the audience of game show; that we are all equal and have the same chances to succeed. Simultaneously, all four overlook the possibility in their performances that we live in a world where people are not treated as equals by systems, institutions, and other individuals.

Philomena Essed's definition of Paternalistic racism expects all racial-ethnic groups to assimilate into dominant culture. It is an assimilation into white culture. In this paradigm, everyone is expected to behave and navigate in more or less similar ways. In white ways. When Osteen neglects to mention power, but reminds us to keep hoping, structures of power remain in place. It remains not enough to label this impulse to universalize as racist. That also universalizes the problem and prevents analysis of the particularities and performances of each white subject.

When Evangelical ministers define success on their terms, they are speaking from a white subject position. I understand the impulse to allow ideology to govern one's worldview. As a white male who grew up in Southeastern Pennsylvania (North of the Mason Dixon line), I grew up invested in the idea that "race" was a non-issue in almost every situation and in almost every conversation. Why would we mention that someone was Black or not white? Wouldn't that work to point out something about someone that was once used to wage terrible violence against them? Would that not mean that I was becoming like those who once committed violence? And so, in an attempt to avoid this, it was my view that ignoring "race" was a non-racist act. By treating everyone the same, I believed I was helping to create a world that allowed everyone hope and opportunity.

By avoiding race, I avoided Black people and Black culture. I did not have the knowledge or experience to understand my own position. When I did talk about race and Blackness, it was couched in language that valued individuality and presumed all people to be equal. Theoretically, we may have all been created equal, in the sense that we are all human, but only in a test-tube within a laboratory, removed from social constructions can we actually navigate the world equally. Fighting for sameness is noble if one wants to actually erase

inequality, otherwise, ignoring race only serves to preserve homogeneity, inequality, and exclusion among us. It is in the work of these Evangelical ministers where I see power that has created difference, and therefore that has ignored constructed notions of “race.”

In his book *Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance*, Jamaican born British scholar and activist Stuart Hall explains that understanding racial structures must take place within the framework of economic relations. He writes, “the problem here is not whether economic structures are relevant to racial divisions but how the two are theoretically connected.”²⁷⁶ Like Hall’s analysis of societal structures – of which Osteen’s program reflects and contributes – assumes white and Black people “stand in essentially the same relation to capital,”²⁷⁷ or, as Osteen alludes to in this particular service, “I’m too blessed.” Hall reminds us that “blessings,” or the results of capitalism, have “been installed through the expansion of market relations, production for which is based on free labour.”²⁷⁸ It is clear that Osteen is attempting to move past problems and trouble. But in doing so, ignores that the differences power created do not stand in the same relation to capital.

After the service, all are invited to wait in a queue to meet and shake hands with Osteen. We were only instructed to not ask Osteen for prayer. Most people brought items they wanted him to sign, like a service program or photo of him and Victoria. The waiting area was positioned in front of elevator doors back in the lobby. We were all so excited. I felt like I was back in the queue waiting to enter the Bob Barker studio in Hollywood. As the doors opened, not unlike the doors Barker and Carey walk through on each episode of *Price* when they are about to greet their viewers, Osteen was revealed with a body guard and two other men who followed him through the doors. We had all been placed in rows, each behind the other. When he came to me, I



Fig. 6. Photo of author with Joel Osteen at Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas. April 7, 2018.

mentioned that I also attended Oral Roberts University²⁷⁹ (see fig. 6). He asked, “And what are you doing now?” I explained that I was writing a dissertation on media in the U.S. and Germany and whether services like this and other mediatized platforms reflect the values of the country or create them. When I asked him for an interview, I could see his body guard standing behind him shaking his head. Then I said, “Well, I know you’re busy, but—” Osteen said, “Well, why don’t you talk to my assistant and give her your contact information.” At that point I asked if he could sign my program and he moved onto the next individual. I followed up with his assistant regarding an interview, but never received a reply.

Conclusion

All four performances by Goff, Warren, Bonnke, and Osteen are engaging in exchanges between their ministries and other cultural domains.²⁸⁰ They are reproducing values privileged and formulated by the German Enlightenment project. These spaces support totalizing narratives and understandings of the world. White remains the default subject position through which all is made possible; whiteness provides access to the most desirable space. Individuality in these spaces has been substituted for the white male subject position, as the evangelists ask audiences to engage with the world like they do themselves. Most damning, when whiteness is performed, it has the ability to commodify people's hope and turns their engagement with these preachers into a transaction. These transactions are in exchange for accessing the best spaces whiteness has to offer. A dichotomy remains privileged as congregations and TV viewers are asked to do or say something specific in order for something positive to happen. Taking up Dyer's call to undertake "equivalent histories of white consciousness in European countries" is necessary so contemporary consumers of Evangelical programming can remember the substitutions; the long, sordid, and raced meaning of today's Evangelical preachers.²⁸¹ These are just guys. Living their best lives. We may not know someone like them, but "I don't think there are any of us who don't wanna be like [them]."²⁸²

Chapter 3 – Show Me the Money: Staging Winners on US and German Game Shows

Introduction

White. White people. White problems. White winning. White dying. The notion that white is the default subject position through which most of television is staged and viewed does not feel like a profound statement. The critique of whiteness in popular entertainment has been going on since vaudeville. White performers mocked Black people to protect their whiteness in blackface performances of the 19th century and beyond to protect it from intruders: non-white others. In the contemporary moment of the 21st century, critiques of whiteness as a default “winning” position from which everything important departs, can be seen in political discourse such as political commentator Van Jones’ reaction to the Trump Presidency as “whitelash,” Hollywood whitewashing in general, and Chris Rock’s critique of white people in his opening Oscar monologue in 2016. This is not uncharted territory. These critiques reflect a culture that protects whiteness and that continues to be staged.

On Sunday, March 25, 2018 at 12:30pm, I stood in line to be part of the studio audience for a taping of *The Price is Right* wearing a shirt that read: “I’m doing my dissertation on Drew Carey!” All 300-some, would-be-contestants were about to face a brief 30-60 second interview with Co-Producer Stan Blits. I knew this was where people were chosen and rejected. Because I am not the kind of person to naturally jump up and down and act like a lunatic, like so many contestants do, I knew I had to find another way to appear excited while still appearing genuine. If I had chosen to give a prepared speech or pitch of myself that mirrored what I saw in others, I do not believe Stan would have believed me. After rehearsing my speech for a few weeks, reciting it to others, and genuinely feeling excited to meet Stan, it was my turn, and Stan turned

to me and said, “Hi!” Now at this point, I had no idea who Stan Blits was, or that it was one man who would choose contestants. However, I saw his name on his lanyard, so I shook his hand and said, “Stan? You’re Stan?” He said, “Yes! Yes!” I said, “Stan, I’m Chris Martin! And I’m doing my dissertation on Drew Carey!” Stan asked me about my project and I explained that it was a theatre Ph.D., and that it was about gameshows, Drew Carey, and the American Dream. He asked, “Oh, so do you teach acting?” I responded, “Yes, that and quite a few other things.” He said, “Give me your best impression of a bastard!” I paused, grunted, and shook my fist in the air. He looked at the rest of the line and made a joke questioning the believability of my performance. We all laughed and we ended our brief interview by exchanging pleasantries. “It’s good to meet you Christopher,” he said. I felt like I successfully passed the test. Nobody that I saw had the level of enthusiasm I performed. Nobody called him by his name. Nobody shook his hand. Nobody attempted to control the conversation. There was probably another hour of waiting before we were ushered into the studio. I did not know what was going to happen upon entering the studio. Did I really pass the test? Is that even possible? Will my name be called? As we left the interview space, we could hear Stan shouting after us, “Remember! If you get called, ACT! CRAZY^{283!}!”

Key Questions

A focus on greed, which values nothing but the pursuit of profit, wealth and things is by and large the extent of the analysis of game show culture up until this point. An analysis of the game show form that only observes contestants winning cash and prizes, a tangible manifestation of the game, would miss the point of this chapter. I will examine ways in which this form, which

is distributed to over 60 million American homes, works to distribute values of success as unraced and available to everyone. Just as this game is protected and reserved for a select group of people to play, this chapter will demonstrate strategies built into the form showcased by *The Price is Right* that serve to protect and reinforce racial constructions of whiteness that frequently go unmarked.

The key questions of this chapter ask, how might acts of white protectionism that reinforce how everyday people— audiences —learn to see and hear whiteness as a non-racialized subject position, which protects and reifies expectations of white privilege, be reflected in the U.S. *The Price is Right* and *The Wall*, my own experience as a contestant on *The Price is Right* in 2018, and the German *Wetten Dass? and Zahhtag!*, Secondly, what are the requisites of who wins and loses on these shows? Finally, how do these shows script and celebrate the cultural myths of white Americans and white Germans of the 21st century that promise a means by which average white Americans and Germans can enrich their economic lives?

U.S. Subjects of Study

The Price is Right

The Price is Right remains the longest running game show in history. This show celebrates the acquisition of something more and reproduces a narrative that a contestant who is called to come on down and play the game can go from nothing to winning the Showcase. It presents a game that enforces the notion to Americans viewing at home that every contestant has an equal opportunity to play and win. Only eight are chosen to ‘come on down’ and only six will be called up to the stage. The vast majority of the audience are able to participate as onlookers

but will never have the opportunity to play. Many will not even make it into the Bob Barker Studio and will be turned away at the door as the studio has a maximum capacity.

At the Museum of Broadcast Communications (MBC) in Chicago, IL, visitors can visit a recreated *Jeopardy* set, including the host podium to the *SNL* spoof *Black Jeopardy*, and take a walking tour through the history of American television gameshows. By the 1950s, America was experiencing an economic boom. In 1955, Producer Louis G. Cowan introduced the *\$64,000 Question*, a show MBC remembers as a “big money quiz show.”²⁸⁴ However, after it became knowledge that the producers on this and other quiz shows directed the outcome from behind the scenes, it would take over 40 years for these types of “big money” shows to return, as first seen in *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire* (1999). As a result, the U.S. Congress amended the Communications Act of 1934 to prohibit the rigging of quiz shows. Consequently, many networks canceled their big-money shows and placed limits on what could be won. Even though these particular kinds of shows were absent from the airwaves for decades, other game shows emerged to reflect the strivings and values of everyday Americans. But the phrase “everyday Americans” does not come without assumptions. Whose reality was reflected on television? What were these shows teaching their consumers? What was possible and within reach of the presumed audience? Or in other words, what reality was the presumed audience striving to obtain for themselves?

Jewishness, whiteness, and Mark Goodson

The world I walked into and prepared for, when I was called to “come on down,” did not come into existence by happenstance. Rehearsing for this performance was not an accidental

requirement. Mark Goodson rebooted and adapted the 1956 version of *The Price is Right* in 1972. Goodson is the son of Jewish immigrants Abraham Ellis and Fannie Goodson, and was born in Sacramento in 1915. Although he graduated cum laude from UC Berkley in 1937, he grew up in poverty.²⁸⁵ He put himself through school with scholarships and hard work.²⁸⁶ Goodson said of his childhood, “We were very poor. When I was 14 [my father] bought a chicken ranch in Hayward [Calif.], which failed miserably and he lost it in the Depression. My memory was always of where to eat, who would pay the rent, five-day-old bread, secondhand clothes. I loathed that idea. There was a whole feeling of catastrophe around the corner.”²⁸⁷ His son Jonathan Goodson explains that his father went through long periods of depression, and that despite all of his success and money, “he was not a happy man.”²⁸⁸ At the time of his death in 1992, Goodson’s empire was estimated at more than \$450 million. By financial measures, this is outrageously successful. His first wife Bluma Neveleff explained that by 1943, he was earning \$20,000 annually, which is over \$290,000 by 2019 standards. She says, “I saw him go from rags to great wealth.”²⁸⁹ Goodson longed for security and control as he never wanted to return to his own past, or worse, the past his parents escaped. Goodson sheds light on his relationship with money when he explained, “Money never became to me things I could buy; nor the ability to purchase a boat or 50 watches. Money to me gave me an overwhelmingly strange sense of security. It is a symbolic sense of achievement and control of the world. There's something I must confess, although it sounds cocky. Environment controlled me; I was helpless in it. I want to control it, have authority, not be at its mercy, have dignity.”²⁹⁰ It is clear his parents wanted to give him a life in this new country that was economically secure. His impoverished childhood tells another story.²⁹¹ Security became so important to him, Goodson said, that “if somebody had

guaranteed me a job at \$10,000 a year for life, I would have grabbed it...never going back where you came from.”²⁹²

Goodson’s parents arrived from Russia at some point before 1915. The Library of Congress explains that Jewish people from Eastern Europe at this time, what was then controlled by Russia, had underwent terrible treatment as they were physically separated into urban ghettos, suffered attacks by non-Jewish people, and were ultimately prohibited to make a living.²⁹³ As Jewish people began to immigrate to the United States, Social Historian Paula E. Hyman explains that unlike other immigrants, they were not peasants. Even though they were restricted in the Pale of Settlement in pre-1915 Russia, they represented 38 percent of those living in cities or towns, and 58 percent of residents in the northwest section.²⁹⁴ Because of this, she writes, “Immigrant Jews, both female and male, arrived in America with considerable experience of urban life in a capitalist economy.”²⁹⁵ The need to strive for more is perhaps the result of great hardship experienced by Goodman’s family escaping the space they came from. However, to only tell the story of making it in America as beginning in poverty, and then privileging a work ethic as the means by which half a billion dollars can be acquired, is a selective reading. Many immigrants were only able to immigrate to the U.S. because they had the financial means to do so and remained successful in the U.S. because they had skills and knowledge prior to immigrating. Therefore, immigrants, including Jewish people like the Goodmans, did not start with “nothing,” even though they experienced great poverty and persecution along the way.

