

AMERICAN FOLKLORE
An evening exploring American tales and songs

Produced with
The Virtual Theatre of Arizona

Tales and Songs curated by Ethan Fox
Essays/Analysis by Ethan Fox

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Performance Instructions: To be performed in one night, around a campfire or hearth. Performers can use visuals to help tell the story such as drawing, puppets, powerpoint... Each section has the capability to be told in its own way. The stories can be told in the performer’s own style, however the essays and analysis must be read verbatim, as a discussion with the audience.

Text italicized and in square brackets are stage instructions.

Preamble

(“This Land”)

[“This Land Is Your Land” sung by Woody Guthrie plays. In the last few verses, the cast members trope on stage, singing the verses. They encourage the audience to sing along with the chorus, even the verses if they know the lyrics. (For Zoom: unmute all mics)]

*This land is your land, this land is my land...
From California to the New York island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me*

*As I went walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway
Saw below me that golden valley
This land was made for you and me*

*I roamed and rambled and I've followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
All around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me*

Chorus

*When the sun come shining, then I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting
This land was made for you and me*

Chorus

*When the sun come shining, then I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
The voice come a-chanting and the fog was lifting
This land was made for you and me*

*Was a high wall there that tried to stop me
A sign was painted, said: Private Property,
But on the back side it didn't say nothing –
This land was made for you and me.*

Chorus (x2 or 3)

Good evening! Thank you all for coming, and it's great to see all of your beautiful faces. It's great to have you here together, it means so much to share an evening with people. That song, as you all probably know, was "This Land Is Your Land" originally penned by Woody Guthrie in 1940. A fun fact about this was that the tune was from a Carter Family tune called "When The World's on Fire" which has significantly more confusing lyrics.

"This Land" has had so many versions and added verses over the years, the song really takes on its lyrics' meaning: it's yours, it's mine. It belongs to everyone. It's been sung by Pete Seeger; Bob Dylan; Peter, Paul, and Mary; Bruce Springsteen; Lady Gaga; even cameo-ing in pop culture shows as "The Simpsons," and "Arthur." It's lyrics have been adopted in Canada, Sweden, Ireland, Mexico, Turkey, and Guyana to name a few.

What really makes this song interesting is its copyright status. The main organization, Ludlow, which claims ownership to the song's copyright sued JibJab in 2004 for a satirical video using the melody. The video contained animated President George W. Bush and senator John Kerry in a political battle, as demonstrated in these lyrics:

[This can be shown as a clip, or sung by two performers]

BUSH: You have more waffles than a house of pancakes/ you offer flip flops, I offer tax breaks/ You're a you. N. Pussy and yes it's true that I kick ass/ This land will surely vote for me

KERRY: You can't say nuclear, that really scares me/ sometimes a brain can come in quite handy/ but its not gonna help you, because I won three purple hearts/ This land will surely vote for me.

BUSH: You're a liberal sissy

KERRY: You're a right wing nut job

BUSH: You're a pink coat comey

KERRY: You're as dumb as a doorknob

BUSH: Hey You got that Botox

KERRY: But I still won three purple hearts

BOTH: This land will surely vote for me."

In response to this parody, Ludlow music filed a cease and desist with JibJab, claiming copyright of Guthrie's song, as they had renewed copyright in 1956 for another 28 years. In response, the Electronic Frontier Foundation dug up sheet music published back in 1945, in a songbook by Guthrie, which allowed them to argue that, under the 1909 copyright act, the song entered public domain in 1973, and Ludlow's filing to renew the song's copyright was invalid. In a statement by Fred von Lohmann from the EFF, "The idea of copyright law is that, after a time, every work comes back into the hands of the public, where it can be reused, recycled, made part of new creativity."

What's crazy about this was that this dispute was never actually tested in court, and there never was a verdict as to if Ludlow owned the rights to the song. On August 24, 2004, Ludlow settled with JibJab, allowing the video to be distributed with no further interference.

This wasn't the first instance, and it was very recently, as of early 2020, when Satorii sued Ludlow for forcing the band to pay for nonexistent copyright fees. As with JibJab's case, the dispute never received a verdict, as the judge dismissed the case on grounds that Satorii had already paid the license fee. So, the song remains in a somewhat grey legal area.

These legal disputes aren't about money. They represent the struggle of inclusion in the court system, the fight for an author's intent, and who owns a folksong: a person, or the public?

It's ironic that a song about collective ownership has had these legal disputes, and an extension of ownership. It is, in many ways, a reflection of the American way. A battle between the courts and wealthy, and the common folk. Just as our history has included bloody disputes between farmer and government, especially during those fresh days of the railway; the fight for suffrage, freedom from slavery and oppression, and even landlord and renter during a pandemic; this song has come to embody our culture. Our people. Our history. It has become a true folksong.

Tonight, we will be exploring our own folklore, songs, myths, and urban legends; what they mean, and their place in our society. Feel free to tune in and out as you please as we swap tales, sing songs, and present the American myths and their criticisms and relations to society. Leave a comment or question, and we'll leave some time at the end to look over those and respond. Oh, one more fun fact about "This Land."

Back when Guthrie published the work, he wrote: "This song is Copyrighted in U.S. under Seal of Copyright #154085, for a period of 28 years, and anybody caught singing it without

our permission, will be mighty good friends of ours, cause we don't give a dern. Publish it. Write it. Sing it. Swing it. Yodel it. We wrote it, that's all we wanted to do."

So that's what we'll do.

*This land is your land, this land is my land...
From California to the New York island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me*

*When the sun come shining, then I was strolling
In wheat fields waving and dust clouds rolling;
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting:
This land was made for you and me.*

*One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple
By the Relief Office I saw my people —
As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if
This land was made for you and me.*

*This land is your land, this land is my land...
From California to the New York island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me*

[Can repeat chorus if desired]

Approximated time: 13 to 16 minutes

Paul Bunyan

Story

This is the story of Paul Bunyan. His birth took five giant storks to deliver him to his parents. In some versions, Paul had no parents, but was raised by an entire village. He grew so fast that after one week, he was wearing his fathers' clothes. His clothes were said to be so large that he used wagon wheels for buttons. It took forty bowls of porridge to whet his appetite. As you can imagine, this led to him outgrowing his cradle, which was a large lumber wagon that had to be pulled by a team of oxen. To remedy this, his parents used a raft, which rocked him in his sleep. This created large waves, that sank many ships.