Matthew Frye Jacobson, author of *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998), contextualizes the experience of Jewish people arriving from Eastern Europe to the United States. In order to understand the position of Jewish people at this

time, he posits, “Race is absolutely central to the history of European immigration and settlement. It was the racial appellation “white persons” in the nation’s naturalization law that allowed the migrations from Europe in the first place.” Therefore to Jacobson, “race” resides in politics and culture.²⁹⁶ As Jewish people immigrated to the U.S. they were faced with shifting particularities of how dominant white culture perceived them and allowed them to participate. Jacobson quotes author and sociologist Yehudi Webster who argues if “race” is unstable and defined by consciousness, then “racialized relations, not race relations, should be considered the object of study.”²⁹⁷ In the spirit of Jacobson’s work, examining Goodson’s personal narrative demonstrates what was at stake for Jewish people navigating white America.

Eric Goldstein in his book *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, writes about the period from the 1870s through World War II and the process of Jewish people no longer describing themselves in racial terms as they assimilate into the white whole. The status of Jewish people was an ambiguous one during this period. It is understood that in order to be seen as white, and navigate past the black and white binary that defined race relations in America, they would have to sacrifice their cultural and religious heritage. Whiteness came with many privileges, and as America continued to experience immigration, Jewish people hesitated to define themselves as a racial “other” as they were most afraid of being grouped with those who could not escape racial classification: African Americans.²⁹⁸ But there also came a time, as the world saw the rise of antisemitism in Germany, that allowed “Jews to see an increasing number of parallels between their own group’s experience and that of African Americans.”²⁹⁹ Here narratives of the German nation became visible to Jewish people, who would go on to

produce popular entertainment that would ultimately be reproduced through different forms back in Germany where it was seen in a different form a hundred years prior.

Chuck Barris hosted *The Gong Show* from 1976-80. This was a talent show for amateurs, where celebrity judges waited on the sidelines with mallets to strike a large hanging gong behind them if they deemed the act to be bad. The show began to script a bit with a Black man we remember as “Gene, Gene, the Dancing Machine,” whose real name was Gene Patton. In his autobiography, Barris explains that he discovered Patton, one of the show’s stagehands, dancing as he swept. Because of this, he put him on the show for his TV audience as he danced to Count Basie’s *Jumpin’ At the Woodside*. Here exists a white host using a song by a Black musician to give a Black man an opportunity to dance and entertain his predominantly white audience. “The Woodside” refers to the Woodside Hotel in Harlem and the “jumping,” or sex, that often took place at this kind of establishment.³⁰⁰ Barris writes, “There was Gene – a huge man, sweet as sugar, perpetually smiling, forever happy – shaking his big black ass to the rhythm of [the music].”³⁰¹ There were other acts, and during one of Patton’s performances, Jaye P. Morgan exposed herself. Barris remembers them dancing “as though someone had announced the end of the world was at midnight.”

Based on James Baldwin’s unfinished manuscript, *Remember This House*, Samuel L. Jackson narrates James Baldwin’s words in the documentary *I Am Not Your Negro*. In this film, as we see clips of Patton on *The Gong Show* and hear Baldwin explain, “To watch the TV screen for any length of time is to learn some really frightening things about the American sense of reality. We are cruelly trapped between what we would like to be and what we actually are. And we cannot possibly become what we would like to be until we are willing to ask ourselves just

why the lives we lead on this continent are mainly so empty, so tame, and so ugly. These images are designed not to trouble, but to reassure. They also weaken our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are.”³⁰²

Admittedly, Barris was lost and searching for his own identity. He writes, “It was during my frenzied dancing – my maniacal, out-of-control twisting and writhing – that I realized I was having my midlife crisis on national television.”³⁰³ There is no indication that Barris asking Gene to dance, or that the act of the audience throwing props and articles of clothing at Patton was an explicit directive to reproduce power as it existed under Jim Crow or before that, where Black people forcibly labored for the pleasure of white people. But Baldwin’s words haunt us as Barris and the white audience mimic the dance with Patton that he brought to the stage. This country’s entertainment, that is just a game to many, reflects the world outside of the television studio, and therefore transforms the game into something more. This country has created difference where there are clear winners and losers; hosts and dancers; subjects and objects.

Television City, Hollywood, a world that promises that any person off the street can go from “rags to great wealth,” is constructed, and is partly a product of Goodson’s own experience. Barris was fourteen years younger than Goodson and also from a Jewish family. Both men were searching for happiness, as if the games they created were not enough. Even though the paradigm of the way the world functions made Goodson and Barris very successful. Its construction is about more than giving agency to the powerless. These television performances not only reflect the world that has been created by white people and for white people, but they celebrate the world that has been created. It worships this created landscape as a strategy for everyone to follow in Goodson’s path.

This landscape is acknowledged by Bob Barker and he explains how he navigated it. In his autobiography *Priceless Memories*, he regales his readers with stories from a past time, when things seemed easier and when a small-town boy like Barker had lots of opportunities. But not too many. He is clear that the Hollywood overnight success stories that our contemporary imagination understands are true. But he is careful to discount the way Hollywood works as random, uncontrollable, and a matter of chance or specifically designed for some to succeed over others. He writes, “but the entertainment business doesn't really work that way. Before producers are ready to risk a lot of money on you, they demand proof of your ability, your experience, and your professionalism. In other words, it takes many years of hard work to become an overnight success.”³⁰⁴ Barker then explains that his story mirrors that of Lana Turner. He received a phone call from Ralph Edwards “that truly made possible everything else that happened.”³⁰⁵ Although Barker admits the myth he perpetuates is false, that all one needs is Lady Luck, he claims that his own story falls in line with a traditional understanding of the way success works: it just happens. Absent from Barker's recollection is for whom “an overnight success” was possible and how the particularities of those possibilities have been reproduced and protected for over forty years.

The Wall

In her *Atlantic* article, “Game Theory,” white American journalist Megan Garber explains that the game show has moved past what was once known as “quiz shows” that were once somewhat educational to performances that distribute a new kind of ethic: a “morality of wealth.”³⁰⁶ She examines NBC's *The Wall* as a space that distributes this new ethic by choosing “good people” who will answer a series of questions for “life changing money” as they stand

before a 4-story (40 foot) wall that drops balls a la Plinko and ultimately determines their financial fate (and perhaps the totality of their identities). In season 2, Ryan, who is a decorated flight instructor, served as a part of the only command center open on 9/11. As he and his wife Stephenie begin the game, Ryan explains, “We’ve been given— I wouldn’t say a lot in our lives, but we’ve been stewards with what we’ve been given.” There’s a passage in The Bible that reads, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”³⁰⁷ Elsewhere it reads, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”³⁰⁸ In this passage, we can hear the centuries-old wisdom repeated in his words. Ryan is referencing the belief that they have been good people and deserve to win. At the end of the game, when the wall turns gold, and as it is revealed they won over half a million dollars, at this moment host Chris Hardwick says, “Good things happen to good people, I think we’ve proved that tonight.”

However, *The Wall*, or what could be read as the free market outside this NBC Universal soundstage, is not generous to all players, despite these prerequisites. In season one, The Wall took all of Chris and Katie’s winnings. It was a sad and heart breaking moment to have established the “goodness” of these people, only to then see them fail. In that silence, as the audience sat stunned, Hardwick in his own speechless state manages to say, “But they’re still good people.” In Season 2, Sharon and Lenny lose over \$850k. Afterward, Lenny says, “The good thing is we have each other, and we have this jumpstart on our future. And we have each other, and I love you more than anything else in the world.” But are they still good people? What kind of construct asks its players to question their love for each other after playing? In this new

ethic, this is how winning is defined. At the end of this episode, Hardwick says, "...they played an amazing game." Are they good people who deserve to have their lives changed, or is it just a game? Hardwick closes the episode by saying, "Zero dollars, but I have to say, these are strong and tough people. The Wall got the better of them. Sorry this had to end this way. We'll see you next time." *The Wall* (2016-) and *The Wheel* (2019-) are two new game shows that function like a sitcom spinoff would, but in this case taking Price's "Plinko" and the "Showcase Showdown" wheel to a new space and raising the stakes. With higher stakes comes a kind of capitalism and morality of wealth that are more visible. If the game show form is a vessel for the exertion of power, then it helps to contextualize that moment in season two when Ryan says, "Everything just changed." Because it's only through this kind of show where financial change of this magnitude is possible, and therefore power. Increasingly, the game show form is transforming into more than just a game.

Participatory Drama of Privilege

When I was waiting in line to be a contestant on *Price*. I was not thinking of *Price* as a metaphor for the kind of hyper-capitalist moment in which Americans live or about intersectional differences in terms of race, sexuality, and gender. I was not thinking about the origins of narratives of success, work ethic, and the individual. However, I *was* preparing to differentiate myself. I had hopes of emerging from the crowd of everyday people to become someone identifiable. I was not entering a space that continues to mark people as "others," but one that ignores difference and tells everyone they have an equal shot; nonetheless, it was my job to play the role of *an individual*.

Over the course of 60 minutes, which is taped to air, eight contestants are called by announcer George Gray to “come on down” for a chance to play at a pricing game. The show is divided into two halves. In the first half, three contestants bid on a prize that serves as a gate keeper to be able to play a pricing game on stage. These items are typically smaller in size and price and are usually under \$2,000. Each winning contestant’s bid must be closest to the actual retail price without going over in order to be called onto stage to play a pricing game. After the first three contestants play, they move on to the Showcase Showdown where each will spin “The Big Wheel”. The object of this stage is to spin the wheel once or twice and get closest to one dollar without going over. The winner of this round in the first and second half will advance to the Showcase, where each will be asked to place a bid on a combination of large prizes and trips without going over. As long as both contestants do not bid higher than the actual combined retail price, there will be a showcase winner. However, if both bid too high, it is possible that no one will win the Showcase.

March 25, 2018, was a beautiful, sunny day at CBS Television City. Many in line were excited at the chance to become a contestant. I waited in line with my friends Tim and Lish. We discovered that, in order to enter the studio, there were a series of obstacles in place that one must first navigate. Unlike priority tickets, line tickets do not guarantee entry. First, the tickets I printed were considered “line voucher tickets” which are different from “priority tickets”. Entry to the Bob Barker Studio, formerly Studio 33, is limited to availability. I was number 211. The security personnel who were managing the line remarked that we were incredibly lucky to have received a number, as Sundays are usually popular. When we arrived about 30 minutes before the time on our tickets (1pm), there were a few line voucher tickets ahead of us and only about 100

priority tickets. To the best of my knowledge, priority tickets are issued with significant advance request, which I did not secure.³⁰⁹ This was the first obstacle I faced in order to enter the studio.

The second obstacle was a queue that included a series of events used to prepare us for entry as we waited in line. For instance, we received name tags, we signed a release form, we



Fig. 7. Photo of (left to right) Alisha, myself, and Tim waiting in line at *The Price is Right*.
Television City, Hollywood, California, March 25, 2018.

took photos in front of a green screen, and we were asked to pose as if we just won twenty-thousand dollars.³¹⁰ This resulted in contestant-hopefuls jumping up and down, screaming, and performing other poses that asked them to perform in ways that would not be seen as “normal” in most other public spaces. After this point, we were kept in numerical order and asked to wait quietly and patiently to be interviewed by co-producer Stan Blits. I was reminded regularly that even if one is awarded a number to the studio, there is a difference between participants and spectators. At one point, my new friend Alisha turned to me and said, “Boy, you’re really

excited” (See fig. 7)³¹¹ Although we all laughed, it was a reminder of what this process does to its participants and spectators. At that moment, I realized that my excitement and the work I was doing to psych myself into a *Price* contestant read as abnormal and out of place. My new friends, as excited as they were to be there, did not choose to transform themselves into the person *Price* demanded of contestants. I was conscious of what I was doing, and I did it intentionally. I was deliberate when I smiled big, talked to everyone, jumped up and down, and embraced the abnormal excitement the moment had to offer. Most people in line chose not to do this. In fact, only nine contestants are chosen to “come on down” each episode, and if you are seen by producer’s as not sustaining the energy and charisma during the taping of the show that you were initially chosen for, the producers have a list of alternate contestants and you will be replaced. When would-be-contestants see their names written on the iconic *Price* contestant name tag, when they are asked to sign a waiver allowing *Price* to use their image, when they are asked to pose for a photo pretending to be a winner, and when they see past winners on televisions in the audience queue, all of it serves to prepare and excite potential contestants. The producers know that it takes work to transform audience members from everyday people to the kind of people that are required to be on this show *playing* everyday people. They know that another obstacle for each chosen contestant is to ignore those in line who look to their friends and say, almost as a jab, “Boy, you’re really excited.”

Barker explains that while hosting *Truth and Consequences* "The contestants didn't have a week to worry about being on television. They hadn't had their hair done or selected their best dress. They weren't even made up. They had their normal street makeup on, if they were women, and there they were: suddenly on television-- just like the people at home who were watching

them and identifying with them."³¹² But who is this audience? What assumptions does Barker make about his TV viewers and live participants? Which of these assumptions have persevered into *Price* under the leadership of Drew Carey? In my experience, I was not an everyday person. I chose to perform my “everyday” identity as cultivated by the show producers through the process of audience selection in a way that I had hoped would be successful.

The third obstacle was a one-on-one interview with Stan Blits. Even though I prepared for that, no one really knew how to ensure Blits would choose them. Barker writes:

People ask me what makes a good contestant. I always say someone who behaves naturally. For *Price*, some people think they have to jump around and scream or they won't get on the show. They try to do that, but if it's phony, it won't work. If that is not your natural way, then you are not going to come off well trying to do it. But if that's your natural way, it will happen. I have had people, taciturn individuals, who were hilarious. They were great fun. And if you behave naturally and are reasonably outgoing when you are standing in line at *Price*, you have a chance to get on the show. If you are too introverted, it is not going to work; but if you try too hard, it's not going to work either. Just be natural. That's the way to be a good contestant.³¹³

Although I believe I successfully created a "natural" persona, I was exhausted after only reaching the contestants' row. I didn't know how to sustain what I created.