Paul grew to be about the height of 18 feet tall, although his exact height is debated. Regardless, he was so tall that his footsteps would create small ponds and lakes. He once dragged his axe through Arizona and created the Grand Canyon. He stacked rocks on top of each other to put out a fire in Oregon and created Mount Hood. Once he came across a river that looped around on itself, making a circle; so he dug out the inside and created a lake.

As a lumberjack, Bunyan was said to work with his seven axe men. These men were all tall and named Elmer (yes, all of them were named Elmer). Paul's axe was double-sided, too large for any grindstone. Instead, he would roll a rock down a hill and sharpen the blade on that. For breakfast, they used a large skillet. It was so large the cook and crew had to skate on pork rinds to grease the pan.

One winter, it grew cold. Unnaturally cold. So cold the snow turned blue, and they called it the Winter of Blue snow. So cold that fire would freeze, and people's voices froze in mid-air before they could be heard. You had to wait until noon to find out what people were talking about, and even then the conversations might still be frozen. In fact, the Winter of Blue Snow was so cold that many phrases didn't thaw out until spring, and then there was an awful chatter for weeks in the early spring. It was so cold the axemen in Paul's camp grew out their beards and wrapped them around themselves for warmth, cutting them off in the spring and selling the hair to make mattresses.

Well one day Paul went out into the knee-deep snow (now keep in mind he's a good 18 feet tall at least) and heard a funny sound. He looked down and around but couldn't see anything. So he listened some more, and walked towards the source of the sound, a mix between a bleat

and a snort, until he came across a little blue ox, hopping around in the snow. It was angry see, cause no matter how high it jumped, it couldn't see above the snow fall.

So Paul took the ox home, named it Babe the Blue Ox, and raised it until it grew to massive proportions. It was said that forty-two axe handles and a plug of tobacco could fit between its eyes. For reference, that's approximately 125 feet, or 42 yards, or almost half the length of a football field.

And here we go again with the examples of just how massively disproportionate this ox was to the world. When Babe got an itch, it had to use an entire mountain or cliff face because no tree was strong enough. Every time Babe, the Blue Ox needed new shoes, they had to open up a new iron mine, because recycling hadn't been invented back then apparently. The ox ate thirty bales of hay just for breakfast, including the wire, so six men had to use pickaroons (a tool for moving cut logs) to clean Babe's teeth each morning. And after that, the ox would go eat a ton of grain for lunch. Not like a ton as in "a lot of grain," a ton as in a metric ton: two thousand pounds.

For all the food the ox ate though, he was a tremendous help around camp. Babe was used to straighten roads, pull tank wagons, and haul logs. Of course, this was easier to do in the winter, so in the summer Paul had to paint the logging roads white. Somewhat unrelated, there was also a large purple cow named Lucy. In the winter, it would sometimes get so cold her milk turned to ice cream as it hit the pail. She only ate grass that was green, so to remedy this in the winter, Paul asked the clerk, Johnny Inkslinger, to create green glasses so as to make the snow look like grass.

Lucy is often mixed up with another of Paul's critters: Bessie, the Yeller Cow. One day, Babe was hauling logs along the road. It was a hot summer day, and as you can imagine, the perfect conditions for a heated romance. So when Babe looked to his side and saw a pretty yeller calf grazing in the field, he stepped right on over to introduce himself. Bessie was, of course, massive in size. She produced so much dairy that they were able to make enough butter to fully grease the giant pancake griddle and have enough left over to butter the toast. Paul would save any leftover butter for the summer, where he would then use it to grease the timber trails to make it easier for Babe to transport lumber.

Now here's where the stories merge a bit. Bessie, just like Lucy, loved the summer and hated the winter. So Paul had Johnny Inkslinger make green glasses so the snow was green.

There may have been two cows that had green glasses, or it's possible that Lucy and Bessie are the same and just came from different tellings of the tale.

Now, there was a river that wound and twisted about. It was a troublesome river, as it would rear up and make a terrible whistling sound every day. It was appropriately named: The Whistling River. Because of how winding it was, the logs from the loggers didn't go down the river as they're supposed to; instead getting stuck in terrible whirlpools. Sometimes the river would take the logs and tie them into knots, and break apart rafts.

One day, Paul Bunyan was sitting by this river, combing his beard. If there's one thing to know about lumberjacks, it is to not mess with their beards. Well either the river didn't have this piece of knowledge, or (and more likely) was so troublesome a river that it wanted to upset Paul. Regardless, it threw an oddly-specific four hundred and nineteen gallons of water in Paul's beard. Not just water, but muddy water filled with twigs and debris.

Well, Paul's a nice guy, a gentle giant. While this upset him, he was willing to assume the river had just been blown by the wind, or was just having a rough day and needed to get some mud out of its bends. So he shakes the water from his beard and goes back to grooming, thinking that if he ignores the situation, it would leave him alone. Well, just as Nazi Germany didn't leave anyone alone, the river didn't leave Paul alone. It reared up to a fearsome two hundred feet and spat five thousand and nineteen gallons of water into Paul's beard this time. And not only muddy water, but the fish, turtles, and muskrats too.

This angered Paul, and an angry lumberjack is not to be taken lightly. He decides he's going to show the river who's boss, and tame it. However, he didn't know how. So he sat down and began to think. All of that thinking made him hungry though, so he popped some popcorn and ate and thought. He did this continuously for four days, and soon the air and ground was filled with popcorn scraps for miles around. By the end, the scraps towered eighteen inches tall. This flurry of white popcorn scraps caused several animals to think it was a blizzard, and they froze to death. This of course was the best situation for the loggers, who not only had popcorn for days, but also pot pies for days.