Barker describes the moment when *Price* really took off. He explains that, because the country was prospering, the networks took advantage of the fortune of Americans. The excitement surrounding television allowed *Price* to advertise new products and technologies.³¹⁴

But who was prospering? He writes, “Many of the products given away were new additions to the American home. We gave away refrigerators, washers, dryers, and other large appliances. Even the small gifts, like coffee percolators, were new products that advertisers, sponsor, and consumers were all excited about.”³¹⁵ Barker gets so close to defining his audience, but ultimately holds back. He writes, “That’s what you always have to remember. When you are doing the show, you are talking to that person at home. If you ignore that fact, you’re in trouble.”³¹⁶ To whom was Barker speaking? For what were such gadgets and markers of middle-class preparing contestants to enjoy and audiences to desire?

Pierre Bourdieu, a white French sociologist and philosopher speaks directly to the kind of audience Barker is describing when he writes about “Habitus”. Bourdieu defines the assumption of a certain audience and the requirement of a specific kind of performance in order to win as a “‘feel for the game;’ a 'practical sense' that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules.”³¹⁷ He further explains that this produces certain practices and perceptions. If an agent has a “feel for the game,” they are being ruled by an “unconscious force” and will therefore reproduce the game.³¹⁸ Bourdieu’s description of *Habitus* speaks to a kind of knowing that informs, consciously and often unconsciously, the way the world, or a field, and in this case, participation as a contestant on *Price*, works. Whiteness, a constructed ordering of things in relation to power, is both a product of *Habitus* and a means by which *Habitus* is communicated and enforced.

If Bourdieu’s “cultural capital”, which he explains “concerns forms of cultural knowledge, competencies or disposition,” can account for the current position of contestants

playing game shows, their values, and their impulses to tune in daily to *Price* and even travel to LA for a chance to be on the show, then “symbolic capital”, which he describes as the “degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, [and] consecration or honour”, is what whiteness ultimately promises as the prize; the reason for playing the game.³¹⁹ He suggests that art, or in this case, the performance of having one’s name called to “come on down,” has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses cultural competence or cultural capital.³²⁰ This kind of cultural capital is needed to fully participate and even win on a show like *Price*. Having a deficit of cultural capital will leave one stranded, alone, and unable to play the game. Having capital allows white people to participate in a perpetuation of social differences, as Randal Johnson writes in the editor’s introduction to Bourdieu’s book, “to the extent that they are taken to be natural talents available to all on an equal basis and thus not recognized as the result of a specific process of cultural transmission and training which is in fact not available to all.” In Johnson’s view, an analysis that does not consider “the social ground of aesthetic taste” often confuses aesthetic and cultural practices as having universal qualities with privilege.³²¹

Acquiring cultural capital happens at a very early age for *Price*. Every summer, I along with my sisters would watch *Price*. I remember picturing myself on the stage of the now Bob Barker Studio and how I would react if I won. There was ample anxiety surrounding those thoughts. Would I guess the correct price? Would I spin one dollar during the Showcase Showdown? When it was time to exit the stage, where would I go? Would I get confused and embarrass myself as I attempted to exit the wrong way? I would rehearse responses in the mirror as contestant and as host. In 2018, *Price* introduced “Kids Week,” which gave “kids, tweens, teenagers, college students, and expecting parents a chance to win big.”³²² In 2019 *Price*

included a “Preschool” episode, where Audrina, one preschool girl, won a new car.³²³ *Price* is looking for ways to offer variety, but this work also serves to produce cultural capital in the youth who consume it.

I was fortunate to have attended a taping of *Price* in 2006 when Barker was still hosting, which contributed to my own cultural capital upon returning in 2018. In 2006, it was unlike anything I could have imagined. I grew up, like so many did, spending my summers watching *Price* every morning at 11am (EST). I grew fond of seeing Janice, Dian, and Holly assisting Barker and presenting cash and prizes. I wanted to be Barker at the top of each episode who had the great privilege of the doors parting so he could walk out to a cheering audience as one of *his* “beauties” gave him his microphone to use for the show.³²⁴ As I first walked into that studio and saw the stage, the colors, and CBS curtain in the back of the studio, I remember how small the studio felt. The three iconic doors were not placed side-by-side on some long 60-foot stage, but wrapped around the stage in an almost semi-circular configuration. And when Barker appeared, the audience went crazy. I’m not sure how else to describe what happened. In fact, in 2006 and 2018 both, the noise level of that studio reached such levels that discerning what Barker or announcer Rich Fields said was impossible. Barker was a smooth, well-oiled machine, whereas Carey is a bit more free-flowing and not so concerned about the process unfolding in a certain way. In 2018, the studio had undergone a remodel: the lighting scheme felt brighter, the colors appeared louder, but still, seeing it came with a renewed sense of nostalgia and excitement as my experience had in 2006. Within minutes of being seated on the far house right bank of seats, behind announcer George Gray’s booth, the taping began.

Hoerschelmann reminds us that "[a]ll forms of popular culture are involved in the organization of understanding of our natural and social world, in the construction of social identities for their audiences, and in the validation and invalidation of different forms of knowledge."³²⁵ *The Price is Right* contributes to Bourdieu's "field of cultural distinction" but only becomes part of popular culture and is given power as the audience engages with it.³²⁶ It is therefore in the interest of *Price* spectators to participate and access a more desirable space within the American stratified society. It is in the show's interest to construct identities that engage with *Price* early.

If the organization of each game show represents how ritual is shaped through the exertion of power, then ritual does not reflect universally held beliefs, but a specific belief or set of beliefs distributed to the broader culture.³²⁷ In other words, the game show form does not just happen to represent one master narrative for all participants and viewers if its format and structure is directly shaped by a select group of individuals in power. Blindly trusting in the narrative too often distributed by *Price* – that one person, seemingly picked at random from the studio audience, can "come on down" and win everything – fosters a narrative that focuses on the subject represented on camera. What it conceals or fails to reveal is the exertion of power behind these representations.

Making visible this exertion of power remains difficult on a "stage" that is wrapped in shiny lights and brand new cars. In her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan provides a way to think about how to view performance and presents a theory "for that which is not really there."³²⁸ She explains that representations should not be taken as carbon copies of real performances or people. They are not fully truthful. They may point the viewer in

the direction of ‘the real’, but there is always more represented than what the real possesses.³²⁹ Producers, camera men, and off-camera staff do not possess the kind of excitement that their show requires contestants to possess. However, executives need to harness that excitement in order to produce a show and make a profit. Phelan takes this further by explaining that a representation is “the product of a negotiation with an unverifiable real.”³³⁰ Commenting about a road trip with her family after the death of her sister, she writes, “There were nine of us in that car, but it was the one who was not with us that we worried about, thought about, remembered. In that clarity of her absence, we redefined ourselves. ‘The real’ was the absence of her sister; we were representations of that loss.”³³¹ It is through this personal experience of Phelan’s that this theory of absence can be defined. In this story, Phelan and her family were representations of what could not be seen. In that respect, this theory of absence is a useful lens through which to examine power within the game show form. Television audiences see spectators, contestants, and a host, but Phelan’s theory allows this conversation to mark who or what is functioning as a ghost; a phantom of the flesh, and ultimately possesses real power.³³²

Once in the studio, in March 2018, the first words we heard were from a producer off-stage. “Okay here we go. Applaud!” The first words from Gray are, “Here it comes! From the Bob Barker Studio at CBS in Hollywood, It’s *The Price Is Right!*” The very next sentence out of Gray’s mouth were, “Christopher Martin, come on down!” In that moment, I didn’t pause or freeze as I feared I might. I jumped up, high-fived everyone along the way, and ran to contestant’s row. My performance had paid off. I did it. I made it past the third obstacle. My shock, excitement, and disbelief all converged at once. I remember making it to contestant’s row and put my hands on my head in disbelief. I could not believe this had just happened. As the

other three contestants joined me, I remembered Blits's words: "ACT! CRAZY!"³³³ However, from my memory, this was a struggle. I don't have much experience jumping up and down for no reason in real life like a lunatic. The friends who accompanied me have little experience doing this as well. I suspect the vast majority of the audience would agree. I remember standing there somewhat panicked as I didn't know how to act. I rehearsed what I thought was a believable audition, but now what?

What we all knew as we were auditioning is that it would not be good enough in this space to 'not act.' This space is not interested in a diversity of performances of normalcy that one could find walking down the street or just going about our day. This space demands that contestants strive for more. As I think about the question, how do audiences learn to see and hear whiteness as a non-racialized subject position, if whiteness is defined not by the color of one's skin but by a system of inequality that structures and controls relationships to power, then *Price* needs people with different ethnic backgrounds, different skin colors, different socio-economic classes, and different ages. It also needs to place them all in one room and call them a studio audience; a cross-section of America. It needs to highlight how everyone is the same, or would like to be. By placing them all in the same studio, and by choosing six of them to 'come on down', *Price* tells its viewing audience that whoever you are, despite observable differences, are all the same and have an equal shot at winning it all. This is how 'whiteness' remains non-racialized. The paradox of this is that it is white men who have occupied these spaces since game shows began.

The expectation by virtue of inhabiting this space is that it is through the white, male host through which all wealth, prizes, opportunity, and access to more desirable spaces is possible.

Drew Carey inherited this space from Barker, another white man. Prior to hosting *Price*, Carey starred in his own show *The Drew Carey Show* (1995-2004) as an everyday white-collar office guy. His character was the Assistant Director of Personnel at Cleveland Department Store. He is also known for his standup and as host of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* (1998—). By all surface reads, Drew Carey is super white and has appealed to a white fan base across his career.

Carey has attempted to share his wealth and privilege that he has acquired. In 2013, Carey shared with *CBS This Morning* ways in which he uses his individualism. He said that before he lost about eighty pounds, he would frequent Vegas often and would enjoy giving big tips. After losing the weight, he revisited a hotel at which he is a regular. When he walked up to the front desk, the bellman looked up and said, “I’ll be right with ya.” Drew responded, “What?” Charlie Rose then asked, “Why were you interested in doing this job in the first place?” Carey responded, “I wasn’t.” He described *Price* as an “old man show” and turned them down at first. When he took a meeting with the daytime producers, they asked Carey, “What’s your favorite thing to do?” Carey replied, “I like to leave tips, I think that makes me happiest. Put a smile on somebody’s face.” The producer then said, “You know on *Price is Right* you get to do that every day.” This is when it clicked for Carey. He explained, “Oh yeah, I could do that everyday.” To Carey, he receives great satisfaction from giving to others through this medium.

It is worth noting that although the position of game show host has been traditionally occupied by white men, today skin color is not a determining factor in who is able to occupy these roles. The way to think through this is to remember that “whiteness” is not solely defined by skin color but by a relationship to power, and in the case of gameshows, proximity to those who have the power to distribute life-changing amounts of money, prizes, and social capital to

contestants. In light of this, even when Black men are hired to host these shows, they are still occupying whiteness because that narrative was never constructed with Black people and their humanity in mind.

A performance that demonstrates this is *Saturday Night Live*'s sketch "Black Jeopardy." In the sketch, studio and TV viewers observe two black contestants competing in this traditionally white space (Jeopardy historically uses clues that perpetuate knowledge that rarely departs from a predominantly white Euro-centric standpoint), we discover that the one white contestant continues to fail because he knows nothing about Black culture. In the sketch, the knowledge of Black culture is relegated to stereotypes of urban culture and completely devalued in the sketch as a joke. The white male contestant (Tom Hanks plays a white working class white male) is depicted as an anomaly when he can answer any "Black" clue. This is one example that demonstrates how the game and quiz show space was constructed for white people. It was not made for Black culture as it is relegated to the margins. Additionally, this sketch illustrates the ways that white men experience "failure" when confronted with Blackness. The game show in this sketch is shown to be more than just a game. The game show is supposed to be a site to where Americans escape, yet implicit in its format are codes of white identity that perpetuate social norms and ideologies of exclusion.

When Black men like Steve Harvey, Jamie Foxx, or Wayne Brady occupy these spaces they are still occupying whiteness because these entertainment spaces were never constructed with Black people and humanity in mind. There is a reason that the entire tone of the game changes when Kenan hosts "Black Jeopardy." This demonstrates that if the form wants to be inclusive, it does not need to only focus on representation, that is, Black men occupying the

positions that white men have vacated. Networks needs to approach games shows that include Black life as legible from the start.

I am a white male and I had an opportunity to stand next to Drew, the most powerful man represented in this space. Through him, I could potentially access everything. At least that is what the space promised. Although I have reason to believe I had brought with me some cultural capital, I also did not prepare in any way in terms of watching past *Price* episodes and memorizing retail prices. I intentionally wanted to enter this space as just a guy off the street. If this space says that anyone can go from nothing to everything, then I wanted to examine to what degree that was possible. I remember few details about each prize and each bid I placed. But I do remember that I did not successfully bid closest to the actual retail price on the first five prizes.

During commercial breaks, I began chatting to audience members next to me. “I really have no idea what I’m doing,” I said. The gentleman sitting directly to my right was very generous with his feedback. He explained, that from what he could tell, a contestant’s best chance at having a winning bid takes place if you are the fourth bidder; after the other three contestants’ bid, because you can always bid one dollar or add one dollar to the highest bid. I was given this opportunity during the fifth prize and blew it. As the sixth prize was put before us, an exercise bike, the pressure was high. I thought: how could I make it this far and be given the best opportunity to get onto the stage and blow it? I was once again given the opportunity to be the fourth bidder.