Paul came to the conclusion that the river needed to be set straight, to straighten up and fly right as it were. So Paul goes out into the North Pole with Babe, and sets a trap for blizzards, using boxes and icicles. Instead of waiting in the cold though, he took a few glaciers and started to play fetch with the ox. This had to stop though cause they wound up flooding Florida.

Anyway, when Paul went back to check on his blizzard traps, he finds he's caught a whopping five blizzards and one nor'wester. He released four, and brought two of them back to the river, using them to freeze up the disrespectful Whistling River overnight. In the morning, Paul hitched the foot of the frozen Whistling River to Babe, wrapping the chain seventy-two times, and shouted for Babe to pull! Babe pulled and pulled, sinking knee-deep into solid rock, yet the river refused to move. So Paul grabbed the chain, and with his ox, pulled the river from its banks unpleasantly fast. They dragged that river through the prairie at such a speed the prairie started smoking.

Now that the Whistling River was straight however, it became salty (not literally) and refused to whistle. Naturally, this made everyone angry at Paul, for now how were they to know when to wake up in the morning? This was before roosters were invented. Well Paul might've been in some real trouble however a man showed up conveniently named Squeaky Swanson. When Squeaky Swanson yelled, you could hear his voice all the way from Maine to Kansas. His voice was so loud that he'd lift the blankets from beds. So they made Squeaky Swanson the CEO of waking up at the crack of dawn to wake everyone else up at the crack of dawn by yelling really loud.

A few smaller tales from Paul Bunyan's life. Paul was known to partner with giant ants. These ants were 2,000 pounds in weight and helped out with logging operations. Once, a swarm of large mosquitoes invaded Paul's camp. The men had to fight them off with axes and pikes, so Paul brought in large bees in hopes they would destroy the mosquitoes. They did the exact opposite, and bred the mosquitoes, creating a swarm of giant mosquito bees. Giant. Mosquito-Bees. Their ultimate downfall was their craving for sweet things. Sensing a ship carrying sugar, the swarm swarmed off and attacked the ship, and then drowned because they ate so much. The bugs that did manage to make it back to camp, and then died from sugar comas, provided sugar for Paul's camp. They then used the dead mosquitos to drill holes in maple trees.

Sourdough Sam was the cook that fed Paul's logging crews, and made everything with sourdough, except coffee of course. He only had one leg and one arm, on account of a sourdough barrel exploding, however he could still make a mean bowl of soup. Once, a team of oxen pulling pork and beans across a frozen lake fell in. Sam built fires around the shore, bringing the lake to a boil, and turned the lake into a delicious bean soup with ox-tail flavor. *[Music]*

Paul Bunyan
Analysis

The story of Paul Bunyan exemplifies the American spirit in numerous ways. From logging operations and lumberjacks to the idea of the “big man” myths, the larger-than-life icons of American lore, Bunyan’s stories have been passed down and popularized in our nation’s identity.

We’ll start with examining the logging industry in America, specifically on a historical basis. It’s hard not to look at America and dismiss the great logging operations of the 1800’s and early 1900’s. Today’s America was started on logging operations, as we were once the world’s logging capitol, especially during the first half of the 19th century. To give some numbers, Wisconsin’s board feet production in lumber was an estimated 200 million in 1853, rising up to nearly 1.25 billion in 1873.

Logging operations expanded North/West as our country developed, hand-in-hand with our concept of Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny was a 19th-century belief that the Western expansion of the United States was justified through God, and inevitable. With the advent of trains, wood harvest was able to increase and expand into areas without major waterways. This created frenzy created an aura about lumber of a limitless supply, with railways revolutionizing lumber movement.

This was where the golden age of logging in America began. By 1887, there was around 850 miles of railway in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, the large lumber states. Unfortunately, most of our early logging operations were devastating on the land as loggers chopped down every tree for wood. “Logging operations were rapid and left little time for cleanup, sometimes leaving nearby communities in harm’s way” (John Patrick Harty). This aided in an increase to fire danger, as timber waste littered the ground, easily-flammable especially in dry conditions.

Serena, by Ron Rash, and published in 2008, has a well-described chapter of the end of a 1930’s logging operation out in North Carolina. It is as follows:

Chapter 35:

It was Snipes' crew who cut the last tree. When a thirty-foot hickory succumbed to Ross and Henryson's cross-cut saw, the valley and ridges resembled the skinned hide of some huge animal. The men gathered their saws and wedges, the blocks and axes and go-devils. They paused a moment, then walked a winding path down Shanty Mountain. It was late October, and the workers' multi-hued overalls appeared woven from the valley's last leaves.

Once on level ground, the men stopped to rest beside Rough Fork Creek before trudging the mile back to camp. Stewart kneeled beside the stream and raised a handful of water to his lips, spit it out. "Tastes like mud."

"Used to be this creek held some of the sweetest water in these parts," Ross said. "The chestnut trees that was up at the spring head give it a taste near sweet as honey."

"Soon you won't find one chestnut in these mountains," Henryson noted, "and there'll be nary a drop of water that sweet again."

For a few moments no one spoke. A flock of goldfinches flew into view, their feathers bright against the valley's floor as they winged southward. They swooped low and the flock contracted, perhaps in memory. For a few seconds they appeared suspended there, then the flock expanded like gold cloth unraveling. They circled the valley once before disappearing over Shanty Mountain, their passage through the charred valley as ephemeral as a candle flame waved over an abyss.

...

Henryson studied the silted stream for a few moments before turning to Ross.

"Used to be thick with trout too, this here stream. There was many a day you and me took our supper from it. Now you'd not catch a knottyhead."

"There was game too," Ross said, "deer and rabbit and coons." "Squirrels and bear and beaver and bobcats," Henryson added. "And panthers," Ross said. "I seen one ten year ago on this very creek, but I'll never see ever a one on it again."

Ross paused and lit his cigarette. He took a deep draw and let the smoke slowly wisp from his mouth. "And I had my part in the doing of it."

"We had to feed our families," Henryson said.

"Yes, we did," Ross agreed. "What I'm wondering is how we'll feed them once all the trees is cut and the jobs leave."

"At least what critters are left have a place they can run to," Henryson said.

"The park, you mean?" Stewart asked.

"Yes sir. Trouble is they ain't going to let us stay in there with them."

"They told my uncle over on Horsetrough Ridge he's got to be off his land by next spring," Stewart said, "and he's farther on the North Carolina side than us standing right here."

"Running folks out so you can run the critters in," Ross said. "That's a hell of a thing."

...

Stewart looked at McIntyre. "What do you think, Preacher? "

The others turned to McIntyre, not expecting him to reply but to see if any acknowledgment he'd been addressed crossed the man's face. McIntyre raised his eyes and contemplated the wasteland strewn out before him where not a single live thing rose. The other men also looked out on what was in part their handiwork and grew silent. When McIntyre spoke his voice had no stridency, only a solemnity so profound and humble all grew attentive.

"I think this is what the end of the world will be like," McIntyre said, and none among them raised his voice to disagree.

For another visual, all one needs is to look to Dr. Seuss's "The Lorax," which also describes a corporation devastating a vibrant forest in exchange for money and product. It should probably be noted that the message of "The Lorax" has been slightly misinterpreted over time. Proper forest management does require the thinning of trees (by fire, logging, or chemical means).

The improper maintenance and care of forests in America has lived on the extremes. On one hand, we have the corporations much like the ones portrayed by Seuss and Rash, causing massive deforestation. And on the other, a complete oversensitivity to human interference. This occurs in our national parks, where policies such as the 10 am policy mandated all fires be put out before 10 am the following day, exist. There are very strict regulations regarding the cutting of any vegetation in a national park, and not enough of a budget to properly manage the lands. The budget has mainly gone, in the most recent years, to fighting mega fires, a result of increased biomass and global warming. It also doesn't help to have gender reveal parties that use explosives.

In recent years, there has not been one summer that has gone without a mega fire. This has caused a large stir in the forestry departments, and has shown some progress of making national discourse. However I would argue most of the fires and their victims are forgotten after a month or so.

This was not always the case. Megafires were rare. Before European settlers invaded, Native Americans would set fire to the forests occasionally, recognizing the importance of fire to a forest's health. For example, fire could be used to increase visibility, clear out unwanted plants, encourage the growth of desirable plants such as blackberries, and to clear land for agriculture. They used the ash in their agriculture, and even had girdling methods (cutting away a ring of bark to stop tree growth). They had started to develop permanent villages, clearing out forests.

It has only been recently that American forestry management techniques have come to embrace Native American methods. Many discussions I've heard from foresters and hotshots on wildfires is the debate on whether to manage wildfires or to manage the forests. The distinction, while seemingly small, could not be greater. At this point in the game, the question of a megafire in America is not if, but when. If one manages a forest, they will be overwhelmed with a megafire. However foresters can use wildfires, directing their path and spread, in order to burn specific and desired areas. It was just two summers ago when I listened to a group of foresters talk about how they used a lightning strike fire to clean up a mountainside.

One of the major issues of Paul Bunyan is his neglect to restore and revive the forest. There are many tall tales depicting him chopping down trees, being the best logger, creating massive landmarks such as the Grand Canyon and Mount Hood; yet none of these are about forest regeneration and health, proper maintenance.

Of course, this can be attributed to the tales circulating in a time when we didn't listen to Native Americans, nor did we really have an understanding of science that the Germans might've had. However the propagation of the tale of Paul Bunyan as it relates to forestry exists as a relic of the golden age of American logging operations, when restrictions were nonexistent, and money was the goal.

It should be noted that in Harty's research paper of Paul Bunyan, he noted the absence of Bunyan from indigenous museums and culture. I would attribute this as well in part to the absence of Bunyan's forest caretaking strategies. While a folk hero of giant proportions and epic deeds, Paul Bunyan simply represents a destructive force, an American legend of carelessness.

This careless, reckless, rough-and-tumble figure can be seen in the depictions of early loggers themselves. Alcohol, specifically beer and whiskey, has become closely associated with the profession, and for good reason. It is well-recorded that lumberjacks drank themselves silly. The men were paid once a month, and to escape the rough conditions of forestry life, would tumble out of the forest for a day or two with their hard-earned wages, spending it all in the bars and saloons.

They were avoided by the townsfolk, being fairly filthy and foul. They would clamber out to the saloons, and when too drunk to stand, would collapse in specially-designated rooms called snake-rooms. As Thomas Whittles wrote in 1912:

“Frank necessity invented the snake-room of the lumber-town saloon...one may not eject drunken men into bitter weather and leave them to freeze. Bartenders and their helpers carry them off to the snake- room when they drop; others stagger in of their own notion and fall upon their reeking fellows. There is no arrangement of the bodies—but a squirming heap of them, from which legs and arms protrude, wherein open-mouthed bearded faces appear in a tangle of contorted limbs.”

However, as always, interpretation is multifaceted. We can take into account the lumberjack pay rate, which was horrendous. Many were unhappy with the conditions of being a logger, as the work and camps were harsh, a test of endurance between man and nature. It is only natural for the common folk to need a central figure. Bunyan is an idealized pastoral, reminiscent of the time when man was more attuned with the natural world.

Digging further into the conditions of the Lumberjack camps and life, it is only a matter of time before one encounters The Industrial Workers of the World strike of 1917 (and of course, what could be more American than a strike between the working class and the proletariat). The demands are reasonable by today's standards, however largely ignored back in the early 1900's. The strikers demanded a twenty-five cent raise per day for all workers, an 8-hour Saturday night shift, an 8-hour Sunday day shift, no work on Sunday nights, shift changes every week, and no reprisals for union activities.

The demands grew, lumberjacks adding a 10-dollar-per-month pay increase, a 9-hour day, clean bedding and sanitary food, and the cleaning of bunkhouses twice a week. Thousands of lumberjacks went on strike as the movement became vilified by the newspapers and company leaders. While conditions bettered slightly, they mostly remained the same, exploited lumberjacks having no other option for work, eventually caving for the marginal improvements.