Preparing for the worst, I said, “You know Drew, I’m doing my dissertation on you, and I’m just here to participate in the American Dream.” That part was ultimately cut from the aired version. I continued, “So...I’m going to bid one-thousand-and-one.” I thought, if I lose once

more, at least I will have been able to be a bit theatrical about it: at least I took advantage of a chance to say something for the rolling cameras that could document my project trying to find life in this space. With that, the retail price of the bike was \$1,047, and I had won the prize! I remember congratulating the remaining contestants as Drew said something to the effect of “Boy he stole that away from you” to the highest bidder. I didn’t have time to process Carey’s remarks at that moment, as bidding one dollar more is a typical strategy on *Price* since its inception. But what is also true is that I did not choose a price that I thought was closest to the actual retail price. I modified another contestant’s bid in order to win. This isn’t cheating, but in light of Carey’s comments, it didn’t feel honest, either.³³⁴

As I quickly made my way to Carey’s position on stage, he asked me, “You’re not really doing your dissertation on me?” I said, “Well, you’re part of it— It’s about game shows in general, the American Dream, and what’s possible...” Carey said, “Good luck. Well, now you’re part of it. Now you’re part of it, and we have a dream for you behind this safe.” Past that, I don’t remember much. I was still in a state of shock that I was standing there, playing the game and participating in this cultural performance. As the second door opened to reveal the prize for this game, I couldn’t see them. We were physically viewing the prizes from a vantage point that did not allow me to see it. I remember stepping forward in order to clearly see what I was playing for. I was playing for an HP 360 laptop computer and a complete home makeover from Plesser’s Appliances and Broyhill Furniture. I was about to play “Safe Crackers.” I then remember Carey walking me over to the safe. The price of the computer would unlock the safe. I relied heavily on audience feedback and I entered 860. I pulled on the safe, and it opened. I was so excited, I hugged Manuela Arbeláez, the model guarding the prizes inside the safe.

What happened next was completely unexpected. In fact, I have made fun of contestants who have done this in the past. But I had no idea what else to do at that point, so I dropped to my knees and lifted my hands in the air. In fact, falling prostrate in front of Drew Carey, the man who distributes all cash and prizes, has been an act I have used to support this project that attempts to connect a morality of wealth to the game show form and similar performances within Christian evangelical television programming. How did I just become one of those individuals I believed I was once so critical of? I wasn't celebrating wealth for the sake of it or worshipping Carey as the source of that which made me a whole person, but I was still in a state of shock and playing a role. I was a scholar who successfully navigated this show for my dissertation project. I was a graduate student who was about to embark upon a three-month visit to Germany to take a language course, one who desperately needed cash to fully support the endeavor.

The final obstacle I encountered, on my way from a guy just off the street on a journey to win the largest prize, was to spin the big wheel. During the commercial break, we were instructed that there would be time to give shout-outs and hellos to folks. We were told not to mention any businesses or organizations, as they would be cut from the final taping. Stan visited us once more and asked us to maintain high energy. He said, "Trust me, You'll thank me later." I was the third contestant to spin in this second showcase showdown. During my first spin, Carey asked, "Is there anyone you'd like to say hello to?" I said, "I'd like to say hi to my mom, my grammom who said I'd always find my way, and to my dissertation chair, Nicole Hodges Persley." Carey responded, "Oh, you're gonna pay for that."³³⁵ I don't remember what my total spin was, but I did not make it into the showcase. It didn't hit me until later, but I did not go from nothing to everything in that hour. I was one of nine contestants called to "come on down"

and play for a chance to participate in this game. I was one of six who were called up on stage to play a game. I left that studio with over twelve-thousand dollars in cash and prizes. From starting as just a hopeful guy off the street to winning something, I think most folks would consider that a win.

As my friends and I were driving back after the taping, I explained that even though I was called to come on down and even though I won, I still felt unsatisfied. I did not win it all. In one of the final obstacles, I “failed.” During the car ride home, I was trying to articulate this angst and unsettled state I was in. Alisha looked to me and said, “Chris, you’re the only one in this car who came out with more than what you went in with, and you also seem to be the most unhappy.” What was it about what I just experienced that made me feel so unfulfilled? Surely it was not my expectations. Surely contestants are not expected to constantly recite a mantra along the line of “This isn’t real. This is just a game. This isn’t real. This is just a game.” The fiction of this game seeped and bled into my real life. This was just supposed to be a game, but I was unable to leave what I had just experienced behind. It was at this point when I suspected that this seeping is not accidental, but deliberate.

I wanted to fully participate in the game Goodson created. But like Goodson and Barris, I remained unhappy. Even though I played a pricing game, I was surprised that I had felt so deflated and defeated after the show. Particularly because I had felt defeated by the one part of the game, spinning the big wheel, that is ostensibly totally random and has little to do with choice. It is as close to fate as *Price* gets. Here I was reminded that *Price* intentionally conflates luck (and knowledge of consumer prices) as work and skill. I believed the conflation. After the first showcase showdown concluded, and I was still not called onto the stage, being on *Price* was

no longer about winning the showcase because I wanted money or needed a trip around the world. Even though Goodson and I are products of different families and places, in some way I understand when Goodson describes money as not about buying a boat or fifty watches. Making it to the stage to play a pricing game was about glory and honor; to win within a game that my country has deemed the most important and successful. This was about acquiring social capital. It is about assimilating into a system in which, and perhaps in different ways, we are not fully a part. Participating in *Price* as a contestant in some way is reliving Goodson's own struggle to assimilate as an everyday person off the street and never return to the poverty stricken past of his youth.

Resisting Participatory Drama of Privilege

Price has rightfully celebrated the "everydayness" of Americans since its inception. When I was signing paperwork with the other winning contestants, I spoke with Katherine, the woman who won the showcase. She won a jet ski and a trip to Nepal and Morocco worth \$33,260 in the Showcase. Her total show winnings approached nearly forty-thousand dollars. She said to me, while still in a state of shock, "I need this. My husband and I need this. We've been working for decades and haven't been able to find any time to get away together. We really need this." The narrative that became true for her and the TV audience, was that if you show up, work hard, and act really excited, you could be rewarded. At least that is what she said.

Ideas of what defines "everyday Americans" have been around for decades. In 1977, John Moranville, ABC Manager of Daytime Programming, West Coast explains that people are out there waiting to have fun on the documentary *Deal*. "You don't see people moping around when

they're out there dressed as a pizza or a radish or whatever. When you walk out to the parking lot you'll see Mercedes and Pintos. It represents a cross-section of America."³³⁶ This perspective has certainly been propagated by those who have an interest in seeing the form succeed. This everydayness is how Barker described what set *Price* apart from the "audience participation" shows that came before. It is no secret that gameshows are major profit enterprises for network; they do not cost much to produce and they come with significant advertising revenue. Barker explains that even though networks made mistakes, game shows allowed them to do so.³³⁷ He writes, "[*Price*] has a wide appeal from the beginning, a complete cross section of the country. And I have to say in all the years I did *Price*, our audiences and contestants always displayed good manners."³³⁸

To say that Katherine won solely because of her white skin would miss the point. Is it fair to posit that she was personally, individually looking to explicitly access a more desirable economic and social space at the exclusion of someone else? No. Is *Price* just a game? Perhaps it depends on the audience as well. I am certain there are individuals who do view their time on the show as just a game. A writer on *Let's Make A Deal* expresses it this way, "I didn't first go to Europe until I was 60. I worked hard and saved money and borrowed money from the Guild and finally went. How is it a bad thing to send this young contestant to Europe and give him \$1200 to spend? Who wouldn't want that?"³³⁹ What remains clear is that this power that game shows give to contestants can also make their lives better. And it is fun! *Price* claims to do similar work. On September 9, 1991, *Price* aired its 20th anniversary special. In the opening, Barker introduces the audience to Mark Goodson for a brief conversation on the show and its success. Goodson points out that the show has given way 100 million dollars over the span of 19 years. Barker responds,

“a writer said, *The Price is Right* has given away more than anyone than health, education, and welfare.” With that, the audience laughs and applauds.³⁴⁰ This vast distribution of wealth and prizes cannot be ignored. In the tiered economic system of the U.S., where it remains difficult if not impossible to advance from “nothing to great wealth,” *Price* has given contestants a taste of what that reality might feel like.

About a week after my episode aired, a politically and religiously conservative, white, middle-class friend reached out via Facebook messenger. She wrote, “If I read things right, you are writing a dissertation on white privilege as seen through game show history? And then calmly you went to said shows for research, and then ended up taking a fine ass new living room home with you. Did I get that correct?” I responded, “Yes, it’s quite the crazy series of events. I won a homemaker, but I have no home.” At this point I was looking forward to unpacking assumptions that exist within *Price* and the production team. To be white means you want to ascend the hierarchy of whiteness and that you want access to more desirable white spaces. These desires of living well in nice spaces is racialized as white, but if you are white and of economic privilege, you don’t really see the whiteness. *Price* has been offering furniture, appliances, and homemaker packages for decades. “Homemakers” have always been racialized and depicted as white women while women of color have been stereotypically depicted as the people who “keep” the house up, i.e. clean it, cook, raise the children, etc. Winning a prize of great financial value allows the contestants to ascend the proverbial ladder, which has real-world consequences outside the parameters of the game. The stakes of winning are racialized, gendered and classed for each winner. Where the winner falls in the racial and social hierarchy of the American Dream narrative determines how valuable the prizes are when they translate to real

world economies and life experiences outside of the “every day American” role the contestant play when they are on the show. This is not RuPaul’s *Snatch Game*, a spoof version of *Match Game* on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, where host RuPaul says, “And the winner is....who cares?” Winners of cash and prizes on *Price* actually win these items, take them home, and overnight, are able to ascend the “ladder of whiteness” to a more desirable rung, which is always “white like” and never measured in value in relationship to the experiences of people of color. However, as a graduate student, I had no house, and chose not to rent but live with family and friends while I wrote this dissertation. The prize was not meant for me. *Price* assumed that whoever played “Safe Crackers” would want the home makeover. I had a choice to “not need” the homemaker since I had other resources that could sustain me to do something luxurious, like pursuing an advanced degree in Theatre Studies. Normative whiteness in this field of study reproduces structural inequities in the American theater when we continue to consent that so called ‘every day Americans’ “American dreams” and Broadway plays are “universal” and have no material consequences on changing the equitable representation of Americans in the field.

After I explained to my friend my living situation, she said, “So um tell me white man. Did you feel in a (any) guilt over your new acquisition?” I said, “Zero guilt.” She responded, “You know? That doesn't really surprise me...I love you Chris!...Enjoy your privilege!” The fact that I had no guilt and no real stakes in winning or losing the game points to the fact that I am always “winning,” so to speak. My position as a white male is still something I contemplate and is what pushes me to do this work. At first, I saw my friend’s commentary as invested in superficial notions of representation. Performance Studies scholar Peggy Phelan explains, “because progressives are concerned with visibility politics and conservatives are policing them,

both possess a "mutual belief that representations can be treated as "real truths" and guarded or championed accordingly."³⁴¹ In other words, white progressives are assumed to be liberal whites who believe that a wide variety of skin colors represented on *Price* will lead to more power for all, and conservatives want to believe that people of color threaten their power for themselves. Because I have white skin, the logic goes, I have a better shot at winning. But I remain convinced that analysis misses the point, as *Price* has been and remains a stage where the cross-section of America is represented. There was nothing magical about the color of my skin as represented and on *Price's* stage, I was just an unmarked contestant, who had an equal shot at guessing the actual retail price as any other of the seven contestants. I continue to question whether my constructed whiteness may have prepared me for my performance. Here, *Price* intends to model intersectional differences while ultimately erasing those differences in the context of performed individuality and commercial desire.

In light of the old proverbial phrase "acting is reacting," studio audience members of *Price* cannot help but react to the power or the authentic real in front of them. Henry Bial, performance studies scholar, builds upon the work of Jacobson and Goldstein. In his book *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage & Screen*, he sets out to identify Jewish identity in theatre and popular entertainment, spaces where Bial explains, "Jews are anything but marginalized."³⁴² He explains that "Jewish identity is not simply a matter of choice. The production of meaning in a performance is a matter of negotiation between the performer and the audience."³⁴³ Further examination of where Goodson's identity intersects with the performances of the studio and television audience are ripe. Bial writes, "The audience can only interpret what the performer gives; the performer cannot completely control the terms of that interpretation."³⁴⁴

By identifying the particularities of the shows Goodson created, it is Bial's model that may serve future scholars as they examine to what degree *Price* and other Goodson creations were influenced by his own Jewishness and personal experiences.

German Subjects of Study

In his book *Rules of the Game: Quiz Shows and American Culture*, Olaf Hoerschelman examines the shifting nature of the quiz and game show form throughout history. He argues for placing the quiz show into a "larger, structured system of meanings" that influences cultural production and how it is received.³⁴⁵ When the Berlin wall fell in November of 1991, Germany saw a renewed influx of American and British TV programming. These adaptations include American game and quiz shows *Jeopardy* (1988-91), *Wheel of Fortune/Glücksrad* (1988-98), *Match Game/Punkt, Punkt, Punkt* (1991-94), *The Gong Show/Die Gong-Show* (1992-93), *The Family Feud/Familien-Duell* (1992-93), *Let's Make A Deal/Geh aufs Ganze!* (1992-2003), and British shows *Fort Boyard* (1990-1991) and *Krypton Faktor* (1991). In the spirit of Bourdieu's work on cultural production, Hoerschelman argues, "Quiz shows are ultimately...a place where social subjects can negotiate, challenge, and understand their position in a stratified society." By maintaining a "highly inclusive" position that considers unlimited phenomena, he frames his work from the outset in a way that will allow for the quiz and game show form to be included.³⁴⁶ In other words, the rush to mass-produce American game shows in soon-to-be reunified Germany reflects hegemonic priorities and the former West's attempt to celebrate what America had been celebrating on television for decades.

In the German Empire (1871-1918), Jewish people found success in most areas of economic and social life, but their security in that world was fragile. Marion Kaplan writes in her chapter “Gender and Jewish History in Imperial Germany” that between 1870 and 1918, German Jews experienced a period “of upward mobility”.³⁴⁷ Volker Berghahn explains that it was not just the U.S. where Jewish people fled from turn of the century Russia. The Jewish population grew in Germany from 512,000 in 1871 to 615,000 in 1910. About one percent of these Jewish immigrants were from Russia.³⁴⁸ By 1914, Jewish people accounted for 24 percent of the richest men in Prussia.³⁴⁹ As World War I ended, and the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) was left defeated and economically depressed, Adolf Hitler forced his way onto the world stage and by the 1920s began using old, tired, and worn stereotypes to scapegoat Jewish people for problems that Germany was experiencing. Goodman’s family circumvented the terrible fate that was about to befall Jewish people living in Europe. They escaped hardship and used their skills and knowledge to economically and socially mobilize upward. Their Jewish story does not intersect with Adolf Hitler the way it did for others. Mark Goodson’s family descended to nothing, circumvented Nazi Germany, and rose up victorious to financially acquire great wealth. I was not thinking about the history of German colonialism and blackface when I waited in line to be a contestant on *The Price is Right* or thinking about why *Price’s* version of success differs from what exists in Germany. But there remain shared values along with values that resist each another.

Wetten Dass?

In Germany, *Wetten Dass?* (1981-2014), which translates as ‘Wanna bet?’, like *Price*, has been the longest running game show in the country. The show was created by white German broadcaster Frank Elstner and has invited American and German celebrities to bet whether an ordinary person could successfully complete a not so ordinary task. These include popping hanging balloons filled with water using a needle on the hood of a tractor, guessing the type of sports car while blindfolded, as it spins donuts around the contestant, and asking a blindfolded farmer to recognize his cows by the sounds they make while chewing apples. If these celebrity bets are wrong, they must then complete an embarrassing task.³⁵⁰ At its’ most popular, 23 million people tuned in across German-speaking countries.³⁵¹ After white American actor Will Arnett visited the show in 2014, he explained to white host Jimmy Kimmel of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on ABC that the show’s title translates as, “What the fuck is happening?”³⁵² It was described by white pop singer Michael Bublé as “a strange show”. He said, “I’ll be honest with you, if I’d known it was going to be this weird, I would have smoked pot beforehand.” In March of 2013, he appeared on the show and was asked to perform while wearing a cat mask. Celebrity guests have included Sylvester Stallone, Eva Longoria, Megan Fox, Kevin James, Will Smith, Kenny Rogers, and Michael Jackson. This is a show that established its reputation as a rite of passage for personalities across continents. Appearing on this program gives celebrities access to a large audience and it gives audiences an opportunity to watch celebrities fail. Even the Pope had agreed to appear as a guest, but was ultimately denied access to this space by the producers as he had only agreed to appear remotely by way of video link.³⁵³ Writing for *The New Republic*, Thomas Rogers argues that the show’s ultimate demise was “because TV viewership in Germany

[had] splintered” and because of a series of bad publicity. In 2010, a man was paralyzed after attempting to jump over four cars, a poodle was accidentally killed on the show, and white host Marcus Lanz challenged residents of Augsburg, Germany to dress up like Black German Jim Knopf, the central child character in the children’s book *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* (*Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer*).³⁵⁴

Even though Germany has produced a show for over thirty years that attempts to make fun of those with fame and power and works to privilege the notions of everydayness found among German people, the boundaries of their stunts were tested. Black British author and scholar Stuart Hall writes in his article, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” that “racial structures cannot be understood adequately outside the framework of quite specific sets of economic relations.”³⁵⁵ Therefore, the question is not whether or not whiteness is at work economically, but in which ways is it working? If whiteness is a relationship to colonialism, then it continues to defend what it can be prescribe what others must be.³⁵⁶

Understanding whiteness is understanding how it defines others. In this instance, it reveals that Germany is still unable to disconnect itself from its colonial past. When moments of blackface and the wresting away of identity from Black people occur, professor and scholar Katri Sieg reminds us that eliminating blackface remains complicated in Germany. First, she describes “blackfacing” as more complicated “than an imported, American practice that drags behind it American discourses of race and racism,” because it remains fused to minstrelsy and therefore has reduced blackface to cross-racial casting.³⁵⁷ German theatre performances have used notions of American minstrelsy, but have made it more than that. Secondly, The Buehnenwatch (Stage Watch), an organization that was established in 2012 following these events, whose mission is to

“end racist casting practices on the German stage,” posted on their website at this time that “key terms and topics...and sought to educate Germans about the historical background to the issue.”³⁵⁸ Posting this taxonomy was necessary because this organization realized Germans were not informed and that continued use of Blackface was partly a product of ignorance.

Zahltag!

While visiting Berlin in 2018, I was introduced to RTL, a German television station established in 1984. This network airs many of Germany’s reality and game shows and produces versions of *The Bachelor*, *Temptation Island*, and what appeared to be an adaptation of Gordon Ramsay’s *Kitchen Nightmares*, although filmed across rural German towns and without Ramsay. On one afternoon I discovered *Zahltag*, a reality show that gives impoverished families across Germany 30,000 Euros and films what happens over the course of a year.³⁵⁹ All families participating are on Hartz IV benefits and are expected to start their own businesses and escape poverty.³⁶⁰ I was struck by this show’s attempt to reproduce what I perceived as U.S. American Dream narratives and the assumption that an individual can go from nothing to everything instantaneously. The contestants are judged by white Germans Ilka Bessin, who used to be a recipient of Hartz IV benefits, Heinz Buschkowsky, ex-Mayor of Berlin-Neukölln, and writer and business economist, Felix Thönnessen.³⁶¹ Ilka says, "I was unemployed for a long time and I moved into Hartz IV and I know what that means for people... In 'payday' we want to give the long-term unemployed the chance to get out of the welfare trap."³⁶² In the promotional advertisement for this show, the viewer is introduced to the three families featured over the season and their problems are introduced: they are on social welfare. Thirty-seven seconds into

the ad, we see a man in a dark trench coat and black leather gloves delivering a suitcase to a front door. The ad cuts to each family opening the suitcase of cash, while underscored to P!nk's "What About Us." In this song, she sings:

We are problems that want to be solved

We are children that need to be loved

We were willin', we came when you called³⁶³

Upon discovering the money, we see shots of them throwing it up into the air, riding a roller coaster, and buying toys. The show's website also establishes expectations. It asks, will these families create small businesses or "squander the money for long-term, suppressed material desires?"³⁶⁴ Even with the language barrier, I was hooked. What would these poor, white Germans do with all of this money? Additionally, I was reminded of my own biases of poor people in this non-American space. That was not coincidental. My thoughts began to police their actions. In one scene they gave money to family and friends, and although they received my empathy for that, I questioned whether that was the best use of the money. The show attempts to reinforce these biases in those who consume this show. The show's website asks viewers: "Do the academics use their chance? Can you make the jump from Hartz IV? Will the families be able to leap out of the social welfare trap?"³⁶⁵

Zahltag ensured that each player, or contestant, originated from the same economic station. In this way, it mirrors a strategy that *Price* uses; to assume that all contestants are equal or have equal chances. The blackface episode on *Wetten Dass?* reminds me of Kant's description of people from Africa as less than human. By not even considering Black people as part of the

fabric of humanity, there emerges space for 50 German residents to perform blackface on command as if they were engaging in some zoomorphic exercise in performing a non-human other. In light of Germany's past, which includes genocide in the former Southwest Africa (Namibia) against its people, *Wetten Dass?* continued to asks white Germans to reinforce white authority. In light of Adolf Hitler's Germany, which murdered six million Jewish people as a strategy to establish white domination, *Wetten Dass?* asked residents of Augsburg to erase humanity once again. German defenders of blackface have explained that they have no history with the practice of black face and therefore cannot be held accountable for using a practice that they did not create. To them, because blackfacing is not minstrelsy because it cannot reflect past racist regimes.³⁶⁶ This is, of course, not true.

Resistance to American Dream Narratives

Here exists a performance in twenty-first century Germany that reproduces myths of American Dream narratives. As I shared what I experienced on RTL with white German-born friends and acquaintances, most laughed and rolled their eyes. All expressed embarrassment and explained that TV performances like this were a product of RTL, which was code for appealing to former East German people. All said they do not own a television and that this performance does not represent the values of Germans. I took this to mean that the Germans I spoke with viewed a show like *Zahhtag* the way an American may view *The Jerry Springer Show*; that these individuals fail to display the proper codes to be an individual. They exists, but no one can quite explain why. It was as if they wanted their cultural landscape to be better, but it was not. They

wanted to pick and choose which cultural performances reflected their values and defined them as good people. But these performances exist in Germany, nonetheless.

It is worth noting that the German nation has a history of creating the cultural landscape that they want. Under the Third Reich, Nazi power created a world that exterminated others. However, in contemporary Germany power has sought to resist reproducing their past by telling the truth through memory and commemoration. For instance, after the Allies' banned Nazi symbols following World War Two, so did the new Constitution of Germany.³⁶⁷ Former concentration camps became sites of memory and commemoration of the prisoners who were liberated by Allied troops.³⁶⁸ While visiting the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp on October 18, 2018, I saw the towering memorial to political prisoners in the center of the camp³⁶⁹ (see fig. 8). The audio guide confirmed the evolving memorialization on this site. Embedded into the top of the memorial structure are eighteen red triangles, which framed individuals held there as political prisoners who fell victim to communist aggressors. Even though each triangle has always represented the various groups sent to Sachsenhausen, such Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and Jehovah's Witnesses, the guide was clear that it was not in the political interests of the Federal Republic of Germany to mention these. Museums were built to remember the past in an effort to ensure Germany never made refugees out of any people group again.³⁷⁰

The actions of the Third Reich continue to be commented upon in other ways. Visitors to Germany today will notice *Stolpersteine*, or "stumble stones" in various cities. These are brass bricks laid in front of homes where Jewish victims once lived. A series of bricks in the Charlottenburg neighborhood of Berlin were organized and installed by Hendrik Czeatzka. In 2012, he was shocked to discover that, prior to 1933, Charlottenburg had the largest Jewish



Fig. 8. Photo of memorial to victims at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, Oranienburg, Germany. October 18, 2018.

population and few households requested these bricks. He believes remembering is the responsibility of the individual. He explains, “One can't pass off everything to the state... All of us must continue to insist that Nazis are not welcome, that we must keep the memory alive and learn from our history so that it does not happen again.”³⁷¹ Discourse and taxonomy that identifies Nazis and fascists has been defined in Germany. For white supremacy to emerge again, there will be fewer ways for them to disguise their true intentions. Reconciling the past has not come without contestation. However, unlike the US that is currently attempting to “Make

America Great Again,” under a Trump administration, there is no doubt Germany is actively working to make sure their past never becomes their present again.

Conclusion

Everyday people— audience and spectators— have been consuming whiteness as a non-racialized subject position for centuries. When, on January 20, 2017, Donald J. Trump gave his inauguration speech after being sworn-in as the 45th president of the United States, his words erased ways in which the capitalist system works. In that speech he said, “It’s time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget, that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots.” Between three pauses for applause, he goes on to proclaim that “We all enjoy the same glorious freedoms” and that a child from the “urban sprawl of Detroit” or “the wind-swept plains of Nebraska” are born with the same dreams.³⁷² Within this description, the President has appealed to two narratives that continue to protect and reify expectations of white privilege in the United States: the idea that the individual can dream and accomplish whatever they set their minds to and the belief that there is no real difference between how individuals are treated by systems, institutions, and other individuals; no material obstacles can stand in the way of the individual from accomplishing what hard work can procure. In the shadow of the 2016 United States presidential election, where the U.S. Electorate elected a kind of game show host to the presidency, there are similarities between Trump’s speech and what remains privileged in *The Price is Right*. This form distributes the idea that the contestant called to ‘come on down,’ can dream and accomplish whatever they set their minds to. In order for that to be the case, the president and the contemporary game show must also distribute the

belief that there is no constructed difference between any person – and, just as importantly, between their relative chances of success – in the studio audience.

This narrative that erases distinctions and places all things as equal is not new. Contestants on any black and white episode from the original *Price is Right* from the late 1950s wore suits and dresses, they were calm, and they lacked the excitement and enthusiasm *Price* is known for today. In a 1957 episode, both male and female contestants wore flower corsages on their lapels. Contestants were chosen beforehand and not from the studio audience as happens today. All contestants were white. The world presented in the original *Price* did not present diverse representations as a strategy to enforce the idea that everyone is the same. It did not include diverse, identifiable markers of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. The original *Price* presented white men who worked and white women who were housewives. This subject position was explicitly on display in the 1950s until the *Price* reboot in 1972, when representation began to mask the work that *Price* was doing. What Barker helped to create and continued to protect required masking. If the cross-section of America was showcased on stage, Barker's position was protected. A cross-section of contestants masked their pursuit of “whiteness” as linked to striving for more desirable economic spaces. Conversely, a television world invested in notions of representation, a game show like *Price* can hardly be seen as enabling notions of white superiority if diversity is seen as everyone playing the game.

As a *Price* contestant, I discovered that the pursuit of enriching my economic life came with a cost. In my last round in contestant's row, when Carey said to the highest bidder, “Boy he stole that away from you”, I remember feeling trapped. It felt unfair for Carey to say that, as if my “win” was not legitimate. I also felt trapped because I was unable to advance economically

as far as possible within the confines of that form. I wanted to ascend from what little cultural capital I had to the most symbolic capital offered. I wanted what Bourdieu described as “prestige, celebrity, [and]...honour.”³⁷³ I wanted the game to solve the problem it had created for me. I was not “acting crazy” prior to entering the CBS Television City parking lot. I remember waking up, having coffee, and feeling grateful for the friends in my life and the sunshine that day. This form told me that my priorities were wrong. I needed to pursue something more. This form has slowly been doing that since I can first remember watching *Price*. In this same way, I believe this form provides answers for why the U.S. Electorate elected a kind of game show host to the presidency. Donald Trump, as an emissary of the game show form, promised to single-handedly save the nation from problems he single-handedly manufactured. Furthermore, when I failed to secure a place in the Showcase, *Price* does not blame itself for my failure, but me.

Subscribing to a binary of winning and losing is not a partisan problem in the U.S. The election of a game show host to the presidency is not a unique problem for the political right. After Black TV host and author Oprah Winfrey received the Cecil B. DeMille award at the Golden Globes in 2018, buzz began to spread that she should run for president. CNN cited two anonymous sources who claim individuals close to Oprah have been encouraging her to run. Barack Obama’s reelection campaign tweeted, “Call me Oprah. I’ve got some Iowa county chairs who would love to hear from you.” We must remember that on September 15, 2004, Oprah Winfrey announced to her studio audience, “I’ve got a little twist.” Models with silver platters and white boxes positioned themselves across the studio. She went on, “Do not open it. Do not shake it.” And at that moment, she shouted, “You get a car! You get a car! You get a car! You get a car! Everybody gets a car! Everybody gets a car! Everybody gets a car! Everybody gets a car!” This event

cost GM \$7.7 million. This happened twice on her show. In 2010, VW gave away two hundred and seventy-two 2012 Beetles and paid the sales tax. Oprah remains a kind of game show host as well and she has consistently functioned in similar ways to the narratives found in this chapter.