In the face of these harsh conditions, poems, songs, and stories – art – became a saving grace for the spirits of the men. Such writings were:

“On its banks and right before me
 Stood a pine tree in stately glory.
 The forest king he seemed to be
 He was a noble Big Pine Tree” (Blegen 1975)

It is from these writings, that often depicted the tales of lumberjack life, and specific lore surrounding a particular man, from which many scholars have claimed Paul Bunyan was originated. Many tales are believed to be based on a French-Canadian timberman, Fabian Fournier, a foreman out in Michigan.

In fact, the origin of Paul Bunyan has been fiercely debated, and has often been categorized not as folklore, but fakelore. Many have attributed his creation to the Red River Lumber Company, which launched an ad campaign in the early 1900s. The campaign, headed by William B. Laughead, was spurred in 1916 with an advertising pamphlet “introducing Mr. Paul Bunyan of Westwood, California.” It wasn't effective.

Laughead wrote two volumes of Paul Bunyan tales, taking many liberties with original oral sources. These were for the advertising campaign, and it wasn't until the second volume's

publication that the tales began to stick. The campaign was an enormous success, and is where we got the iconography of Paul Bunyan.

Were this to be true, Paul Bunyan would indeed be considered an example of fakelore, a pseudo-folklore that's been inauthentically manufactured and presented as if authentic. I would argue, were it true that Paul Bunyan was the invention of the lumber company, that what may have started as fakelore, evolved into folklore over time. Not only this, however what is more American than inauthenticity presented as authentic?

The American dream, for example, is presented as an authentic reality that anyone, regardless of their origin or birthing conditions, can attain their success, and upwards mobility is possible for everyone. It is achieved through sacrifice, risk, and hard work. This has, time and time again, been proven untrue for much of Americans. Take for example, the plight of the lumberjacks as recently discussed, in their strike against the lumber companies. They worked hard, sacrificed their own lives (as logging was, and still is, a wildly-unsafe profession), and risked their jobs in order for better working conditions. Yet still, the men received poor treatment and nothing came from their movement.

Not only this, however if we look at the definition of a folklore as an expressive body of culture shared by a group of people, encompassing their traditions, it quickly becomes obvious that Paul Bunyan is not fakelore (at least, not anymore). First, no one can claim copyright over the stories. Second, Bunyan is shared by a vast number of Americans as a part of their cultural identity and remains a relic of real life back in the 1800s/early 1900s.

As it stands, there are many recorded references to Bunyan that predate this advertising campaign, albeit the campaign was what got Bunyan into our culture. In 1893, a reference was published of Paul Bunyan in the Galdwin County Record, stating: "Paul Bunion is getting ready while the water is high to take his drive out." And in 1904, the first recorded story of Paul Bunyan appeared in the Duluth News Tribune: "Caught on the Run."

"In spite of a great deal of talk about the decline of the great American Lumber Jack he remains much the same jolly picturesque individual that he was in days gone by. His language, his jokes and his apparel are a never ending source of amusement to those who have not grown accustomed to his ways.

If the firm for which he works fails to suit his taste in the matter of food, blankets or length of the work day, the luckless capitalists are immediately classified as being "gunnysack," haywire" or "lard can."

His pet joke and the one with which the green horn at the camp is sure to be tried, consists of a series of imaginative tales about the year Paul Bunyan lumbered in North Dakota. The great Paul is represented as getting out countless millions of timber in the year of the "blue snow." The men's shanty in his camp covered a half section, and the mess camp was a stupendous affair. The range on which an army of cookees prepared the beans and "red horse" was so long that when the cook wanted to grease it up for the purpose of baking the wheat cakes in the morning, they strapped two large hams to his feet and started him running up and down a half mile of black glistening stove top."

Paul Bunyan and his stories belong to the people, as you can't claim ownership or copyright of a folktale. He has appeared in many books with their own takes on his life, and many adaptations exist. For example, he's made appearances in two Marvel comics helping Captain America. Benjamin Britten wrote an opera about Paul. Disney animated his tale as a part of his American Legends series. It was presented, in technicolor, in 1958.

What's interesting about Disney's version of Paul Bunyan is the ending tale, which goes: One day, a salesman arrived at Paul's camp with a machine that he claimed could cut timber faster and better than any man alive. This was the new steam-powered saw that could fell trees faster than even Paul Bunyan. Along with this new saw, the steam engine railroad was also being built that would be able to haul timber faster than any river or animal, even Babe the blue ox. Well of course this enraged Paul, who promptly challenged the salesman to a tree-cutting contest. For an hour, the steam saw felled tree after tree. For an hour, Paul Bunyan swung his trusty axe. For an hour, the steam engine huffed and puffed, racing against Babe to haul the fresh-cut logs into piles. At the end, there was no clear winner: both piles looked just the same height. So they had to measure the piles. It was declared that Paul's stack was a whopping 240 even feet tall. And as for the salesman's, the pile measured 240 feet and 1 inch, thus proving the machine mightier than even the mightiest of men. Paul and Babe solemnly trudged away, where it is rumored they still play around in the arctic snow.

Unfortunately for Disney, which already has a huge track record for whitewashing and other such bad habits in their storytelling, this tale is not canonical in the original Paul Bunyan stories. I have scoured the internet, and even consulted Harty's graduate dissertation, and have found no evidence of this story belonging to Paul Bunyan. What I did find, however, were very stark similarities to another myth and legend that challenged the railway and steam engines: John Henry. It's a well known fact that John Henry was black, and Paul Bunyan has always been depicted as white. Even giving the benefit of the doubt that Bunyan could possibly be a black man, the etymology of his last name is Quebecois, French. The tale of Paul Bunyan against the steam engine is an appropriated creation from Disney.

We will explore this later when we tell the folklore of John Henry. However it should be noted that the idea behind man vs machine is an extremely prevalent theme in American culture. It certainly tracks that the myth is appropriate for the time and myth, as (as mentioned earlier) the railway had just began to spring up; and if there is one thing the railway is notorious for, it is screwing over the lives of Americans. But again, we'll explore these themes in John Henry's tale.