What remains clear is that the game show form, this second “performance stage” of whiteness, can function as a space for those who are striving to be white, albeit trapped, to access more desirable spaces. Along with Goodson and Barris, I felt trapped. German spectators are trapped when *Zahlttag* asks its television viewers, “Can you make the jump from Hartz IV? Will the families be able to leap out of the social welfare trap?”³⁷⁴ There may not exist an answer in all times and places, but the problem that this show creates for its contestants remains. These families exist on long-term social welfare assistance and must “stand on their own feet” over the course of one season, while white Germans of varying social classes answer the question for themselves. Will they win or will they lose? The answer in some respect is irrelevant, but the striving within this constructed binary is part of the game.

I have wanted this binary to be true since I began watching *Price* every summer since I was a child. One of my earliest memories of *Price* was in September 1987, when Barker taped his first show with gray hair. I was five years old. I would start Kindergarten later that month. I was taught that my worth as a human is connected to whether I win or lose. I was trapped. We are trapped when millions of dollars can unsettle the relationships, which first appear strong and unwavering, on *The Wall* as Hardwick quick tries to save face by reminding the television audience that the contestants arrived here because they are good people. Surely happiness still exists for them somewhere? We are trapped when *Price* presents the “Showcase” as the object of the game and in reach of being won by all 300 studio audience members. The dream that this

space promises, and the myths that accompanied it, were reinforced as possible to my family who watched my appearance on *Price* that morning. I was participating. Goldstein writes, “For Jews, participation in the country’s culture of commercial abundance was a central means of claiming an American identity.”³⁷⁵ If you participated, you had a chance at becoming white and an American. Perhaps for many, these spaces only function as a game. I envy their perspective and ability to consume and participate in these spaces without giving them power. In light of that possibility, although I believe one can become free when we choose not to play the game, when we do not believe in the manufactured problem in the first place, when environment no longer controls us, and when “rags to great wealth” becomes a bedtime story and no longer a way of life, the evidence of this chapter does not support that kind of position.

Conclusion – Winners and Losers: An Imagined Future

The ultimate assumption is that to be enlightened is to be white within the binary of winning and losing on these three performance stages. Not only is whiteness presumed as the default subject position, but also that white people will win. Humanity that is not occupying a position of racial and economic whiteness falls to the other side of this manufactured binary, and by default loses. However, on today's Broadway performance stage, Eric Blake, Charles Smith, and Jason are just men who are experiencing loss. They are not presented as "white." Their loss of privilege places them back onto the spectrum of the winning and losing binary and as spectators, we watch their fight to reclaim privilege. These are stories of American loss, not white loss of something that was promised to them as their birthright. On the performance stage of television Evangelical programming, Bob Goff, Rick Warren, Reinhard Bonnke, and Joel Osteen are four straight, white men whose whiteness is never commented upon. They embody a humanity that remains unaffected by the trials and tribulations of the world outside of the space they embody. In order to win, participants and spectators are asked to be like them; white. On the game show performance stage, Bob Barker, Drew Carey, and Chris Hardwick represent a kind of penultimate whiteness, where capitalism and religion merge. Although references to God are not a part of these performances, the striving for access to a more desirable white space remains. The benefit of being white on all three stages is never being marked as such. White people are able to transcend "race," while Black and non-white people are unable to escape this binary that requires they are marked.

In July 2016, a lone teenage, male gunman, stormed into a Munich McDonalds and left 10 dead, including himself. As Germany attempted to understand the motivations behind such a

tragic event, Thomas Steinkraus-Koch, the Bavarian state prosecutor explained, “We’re working on the assumption that this was a classic shooting-spree assailant without any political motivation.” There was no indication that this event was connected in any way to the Islamic State. Some books and articles were found in the gunman’s room that suggested he had an interest, or was even studying mass shooting in the United States. Steinkraus-Koch suggested, “He had apparently been undergoing medical and indeed psychiatric treatment. I would be cautious with this, but it appears to have to do with a depressive illness.”³⁷⁶ What much of the coverage over this incident failed to report was that Ali David Sonboly was born in Munich to Iranian parents. During the rampage, a construction worker nearby attempted to distract gunman from a nearby balcony. He shouted, “They should cut off your head, you asshole.” The gunman replied, “Fucking Turks.” The construction worker said, “Fucking Kanaken.”³⁷⁷ And with that, the gunman shouted, “I am German.”³⁷⁸

This incident provides a glimpse of the narrative of the German nation. If these reports mentioned the details of his German-Iranian nationality, it was in passing. Munich,” leaving it up to the reader to conclude the potential of what that means with the national narrative that exists in the mentalities of Germans.³⁷⁹ Some bureaus only identified him as an “Iranian from Munich,” leaving it up to the reader to conclude the potential of what that means with the national narrative that exists in the mentalities of Germans.³⁸⁰ The narrative that seems to surface as a result of this event, relies on the assumption that this gunman operated in a vacuum and therefore had no material or ideological connection to the nature and fabric that defines the German people. Confino defines the notion of memory as “the ways in which people construct a sense of the

past.”³⁸¹ He explains that it is a subjective experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power.” In other words, who wants whom to remember what and why.³⁸²

Events like the one that occurred at the Munich McDonalds are ready to be grounded and understood through notions of memory, concepts of race, and collective mentalities. There is value in examining public narratives of nation as a product of memory and ideologies of whiteness and how events like this and blackface at the Deutsches Theater are connected. In both instances, white German bodies were legible as human and non-white bodies of color were not.

In chapter one, white people do not possess an inventory of the experiences of Black Americans, in light of Kanye and Rihanna's *All of the Lights*. Their predominantly white stories reflect that absence of knowledge represented on the theatrical U.S. and German stage. These plays are positioned as universal narratives relevant to anyone who views them. *The Humans* is a play that makes space for the audience to mourn with Erik Blake over the “loss” he is experiencing while refraining from directly commenting that the context of his loss is white privilege. Karam distracts us to believe that *this* is a story about everyone. The binary that promised him goodness resides in the home, failed him. *November* forces the story to a moral conclusion that is the “most dramatic” and does not ask the audience to learn from the folly of whiteness but to become the fool by laughing at President Smith navigate his world unpunished. If a protagonist is only concerned with “what happens next,” then they are subject to the most dramatic thing that the *playwright* believes will happen next. Because the position of the playwright is ignored in Mamet’s analysis of his own writing process, his plays become “universal,” existing in a space implicitly controlled by him— a space that has no interest in telling the truth. Explored are the positions of each character as they currently exist within an

Enlightenment binary that seeks greater access to power, whiteness, and autonomy. In *Hand to God*, whiteness is absent. Askins is attempting to write a “good play”. He even presents a story of a protagonist fighting to escape the grip of whiteness, but never explicitly says that.

Enlightenment binaries of God and the Devil are present and difficult to escape. The idea that “we are all the same” surfaces in Germany when Michael Thalheimer cast white German actors and instructed them to wear Blackface in a failed and offensive attempt to pass as African migrants. Humanity was classified as human and lesser human, similarly to what transpired during the German Enlightenment.

In chapter two, Bob Goff, Rick and Kay Warren, Reinhard Bonnke, and Joel Osteen have worked to erase difference. Difference here is any representation outside of whiteness. In part, that erasure is explicitly the point. Christianity offers worshippers an Enlightenment-inspired master narrative— one way of understanding-- of how the world and universe are structured with instructions on how to navigate them. They are intentionally not concerned with identities that unsettle this objective. Buckhead Church asks congregants to be like straight, white male Bob Goff. In an attempt to universalize who is effected by HIV and AIDS, Saddleback Church has refrained from making any mention of those individuals who are most, and disproportionately, affected by this disease; gay men. Gay men and women of color are completely illegible.

Participants at Bonnke’s rallies across Africa all have an equal opportunity at winning in his services, if they do so within the parameters that he defines. Osteen is a force of inspiration for many, but just like every other Evangelical minister, neglects to mention the dynamic of power in the earthly lives of his congregants. It is his intent to bypass what happens in the material realm in favor of what God can do in the supernatural. If these ministers refused to appeal to notions of

sameness, their ministries and personal stake in it all would be placed into jeopardy. By critiquing power and acknowledging difference, they would be critiquing themselves.

In chapter three, I experienced what it was like to participate as a contestant on *The Price is Right*. This game show form has served as a metaphor for the American Dream for over forty-five years. It presents a studio audience of "everyday Americans" who are willing and excited at the chance to "come on down" and who go from contestant's row to winning the Showcase; to go from nothing to everything. I watched my friends gasp in bewilderment as I transformed from myself to excited, intense, and invested in the interview process. I was required to play the game for a chance to win. Out of a studio audience of almost three hundred, only nine contestants are called to play the game. I know what it is like to be called and to then not have any knowledge of product prices. I felt like I struggled to sustain the kind of energy and intensity that the game required. I struggled to be white.

Just as *Price* presumes everyone to be the same and have an equal opportunity to win, *Wetten Dass?* in Germany also operates in a space where participants felt like they were the same. From this sameness emerged fifty white Germans performing blackface. In *Zahltag*, each contestant, or family of contestants, are presumed to be equal— if only they had a suitcase of cash, they could be just like us, the presumed white and economically superior German television audience.

Black and non-white people of color offer these "performance stages" contributions to unsettling normative whiteness. The subjects in this dissertation protect themselves by gaslighting the doubters, the critics, the thinkers, and those who dream of humanity being available to all. These stages define how spectators and participants are able to engage with

them. Deviation from the constructed paradigm set forth by these stages then robs individuals of their humanity. Reproduced and mourned on each stage is the American Dream, as defined as a speedy journey from nothing to everything. Structured into the fabric of U.S. and German culture are those who have power and those who do not; those who win and those who lose. These performances are more than a reflection— they work to protect the order of things. Power and privilege is not to be won on these stages, but merely for participants to strive to win. Power and privilege has already been won by the white ruling class and is currently being protected. However, the myth remains that attaining more is possible and normative for all. Du Bois writes in “The Souls of Black Folks,” “We cannot hope, then, in this generation, or for several generations, that the mass of the whites can be brought to assume that close sympathetic and self-sacrificing leadership of the blacks which their present situation so eloquently demands.”³⁸³ Du Bois words all illustrate one thing: whiteness as a structured relationship to power gets in the way.

When Black people do engage with these white spaces they are only occupying spaces that were constructed for white people. Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* does this when he changes representation of the cast but preserves a kind of bootstrapping narrative that can be found in nearly any other Broadway musical. Lynn Nottage’s *Sweat* does this when she resolves the play in a way that exonerates white female Tracey for her treatment of Black woman Cynthia after she receives a promotion to management at their place of employment. Creflo Dollar, Black television evangelist and mega-church pastor who preaches the prosperity gospel and based in Atlanta is occupying a space that was originally constructed for white people. Acclaimed Black rapper Killer Mike in his new Netflix series *Trigger Warning with Killer Mike* interviews Dollar

and says, “I want to see a black savior. I don't see the guy that looks like me.” Dollar says, “They did that, man. That's a Michelangelo painting, man.”³⁸⁴ The "they" Dollar is referring to is white people. Steve Harvey is occupying a white space as host of *Family Feud*. I attended a taping of *Feud* in March, 2018 at witnessed off-camera behavior from Harvey that made Richard Dawson's womanizing on-camera look mild. Harvey now lives in this white space and has the privilege of making fun of people with disabilities and gay people. These were two running gags he developed during the taping. At one point he looked at his producer and asked, “You're gonna cut that right?” She nodded. He knew her response before he made the jokes. She would not respond in any other way. The space he is occupying allows for this; it gives him immunity. He no longer must encounter the trials and tribulations of the world outside of this space.

In her book *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison explains that it was Africanism that was “deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity.”³⁸⁵ Therefore, to be autonomous (not a slave) was necessary in order to champion stories of the individual and later, notions of sameness. These narratives of sameness exist because of their relationship with those who, under this construct, could not be defined as an individual, and could not be “the same” as those persons of Northern European origin.³⁸⁶ These stories were never meant for Black and non-white people of color to consume. To win in the stories that persist in the culture of whiteness, protagonists must ensure that others can be used to assist the individual in their quest and to guarantee the playing field is not the same for all players. The stories that continue to persist and remain resilient do so because they spoke to a specific time and place; when white people were human and Black people were not. As white and Black Americans are desperately looking for access to the

American Dream, the stories in this project offer boundless opportunities to appeal to the strength and work ethic of the individual man, and work to keep stories universal. Morrison offers a counter narrative structure.

In a talk at Harvard Divinity School in 2012, Toni Morrison shares her fascination with notions of goodness found in Southeastern Pennsylvania in light of the Amish school massacre in Nickel Mines in 2006. This event killed five children before the gunman killed himself. After this event the Amish community did not seek vengeance or ill will toward the shooter, but forgave him and his family. They even attended the funeral of the killer in an attempt to be good and forgive. In order to illuminate precisely the moral concepts embedded in narrative, Morrison described her interest in acts of goodness that produce language. The Amish community had an impact on the media's consequent narrative and reporting of that event. To her, this produced life changing properties. To Morrison, narrative is satisfying "when the protagonist learns something vital, and morally insightful, and mature that she or he did not know at the beginning."³⁸⁷

Allowing goodness a voice does not eliminate evil, but it produces knowledge that can function as a model for playwrights, directors, producers, ministers, TV producers, and educators. These observations by Morrison are not a solution, but a model for producing and examining future content on these three stages.

Endnotes

¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 7.