The last facet to draw our attention upon from Paul Bunyan's tales is the idea of "The Big Man" myth. This is the idea of a singular man being highly influential; has recognition through skill, expertise, and/or wisdom; and acts as a provider of sorts to his followers which in turn, increases his status. It's a very individualistic idea, and one that Paul Bunyan has come to represent, especially in the image of masculinity.

Our society was founded upon principals of men, for men, and as such our folklore reflects these cultural values. Paul Bunyan is a man with great power. An individual that rises and is greater than any other. We see these values praised in our society, with works from Ayn Rand to The Matrix to Batman to Raging Bull; and even our history with people being individual leaders of large movements. We see this with Martin Luther King and Malcom X, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, Graham Bell and Albert Einstein.

As a society, we place the cumulative efforts of the collective on the shoulders of one individual time and time again, when it is well-known that movements cannot happen without a population, science cannot happen without the work of others (and certainly our well-renowned scientists have stolen the achievements of others). Paul Bunyan is an example of one man

shaping American soil. One man solving a problem. One man representing a whole culture of lumberjacks and the golden age of lumber.

It is not, per-say, a bad thing. However it is right that – especially in this postmodern era when full mounted attacks are the work of hundreds to thousands to hundreds of thousands and millions of individual people – we question the big man myth’s place in society. For example, take the recent attack on hedge funds by redditors. Take insurgency warrefare. These are not the campaigns of one individual, but a collective effort of the masses working to topple powerful organizations.

In a time when many Americans have rallied around one president as their lord and savior, above any moral obligation and certainly above any national obligation, the myth of big men should be analyzed more, and taken with grains of salt. Perhaps, it may even be time to discard these folktales that propagate the myth of individual greatness for tales of community.

[Music]

Approximated time – 50 min to 1 hour

Big Rock Candy Mountain
Billy Mack, Harry McClintock

Who's ready for a song?

*One evening as the sun went down
And the jungle fire was burning
Down the track came a hobo hiking
And he said, "Boys, I'm not turning"
"I'm headed for a land that's far away
Besides the crystal fountains
So come with me, we'll go and see
The Big Rock Candy Mountains"*

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
There's a land that's fair and bright
Where the handouts grow on bushes
And you sleep out every night
Where the boxcars all are empty
And the sun shines every day
And the birds and the bees
And the cigarette trees
The lemonade springs
Where the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains*

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
All the cops have wooden legs
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth
And the hens lay soft-boiled eggs
The farmers' trees are full of fruit
And the barns are full of hay
Oh, I'm bound to go
Where there ain't no snow
Where the rain don't fall
The winds don't blow
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains*

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks
And the little streams of alcohol
Come trickling down the rocks
The brakemen have to tip their hats
And the railway bulls are blind*

*There's a lake of stew
And of whiskey too
You can paddle all around it
In a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains*

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
The jails are made of tin
And you can walk right out again
As soon as you are in
There ain't no short-handled shovels
No axes, saws nor picks
I'm goin' to stay
Where you sleep all day
Where they hung the jerk
That invented work
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains*

*I'll see you all this coming fall
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains*

That's a cute little song isn't it? The lyrics themselves are about an enticing life out in the Big Rock Candy Mountains where there exists a paradise. The hobo sings about the thrill of life out in the open, free from society and responsibilities. No work, no jails, free food and lemonade and whiskey. Sounds like a great time, right?

Wrong. It's more like the tale of Hansel and Gretel, where the song writer are the kids, the hobo is the witch, and the song is the gingerbread candy house. The song was originally sung to warn children of the dangers of "jockers," predatory hobos who would lure boys out with food, protection, and booze in exchange for sex.

The last stanza has been rewritten and sanitized out of popularity by McClintock himself, and goes something like:

*The punk rolled up his big blue eyes
And said to the jocker, "Sandy,
I've hiked and hiked and wandered too,
But I ain't seen any candy.
I've hiked 'till my feet are sore
I'll be God damned if I hike any more*

*To be buggered sore like a hobo's whore
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.*

The exact lines are questionable, as McClintock never recorded the adult version of “Big Rock Candy Mountain,” and was notorious for claiming validity to several versions of the song, which he may or may not have actually penned (he also cleaned up a lot of the alcohol references for the radio to make it kid-friendly).

And, as with Woodie Guthrie’s “This Land,” the copyright is in question, although this one a bit more protected. While the courts have ruled the song traditional, and in the public domain, McClintock’s ownership has mostly prevailed, and his heirs are more than willing to protect the “rights.” There do exist two other versions published before McClintock’s version: “The Appleknocker’s Lament” by Marshall Locke and Charles Tyner in 1906, and “An Invitation to Lubberland,” an English ballad first appearing in the late 1600’s.

Beyond the hidden hobo meaning, however, “Big Rock Candy Mountain” can be analyzed in a few notable ways. Specifically, we will be looking at the song through Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road*, and the 2008 YouTube classic “Charlie the Unicorn” by FilmCow.

Of the most famous books in the beat generation, *On The Road*, stands out for its complex narrative of Sal and Dean Moriarty’s trek across the United States after World War II. It describes the lure of the road, and the compelling nature of Dean Moriarty, a wild and eccentric character who’s travels on the open road promise freedom. Note Dean’s description in the very first paragraph of the book:

I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won’t bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I’d often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. First reports of him came to me through Chad King, who’d shown me a few letters from him

written in a New Mexico reform school. I was tremendously interested in the letters because they so naively and sweetly asked Chad to teach him all about Nietzsche and all the wonderful intellectual things that Chad knew. At one point Carlo and I talked about the letters and wondered if we would ever meet the strange Dean Moriarty. This is all far back, when Dean was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery. Then news came that Dean was out of reform school and was coming to New York for the first time; also there was talk that he had just married a girl called Marylou.

Dean is described as mysterious, an exciting person who is perfect for exploring the road. And explore the open road of the US they do, even taking a break out into Mexico. What makes the trip compelling is Sal's search for freedom and meaning, to get away from his life, where he follows Dean out from his home. Through the book, Sal continuously follows Dean out into the West on the road, and each time ends the journey in shambles.

This is perfectly exemplified in Part Three when, in order to obtain free travel, Sal and Dean drive a Cadillac from Denver to Chicago for a travel bureau. Dean is allowed to drive most of the way, in which he drives in a reckless fashion. At the end of the drive, the once pristine Cadillac is in such a state that the owner doesn't even recognize it.

This look at the excitement and lure of the open road is shown to be promising and bright, much like the playful promises of "Big Rock Candy Mountain." However, just as in the warning of the original tune, *On The Road* delivers a harrowing message of ruin at the hands of such mysteries. The treachery of the hobo can even be seen in Dean, who constantly abandons Sal out in the middle of nowhere, even leaving him during a bout of serious illness.

Much can be said about the deeper implications of this. A few that come to mind are the idea of the government luring out young men to go to war, whereby they are promptly deserted either in dire situations, or as veterans back home. The idea of the great American dream that lures us into the notion of greatness and success, but so often leaves one destitute on the road – although the song can itself be looked at as a cautionary tale to follow the American Dream and work hard, and that no lunch is free.

The most important part of Kerouac's book is the ending:

Dean stood outside the windows with his bag, ready to go to Penn Station and on across the land.

“Good-by, Dean,” I said. “I sure wish I didn’t have to go to the concert.”

“D’you think I can ride to Fortieth Street with you?” he whispered. “Want to be with you as much as possible, m’boy, and besides it’s so durned cold in this here New Yawk ...” I whispered to Remi. No, he wouldn’t have it, he liked me but he didn’t like my idiot friends. I wasn’t going to start all over again ruining his planned evenings as I had done at Alfred’s in San Francisco in 1947 with Roland Major.

“Absolutely out of the question, Sal!” Poor Remi, he had a special necktie made for this evening; on it was painted a replica of the concert tickets, and the names Sal and Laura and Remi and Vicki, the girl, together with a series of sad jokes and some of his favorite sayings such as “You can’t teach the old maestro a new tune.”

So Dean couldn’t ride uptown with us and the only thing I could do was sit in the back of the Cadillac and wave at him. The bookie at the wheel also wanted nothing to do with Dean. Dean, ragged in a moth-eaten overcoat he brought specially for the freezing temperatures of the East, walked off alone, and the last I saw of him he rounded the corner of Seventh Avenue, eyes on the street ahead, and bent to it again. Poor little Laura, my baby, to whom I’d told everything about Dean, began almost to cry.

“Oh, we shouldn’t let him go like this. What’ll we do?” Old Dean’s gone, I thought, and out loud I said, “He’ll be all right.” And off we went to the sad and disinclined concert for which I had no stomach whatever and all the time I was thinking of Dean and how he got back on the train and rode over three thousand miles over that awful land and never knew why he had come anyway, except to see me.

So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by

now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars'll be out, and don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty.

The question we must ask ourselves, that this book has asked of us, and that “Big Rock Candy Mountain” asks of us, is where is our freedom? Can we recognize the folly in the open road? Can we learn from the past and turn away from the dazzling lies no matter how enticing?

Which brings us to our next analysis: “Charlie the Unicorn.” The first “Charlie the Unicorn” was originally published on Newgrounds, and later distributed on YouTube in 2006, and officially re-uploaded on FilmCow’s channel in 2008. The animated Flash short is a direct adaptation of “Big Rock Candy Mountain.”

[“Charlie The Unicorn” can be played in its entirety, or the following description can be read:]

It’s about Charlie, a lethargic unicorn who is led to the mythical Candy Mountain by two gender-ambiguous unicorns: Lolz (blue) and Roffle (pink). Once there, Charlie is surprised to find Candy Mountain does indeed exist, and is guarded by singing letters that later explode. Once inside the mound of candy, Lolz and Roffle lock him in. Charlie wakes up with a side wound, stating that Lolz and Roffle had stolen his liver.

[End description.]

That should sound pretty familiar, although the animated adaptation was once again cleaned up to be PG and kid-friendly. Charlie plays the fool to Roffle and Lolz’s hobo. It’s interesting to note that Roffle and Lolz seem to do this for fun, and not just to Charlie. In

“Charlie the Unicorn 4,” where Charlie follows the two unicorns out to the moon to fight a millipede. Once the millipede blows up, Lolz and Roffle lead Charlie into a cavern where a bomb is about to explode, and subsequently leave him stranded on the moon. On Earth, Lolz asks “ok who’s next” to Roffle, implying Charlie was only one victim.

These fun little videos are a great way to reincarnate an old folksong, especially on a medium that promises a great deal of fame and glory to literally anyone: the internet. I could go on an entire tangent on the rise of YouTube and algorithms and such and such, but I’ve already written an essay on this for a media textbook and it can be found on my website.

However it is to be said that modern fame in the hands of the everyday person, when any old video could become the next meme, or trend, offers us a compelling life of bedazzlement and attention. The problem with most of this is as Robert Frost wrote, and SpongeBob famously quoted: “Nothing gold can stay.” Viral videos circulate in less than a week, and videos created off of these are considered trends. Trends are often quick, usually lasting no more than a month at top. More sustainable trends turn into memes, but these are few and far between. Take for example, the first month of 2021 TIKTok trends (this list is generated off of my personal TikTok feed, and is biased based on user data).

1. “WHATS POPPIN”
2. #Welcome2021
3. “What’s a video that lives in your head rent free?”
 - a. And subsequent trends
4. Capitol coup
5. “I can’t talk right now, I’m doing [insert action]”
6. “The Wellerman” and sea chanties
7. The Woodchuck song
8. The Woodchuck Rebellion of 2021
9. Time Warp Waterfall

And that’s just up to January 15.

The idea of “whoring yourself out” has become a means to gain more views, with men and women appearing more scantily-clad than a 1950’s film would ever allow. More and more, it’s becoming acceptable to share venmo information, some users even creating onlyfans accounts to sell images of their body.

Just like the song, the internet has become a place where fame and fortune can come at a high price, even if the cultural norms have shifted. We could also look at the wage disparity, and the widening wealth gap between the working class and the ultra-rich, as a cause for this new business trend to rise. It makes sense that kids, especially Gen-Zers who are facing terrible odds in the traditional workforce, are turning to their own private business to generate income.