² For more about European ethnic groups that transitioned into whiteness see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York; Routledge, 1995) and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, (New York: Verso, 2007). Most recently, Ta-Nehisi' Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2016) uses the phrase “people who believe they are white” as an ode to James Baldwin and his use of the phrase in his essay “On Being White and Other Lies” published in *Essence* magazine in 1984. Baldwin writes, “No one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country.” Later in the essay he writes, “America became white-- the people who, as they claim, “settled” the country became white — because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation.”

³ Tourism Economics, *The Economic Impact of Tourism in Lancaster County*, (London: Oxford Economics, 2015). <http://www.discoverlancaster.com/Uploads/files/TE-FullReportSept2014.pdf>.

⁴ Jane Stern, *500 Things to Eat Before It's Too Late: and the Very Best Places to Eat Them*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 101. Shoo-fly pie is made with flour, brown sugar, and molasses, and spelled *Melassichriwwelkuche* in Pennsylvania Dutch. I won second place in the Ephrata, Pennsylvania Street Fair for my recipe in 1999, bested only by a Mennonite woman.

⁵ On October 28, 2018 Jair Bolsonaro was elected to the Brazilian presidency. Brazil is experiencing one of their largest recessions and crime has been on the rise. Bolsonaro is a right-wing populist who “exalted the country’s military dictatorship, advocated torture and threatened to destroy, jail or drive into exile his political opponents.” Ernesto Londoño and Shasta Darlington, “Jair Bolsonaro Wins Brazil’s Presidency, in a Shift to the Far Right,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/world/americas/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-election.html>; Right-wing nationalism is not an intelligent force surfacing on its own volition. It is brought into existence. openDemocracy has examined a dozen American Christian right groups linked to the Trump administration and Steve Bannon and found that “several of them appear to have significantly increased their spending in Europe over the past five years,” which accounts for over fifty-one million invested into Europe’s far right. Mary Fitzgerald and Claire Provost, “Revealed: Trump-Linked US Christian ‘Fundamentalists’ Pour Millions of ‘Dark Money’ into Europe, Boosting the Far Right,” openDemocracy, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/revealed-trump-linked-us-christian-fundamentalists-pour-millions-of-dark-money-into-europe-boosting-the-far-right/?fbclid=IwAR1iy29v2FRbUr0V2d9rNDcuhCuNvP5Zc0kRZFsrkLoAZAAzbUuLPOBJ5T8>.

⁶ I choose to capitalize “Queer” as a strategy claim my personal and political relationship to intersectional queerness and the subversion of notions of queer identity as “less than” normal. I claim white allyship with marginalized communities of color who do not have the power to be seen wholly through race, class, gender, disability, and secularity intersections .

⁷ I do not intend to assign white masculinity an intelligence and the ability to perceive its own diminishment. This would remove accountability and agency from the people who are actively defending, consciously or not, the terrain of the white masculine.

⁸ Tom Lutey, “Trump: ‘We’re Going to Win so Much, You’re Going to Be so Sick and Tired of Winning,’” *The Billings Gazette*, accessed April 1, 2019, https://billingsgazette.com/news/government-and-politics/trump-we-re-going-to-win-so-much-you-re/article_2f346f38-37e7-5711-ae07-d1fd000f4c38.html.

⁹ Charles Isherwood, “Review: ‘The Humans,’ a Family Thanksgiving for a Fearful Middle Class,” *The New York Times*, December 21, 2017, sec. Theater. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/26/theater/review-the-humans-a-family-thanksgiving-for-a-fearful-middle-class.html>.

¹⁰ “When Stephen Karam Couldn’t Get Cast, He Found Speech & Debate | Playbill,” accessed July 24, 2019, <http://www.playbill.com/article/when-stephen-karam-couldnt-get-cast-he-found-speech-debate#>.

¹¹ Nancy Churnin, “Texas Playwright Brings His Tony-Nominated Puppet Comedy, ‘Hand to God,’ to Addison,” *Dallas News*, August 3, 2018. <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts/theater/2018/08/03/texas-broadway-back-cypress-born-playwright-brings-hand-god-hit-home>.

¹² Jerome Weeks, “Going To The Devil – Onstage.” *Art&Seek*, August 2, 2018. <http://artandseek.org/spotlight/going-to-the-devil-onstage/>.

¹³ Weeks.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ I choose to capitalize the word “Black” as a strategy to remain in solidarity with Black scholars and activists who first capitalized it in order to reclaim power. The history of capitalizing in recognition of these terms as identities and not adjectives began with Early Twentieth-Century Black author and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois when he successfully worked to see the N in Negro capitalized among newspaper and magazine publishers, even though it was not a word he used exclusively. “Why We Decided to Capitalize Black, Aboriginal and Indigenous,” TVO.org, accessed April 2, 2019, <http://www.tvo.org/article/why-we-decided-to-capitalize-black-aboriginal-and-indigenous>; Capitalization can also be seen in James Baldwin, “On Being White and Other Lies,” *Essence* (1984).

¹⁷ Katrin Sieg, “Race, Guilt and Innocence: Facing Blackfacing in Contemporary German Theater,” *German Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (2015): 131.

¹⁸ “BODY TALK / A Festival of Bodies and Markets, Gender and Visibility in the 21st Century In cooperation with Missy Magazine,” *Müncher Kammerspiele*, date accessed March 1, 2018, Deutsch, <https://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/en/staging/body-talk>.

¹⁹ "Changing Theatre Landscape in Germany," *The Theatre Times*, May 30, 2017. <https://thetheatretimes.com/changing-theatre-landscape-germany/>; In her article "Not Just a Blackened Face," Black art scholar and curator Sandrine Micossé-Aikins explains that what this controversy is really about is the struggle over the Black body. She writes, "For if you happen to be a Black person in a predominantly white society like Germany, you will most likely be aware of the fact that your body constantly speaks with somebody else's tongue. It is communicating false information about you and there is often nothing you can do about it." Here we strangely see made manifest, the perverse nature of a German collective mentality, one that insists on defining who can be seen, and what it means to allow "the other" to speak for themselves. Innocence has been commented upon and whiteness has been marked.

²⁰ Government Document. *English: Public Domain U.S. Government Document*. April 1, 1930. [ancestry.com. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_\(Bob\)_Barker_-_South_Dakota%27s_Indian_Census_Roll;_April_1,_1930.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_(Bob)_Barker_-_South_Dakota%27s_Indian_Census_Roll;_April_1,_1930.jpg).

²¹ "Bob Barker Net Worth" *Celebrity Net Worth*, Accessed February 24, 2019. <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/bob-barker-net-worth/>.

²² "Bob Barker Opens Up About 'The Price Is Right' on the Show's 60th Anniversary," *Closer Weekly*, Accessed February 21, 2019. <https://www.closerweekly.com/posts/bob-barker-the-price-is-right-119117/>.

²³ "The Price Is Right." *The Price is Right*. Accessed April 20, 2019. <http://www.priceisright.com/>.

²⁴ "30 Facts about Denny's," Denny's Diner, accessed April 20, 2019, <http://blog.dennys.com/post/74877614156/30-facts-about-dennys>.

²⁵ "Carey: Why I Changed My Mind about 'Price Is Right' - YouTube," accessed April 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTSzpl67_Hw.

²⁶ Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 5, 24.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

²⁹ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 167.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 167.

³¹ Phelan, 1-2.

³²Roediger, 189.

³³ Phelan, 146.

³⁴ She is the daughter of Hirini Moko Mead and is affiliated to the Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi; Te Karere TVNZ. *Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith Made CNZM*. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hy7g8FggZAU>.

³⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2012), 35-47.

³⁶ Wendy Sutherland, *Staging Blackness and Performing Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century German Drama*, New edition edition, (Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2016), 7.

³⁷ Ibid, 230. Led by General Lothar von Trotha.

³⁸ Ibid, 230.

³⁹ "Jewish Population of Europe in 1945," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed November 11, 2017. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005687>.

⁴⁰ I identify Confino as white because that marks the kind of privilege he has based on skin color alone. Confino was born in Jerusalem and writes about "German and European history, Holocaust and genocide, Zionism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." His intersections with a Jewish heritage also defines his identity. However, I found no published materials where he uses Jewish faith or background to explicitly mark his position from the outset. This is not a criticism of his choice to do so, but a challenge for my project that is attempting to unsettle subject positions that have the privilege of remaining unmarked in this way; "Alon Confino." Wilson Center, June 16, 2016. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/alon-confino>.

⁴¹ Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review*, 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386.

⁴² Confino, 1388. Confino explains here that memory must be "linked to historical questions and problems via methods and theories." There is no correct way to engage with memory research, but his notes here work to warn and divert the scholar from enacting a "facile mode of doing cultural history."

⁴³ Sieg, 117.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 119.

⁴⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Reissue edition, (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 15.

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- ⁴⁸ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 92.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 94.
- ⁵⁰ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Reprint edition, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1993), 90.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, 51.
- ⁵² Roediger, 11.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 8.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid, 10.
- ⁵⁵ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*, (Iowa City, University Of Iowa Press, 1997), 10.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 342.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid, 2.
- ⁵⁸ NAACP, "NAACP History: W.E.B. Du Bois," *NAACP.org*. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.naacp.org/naacp-history-w-e-b-Du-Bois/>.
- ⁵⁹ "Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 138.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 138.
- ⁶² Sarah Wall, "Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 7, no. 1 (2008): 38.
- ⁶³ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 2nd Edition, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 1.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. 18.
- ⁶⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16.
- ⁶⁶ "Kanye West - All Of The Lights Ft. Rihanna, Kid Cudi - YouTube." Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAfFqiYLP0>.
- ⁶⁷ Sutherland, xii.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 10.

⁷⁰ Gilroy, in his book *The Black Atlantic*, explains that there is no pure culture. The culture that white masculinity is attempting to reinstate and preserve never existed in the first place. To desire to return to a perceived state of prosperity and well being is to desire, within the system that the United States functions, is to do it at the expense of slave labor in some form, and at the expense of the prosperity of Black and non-white American people of color in another form. Gilroy explains that it is his hope that cultural historians take the Atlantic as “one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective.” The performances examined in this chapter rely on transnational perspectives in order to be properly placed into that context. In that way we can in the fullest sense ask how they are protecting whiteness.

Although Gilroy sees modernity and slavery as interconnected, he explains that it has been unproductive to discuss modernity within a binary. Too often a Eurocentric rationalism will ignore the slave experience as part of modernity and the opponents of modernity are ultimately anti-humanist as they focus their arguments on the flaws and gaps and critiques within the Enlightenment project. Gilroy explains that the history and experiences of Black people provide “a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory” of our contemporary moment. This chapter will take up his call to not ignore Black lives by interrogating how whiteness re-centers narrative onto itself in U.S. and German theatre. Examining whiteness is not the final destination of the Atlantic. Deconstructing whiteness is merely a momentary and necessary stop on the journey of analyzing examining inequality in our world. Gilroy wrote *The Black Atlantic* in 1993. Twenty-five years later Black activists, scholars and their allies are still saying that Black lives matter.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, xii.

⁷² H. B. Nisbet, "On the Rise of Toleration in Europe: Lessing and the German Contribution." *The Modern Language Review* 105, no. 4 (2010): xxiv.

⁷³ *Ibid*, xxix.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, xxx.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

⁷⁶ Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (December 1997): 1386–1403.

⁷⁷ Charles Isherwood, “The Pain Behind the Posturing,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2016, sec. Arts & Leisure.

⁷⁸ Charles McNulty, “‘The Humans’ at the Ahmanson: Quite Possibly the Best Cast of Actors You Can See Anywhere.” *latimes.com*. Accessed December 20, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/theater/reviews/la-et-cm-humans-play-ahmanson-review-20180621-story.html>.

⁷⁹ Maureen Lee Lenker, “The Humans Review: A Thoughtful, Humorous Portrait of an American Family,” *EW.Com*, Accessed: December 20, 2018. <https://ew.com/theater/2018/06/21/the-humans-stage-review/>.

⁸⁰ Michael Billington, “The Humans Review – Family Dinner Turns to Schlock in Uneasy Drama,” *The Guardian*, September 7, 2018, sec. Stage.

⁸¹ Sean Nelson, “The Humans Is a Wrenching Play That Tries Hard to Say Something About the Death of the American Dream (and Succeeds).” *The Stranger*. <https://www.thestranger.com/theater/2017/12/06/25607705/the-humans-is-a-wrenching-play-that-tries-hard-to-say-something-about-the-death-of-the-american-dream-and-succeeds>.

⁸² McNulty.

⁸³ Michael Schulman, “The Decline of White, Middle-Aged America, Onstage,” February 26, 2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-decline-of-white-middle-aged-america-onstage>.

⁸⁴ Jones, Chris. “Tony-Winning ‘The Humans’ Comes Home — Its Family and Feelings Intact.” *chicagotribune.com*. Accessed December 20, 2018. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/reviews/ct-ent-humans-review-0202-story.html>.

⁸⁵ Schulman, Michael. “The Decline of White, Middle-Aged America, Onstage,” February 26, 2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-decline-of-white-middle-aged-america-onstage>.

⁸⁶ Isherwood, Charles. “Review: ‘The Humans,’ a Family Thanksgiving for a Fearful Middle Class.” *The New York Times*, December 21, 2017, sec. Theater. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/26/theater/review-the-humans-a-family-thanksgiving-for-a-fearful-middle-class.html>.

⁸⁷ White, 5, 24.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 19.

⁹⁰ Goldberg, David Theo. *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*. 1 edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, 337.

⁹¹ “Diverse Dialogues: Class, Race and Marxism,” *KJHK 90.7 FM (blog)*, October 25, 2017. <https://kjhk.org/web/event/diverse-dialogues-class-race-and-marxism/>.

⁹² Roediger, 8.

⁹³ Ibid, 13.

⁹⁴ Morrison, xii.

⁹⁵ Morrison, 59.

⁹⁶ Du Bois, *The Souls...*, 138.

⁹⁷ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany (Cambridge Concise Histories), Second Edition*. 2nd edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 93.

⁹⁹ Nicolaas A. Rupke, *Alexander Von Humboldt: A Metabiography*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 128.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 128.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Marilyn Sephocle, "Anton Wilhelm Amo," *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 2 (1992): 182.

¹⁰⁴ Justin E. h Smith, "The Enlightenment's 'Race' Problem, and Ours," *Opinionator* (blog), February 10, 2013, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/why-has-race-survived/>.

¹⁰⁵ "David Mamet Stopped Being a 'Brain-Dead Liberal' Back in 2008." Accessed March 23, 2019. <https://www.villagevoice.com/2011/05/16/david-mamet-stopped-being-a-brain-dead-liberal-back-in-2008/>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 53.

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²⁵⁹ Although “the earth”, “the world”, or “the globe” is not mentioned explicitly in their website’s “What We Believe” section or more abstractly in terms of reaching people around the world, or spreading the gospel in some way, I presume that is the function of this spinning golden planet earth; Chris Martin, photograph of golden globe on stage at Lakewood church, Houston, Texas, (April 7, 2018).

²⁶⁰ Other announcements included a health fair, a church internship, gift and estate planning, a marriage conference, bookstore hours, instructions on how to give, including through a downloadable app, book promos, and a slide welcoming veterans home. In the physical distributed program, it reads, “Welcome to Lakewood! Today, I encourage you to take the limits off your thinking. Lift up your eyes to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Trust that he is working behind the scenes on your behalf and will make a way out of no way.”

²⁶¹ Chris Martin. Field notes of the author, Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas, (April, 7, 2018).

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²⁶³ Kenneth Hagin was instrumental in starting what is known as the Word of Faith movement, a movement which, in short, promises a prosperous life to people if they choose to have faith.

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²⁶⁵ Chris Martin. Field notes of the author, Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas, (April, 7, 2018).

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“This is *my* Bible.
 I am what it says I am.
 I can do what it says I can do.
 Today, I will be taught the Word of God.
 I boldly confess:
 My mind is alert, My heart is receptive.
 I will never be the same.
 I am about to receive
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²⁷⁰ Richard Dyer. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1997, 75.

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²⁹¹ This “rags to great wealth” narrative does not ultimately have an origin in Goodson’s story. Benjamin Franklin and Ralph Waldo Emerson are others who are also remembered as propagating these narratives. Many long for the repetition of the kind of story where one man fights against all odds, by himself, to attain the unattainable goal, because it centers power onto the identity and location of the individual. It refuses to acknowledge phantom power at work somewhere else. As this narrative evolved and changed into the 20th century, it became an immigrant success story, one that looked at the achievements of certain disadvantaged groups like Jewish people, for instance, and the continued struggles of others, such as Black Americans, or the plight of Anabaptists and their escape from Switzerland and Southern Germany, and asked the reader or hearer to make destructive assumptions of which each group was made. In light of the election of a kind of game show host to the U.S. Presidency, an archetype that promises spectators that they alone can distribute solutions to their problems, it is clear that this everyman story is operating from a deep place in the American psyche.

²⁹² Ibid.

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²⁹⁵ Paula E. Hyman, “Eastern European Immigrants in the United States,” *Jewish Women’s Archive*, Accessed February 22, 2019. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/eastern-european-immigrants-in-united-states>.

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³⁰⁶ Megan Garber, "'The Wall' and the Rise of the Moral Game Show," *The Atlantic*, February 15, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/02/the-wall-and-the-rise-of-the-moral-game-show/516534/>.

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³⁰⁸ “Matthew 25:23 His Master Replied, ‘Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant! You Have Been Faithful with a Few Things; I Will Put You in Charge of Many Things. Enter into the Joy of Your Master!’,” *Bible Hub*, Accessed March 1, 2019. <https://biblehub.com/matthew/25-23.htm>.

³⁰⁹ 3/25/18 tapings were unavailable since when I began looking for tickets at the beginning of the year. www.oncameraaudiences.com gave me the option to sign up for notifications in case they choose to release more tickets at a later date. I received an email on Tuesday, March 20, five days before the Sunday taping, that limited tickets had been released and that “the *Price is Right* [was] inviting [me] to come on down”.

³¹⁰ A “green screen” is a large, bright green screen that hangs behind the subject. In this instance, it allows for producers to superimpose any image they want behind would-be contestants.

³¹¹ Chris Martin, photograph of (left to right) Alisha, myself, and Tim waiting in line. Television City, Hollywood, California, (March 25, 2018).

³¹² Ibid, 16.

³¹³ Bob Barker and Digby Diehl, *Priceless Memories*, First Edition edition (New York: Center Street, 2009), 42.

³¹⁴ Ibid 16.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 16.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 22.

³¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 7.

³²⁰ Ibid, 7.

³²¹ Ibid, 24.

³²² “Come On Down: The Price Is Right Kids Week Starts Monday, Mar. 19 On CBS!,” accessed July 22, 2019, https://www.cbs.com/shows/the_price_is_right/news/1008389/come-on-down-the-price-is-right-kids-week-starts-monday-mar-19-on-cbs-/.

³²³ “The Price Is Right on Instagram: ‘It’s True!! A 5-Year-Old Won a Car on “The Price Is Right!” #TPIR #newcar,’” Instagram, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0Oud3EnXwH/>.

³²⁴ Although today the models are referred to as “The *Price is Right* Models,” from 1972 - 2007, when Drew Carey succeeded as host, they were referred to as “Barker’s Beauties.”

³²⁵ Hoerschelmann, , 4-5

³²⁶ Ibid, 7.

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- 327 Ibid, 11
- 328 Phelan, 1.
- 329 Ibid, 2.
- 330 Ibid, 1.
- 331 Ibid, 12.
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- 333 Chris Martin. Field notes of the author, (March, 25, 2017).
- 334 Drew Carey conversation with the author, *Price is Right*, Hollywood, California, (March, 25, 2017).
- 335 Drew Carey conversation with the author, *Price is Right*, Hollywood, California, (March, 25, 2017).
- 336 John Schott, *Deal*, Documentary, 1977.
- 337 Barker and Diehl, 37.
- 338 Ibid, 49.
- 339 John Schott, *Deal*, Documentary, 1977.
- 340 Nick M, *Price Is Right 20th Season Premiere Intro*, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQyNkiIMfSs>.
- 341 Phelan, 2.
- 342 Henry Bial, *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 7.
- 343 Bial, 15.
- 344 Bial, 15.
- 345 Olaf Hoerschelmann, *Rules of the Game: Quiz Shows And American Culture*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 6.
- 346 Hoerschelmann, 6
- 347 Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein, *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 204.

³⁴⁸ Volker Berghahn, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918: Economy, Society, Culture and Politics*. (City: Berghahn Books, 2005), 102-3

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 104-5.

³⁵⁰ Thomas Rogers and Alex Shephard, “This German Talk Show Is American Celebrities’ Worst Nightmare,” *The New Republic*, November 3, 2014. <https://newrepublic.com/article/120105/wetten-das-german-talk-show-american-celebrities-fear>.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 308.

³⁵⁶ Settler Colonialism is a more specific way to discuss that particularities of U.S. colonial history. Settler colonial States include Canada, the United States, Australia, and South Africa. In these geographic spaces indigenous populations were replaced by another society who ultimately, declared sovereignty.

³⁵⁷ Sieg, 118.

³⁵⁸ Sieg, 120.

³⁵⁹ 33,000 Euros converts to just over 37,000 USD. See FOCUS, “RTL hat gezielt Menschen ausgenutzt: Ex-Jobcenter-Mitarbeiterin entsetzt über Hartz-IV-Show,” *FOCUS Online*, Accessed February 28, 2019. https://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/panorama-das-sagt-eine-ex-jobcenter-mitarbeiterin-zum-rtl-zahltag-finale_id_9343855.html.

³⁶⁰ Hartz VI gives individuals 391 Euros each month. When combined with other additional housing and healthcare assistance, it is worth about 30,000 Euros annually, the amount each family receives on this show. See FOCUS “Regierung will Arbeitslosengeld II-Regelsatz erhöhen,” *FOCUS Online*, Accessed February 28, 2019. https://www.focus.de/finanzen/news/acht-euro-mehr-ab-2013-regierung-will-arbeitslosengeld-ii-regelsatz-erhoehen_aid_818685.html.

³⁶¹ Gordon Mill, “Zahltag: Felix Thönnessen, Ilka Bessin Und Heinz Buschkowsky Begleiten Langzeitarbeitslose,” *rtl.de*, Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://www.rtl.de/cms/zahltag-felix-thoennessen-ilka-bessin-und-heinz-buschkowsky-begleiten-langzeitarbeitslose-4195880.html>.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ “P!Nk – What About Us? Lyrics,” *Genuine Lyrics*, Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://genius.com/P-nk-what-about-us-lyrics>.

³⁶⁴ Mill.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Sieg, 121.

³⁶⁷ Around the same time, this was codified into the German Criminal Code under a concept known as Volksverhetzung, or “incitement to hatred.” In this section, disseminating information, symbols, or speech of any kind that denigrates an individual or group or causes violence based on ethnicity or religion can receive imprisonment in a range from three months to five years; “Germany Will Now Allow Some Nazi Symbols in Video Games. Here’s What to Know About the History of That Ban,” *Time*, accessed April 3, 2019, <http://time.com/5364254/germany-nazi-symbols-video-games-history/>.

³⁶⁸ This reconciliation with the truth of the German past did not come without pressure to do so. For instance, it was only after ex-prisoner groups pressured the state to open former concentration camps into exhibition centers that the camps became more than empty spaces filled with Christian monuments commemorating victims; Richard J. Evans, “From Nazism to Never Again,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2017-12-12/nazism-never-again>.

³⁶⁹ Chris Martin, photograph of Sachsenhausen memorial, Oranienburg, Germany, (October 18, 2018).

³⁷⁰ When I visited the Jewish Museum in Berlin, 2015, it was clear that because Germany made refugees out of over 340,000 Jewish people between 1933 and 1942, Germany today is working to ensure they never make refugees out of any people group again. As of 2017, Germany has taken in over 1 million asylum seekers as a result of the crisis regions of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Although in this instance, Angela Merkel and her party, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, are proactively forming policies from past lessons, there remains opposition to her work. The AfD (Alternativ für Deutschland) party has organized as a vehicle for anti-immigration, anti-climate change, anti-gay, and pro-Nazi voices. Today they have support from about twenty-percent of voters, mostly from former East Germany; Richard J. Evans, “From Nazism to Never Again,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2017-12-12/nazism-never-again>.

³⁷¹ “Stumbling Upon Miniature Memorials To Victims Of Nazis,” NPR.org, Accessed January 3, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2012/05/31/153943491/stumbling-upon-miniature-memorials-to-nazi-victims>.

³⁷² Time Staff, "Trump Inauguration: Transcript of Donald Trump Speech," *Time*, Accessed March 27, 2017. <http://time.com/4640707/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript/>. Trump used the word "winning" more than "freedom" and "liberty," and used the word "same" five times over the course of two paragraphs. The foundation of "sameness" must be established in order for the narrative of success and the individual to be plausible.

³⁷³ Bourdieu, 7.

³⁷⁴ "Zahltag!"

³⁷⁵ Goldstein, 140.

³⁷⁶ Elisabeth Behrmann, Patrick Donahue, and Aaron Ricadela, "Germany Tries to Make Sense of Carnage as Terrorism Excluded," *Bloomberg.com*, July 23, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-07-23/germany-tries-to-make-sense-of-shootings-after-carnage-in-munich>.

³⁷⁷ Gabriele Trost, "Geschichte der Gastarbeiter: Kanake." *Geschichte der Gastarbeiter: Kanake - Deutsche Geschichte - Geschichte - Planet Wissen*. Accessed March 28, 2017. http://www.planet-wissen.de/geschichte/deutsche_geschichte/geschichte_der_gastarbeiter/pwiewissensfrage550.html. It appears the word "Kanake" is used derogatorily toward young male Turks. More recently, this author explains, a change in the use of "Kanake" can be observed. Young Turks are now using it to refer to themselves, in the style of Black rappers from the United States, who call themselves the n-word. It is increasingly being used in a self-empowering fashion, unlike the use as described at the Munich shooting event.

³⁷⁸ Yascha Mounk, "The End of German Exceptionalism | Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, July 27, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/27/the-end-of-german-exceptionalism-terrorism-merkel-islamic-state/>

³⁷⁹ Jamie Grierson, Emma Graham-Harrison, and Kate Connolly, "Munich gunman lured victims on Facebook with 'free McDonald's food,'" *The Guardian*, July 23, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/23/munich-shooting-teenage-gunman-researched-killing-sprees-no-isis-links>.

³⁸⁰ Jamie Grierson, Emma Graham-Harrison, and Kate Connolly. "Munich gunman lured victims on Facebook with 'free McDonald's food'" *The Guardian*. July 23, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/23/munich-shooting-teenage-gunman-researched-killing-sprees-no-isis-links>.

³⁸¹ Confino, 1386.

³⁸² *Ibid*, 1393.

³⁸³ Du Bois, *The Souls...*, 138.

³⁸⁴ “Killer Mike | RELEVANT Magazine,” accessed July 20, 2019, <https://relevantmagazine.com/issue-98/killer-mike/>.

³⁸⁵ Morrison, 44.

³⁸⁶ Dyer, 21-35. Dyer explains that the myth of a pure beginning extends into history arguably deepens the resolve of its proponents. He writes, “The Aryan and the Caucasian model share a nation of origins in mountains. [Martin] Bernal notes the admiration of the Romantics, by whom such notions were especially promulgated, for ‘small, virtuous and “pure” communities in remote and cold places: Switzerland, North Germany and Scotland’.” He goes on to write, “The West constitutes a myth of origins for the USA, for a hundred years the leading edge of white world. It stands in contrast to another such myth, the South. The West shows the construction of a (white) national identity centered on men and in the face of an indigenous ethnic other, whereas the South shows the construction of one centered on women and in the face of a forced immigrant other.”

³⁸⁷ Harvard Divinity School, *Goodness: Altruism and the Literary Imagination*, accessed April 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2500&v=PJmVpYZnKTU.

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