While the older generations may cast scorn at this, not only are a great deal of Gen-Zers aware of this trend and the forces behind it, but have expressed meta jokes on sympathies that should be extended in the future. The concept of a digital footprint for the future generations will be less about the silly and light-hearted content of trends, and more damning of harmful and ignorant thoughts shared with the public.

A recognition that change is human, and the merit that all people are capable of change, is starting to emerge and spread rapidly (take for instance the NBC comedy *The Good Place*). For all intents and purposes, the reorganization of the status quo that a person's past actions define them becomes less of a law, and the recognition that present actions are the more important deeds of humanity.

John Henry
Story

It was said John Henry was born with a hammer in his hand. It was said he was the strongest and most powerful man working the rails. Yes sir, it was said no man could match his speed and strength. John Henry was a steel-drivin' man.

When he was freed from slavery, John Henry found a job where most freed slaves and convicts could find work: the railway. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, drilling holes in the West Virginia mountains. Now back in the day, steel driving was done with one man hammering at a steel drill, while the other man held the drill in place and turned it after each strike. Some say the weight of the hammers were nine pounds, others say ten, still others will say John Henry wielded a twenty-pound hammer.

With John Henry, the new railway was built quickly; that is until one day when the workers came across Big Bend Mountain. This mountain was a mile and a quarter thick, practically the length of 665 football fields, and the men had orders from the C&O railway to go straight through. Without much choice, the men began to drill through the mountain; John Henry working tirelessly, sometimes going 12 feet in one work day. That's 4 yards, or 1/25th the length of a football field.

Dust rose so thick you couldn't tell day from night, and one could hardly breathe. A thousand men died in the process. Yet it was said John Henry kept going, hammering away with his twenty-pound hammer; year after year

One day, a salesman came along the railroad camp with a steam-powered drill. He claimed that this new drill could out-drill any man, even John Henry. Well that didn't sit too well with John, so he challenged the salesman to a competition.

So the next day they went out to compete. The salesman powered up the steam drill. John Henry pulled out two twenty-pound hammers, one in each hand. And they were off. John Henry pounded on the drill, kicking up so much dust no one could see him. The drill also created so much dust no one could see its progress. But at the end of an hour, there was a clear winner. The steam drill had drilled a nine foot hole directly into the mountain, while John Henry had drilled two seven feet holes.

The spectators clamored around John, who held his hammers up in triumph as the men shouted and cheered. And then he died, crashing to the ground with a deadly weight of silence. He had worked so hard that he gave himself a stroke. And with that, the greatest driller in the C&O railroad was dead.

It is said his ghost haunts the tunnels, occasionally causing the tunnel to collapse (although the mountain is made out of Red Shale). And it is said his likeness is carved into the rock of Big Bend Tunnel, and you can hear the sound of his two twenty-pound hammers still to this day.

Analysis

A great deal of American history and even Americana can be attributed to this singular story of John Henry. The industrialization of prison labor as a reformed version of slavery, the railway monopolies and labor laws, as well as naturalism or realism in American fiction.

One cannot talk about John Henry without talking about African American history in the United States. For one, John Henry was a freed slave, who was worked to death by the railway companies. The railway monopolies of the late 1800s and 1900s were notoriously exploitative in their employee wages, and lack of care for employee safety. If being a slave was hard labor, obedience, lack of freedom, and the fear of death from their oppressors; then these jobs on the railway offered no better.

To start in the Civil War era, the reason African Americans were employed by the railroads was their willingness to do so in the absence of their white, male counterparts. Non-combative labor was seen as unmanly, however without the railroads, the Civil War would not have been won. The railroad offered Lincoln quick mobility and maneuverability in the war, which meant the North could always be on the initiative, rather than the defensive. At the end of the war, it is estimated that some 200 thousand former slaves were working on the railroad, providing the invaluable physical labor. The railroads, especially the ones in the Eastern states, were almost entirely built by former African American slave workers (male and female). Some railroad networks even owned slaves which they exploited in the road's construction.

Building the railroads was a dangerous feat. Strictly looking at John Henry's story, the only way to drill through a mountain is to kick up great clouds of dust. This caused silicosis, a condition where the lungs are attacked by the continued breathing in of dust or particles. It has been described as drowning in slow motion. An approximate 80 percent of workers became ill, died, or walked off the job within a six-month starting period. Thousands of workers died in John Henry's tale, and we can assume they died from injuries sustained on the job, collapsed tunnels, but mostly from silicosis. When these workers died, railroad companies would quickly change the cause of death in order to claim that few, if any, died from silicosis in railway tunnels.

Beyond silicosis, conditions offered plenty of opportunities for injuries to body parts. From 1911 to 1915, a total of 4,000 accidents have been reported in a new database as of 2018. It

is estimated that in 1889, one in every thirty-five railway workers was injured each year. The closer the proximity of work to an actual train car would increase this rate.

Black workers were denied their worker's rights such as 30-minute breaks in clean air, sick leave (reports of workers being forced into tunnels at gun-point are numerous), and anonymity in death. African American workers were buried in unmarked graves, and death notices were rarely sent to families.

In these conditions, it is easy to see just how minimal progress was for African Americans after the Civil War. Railroad work was hard labor. They were penalized for lack of obedience, which meant they had very little freedom or agency. Note the way in which the C&O railway could have gone around Big Bend Mountain, however forced the workers to go through it or they'd find other workers who would (this is also an example of how the railway companies disregarded employee safety, not only forcing more workers to die, but also drilling through red shale, which isn't a very stable rock). The fear of death is more metaphorical in this sense, with the anonymity of death. Many families will most likely never know where their members were, or if they were ok. This nameless death adds a lot of amnesia to our collective history: if records don't exist, who's to say it actually happened?

In modern America, the conditions are slightly better. However racism in workers' rights, and slavery, are still present. Racism still exists in labor laws, for example: the restaurant industry and the tip system.

As it stands, employers are only required to pay 2 dollars and 13 cents an hour, if their workers get tips enough to equal the minimum wage. If the tips don't compensate for the sub-minimum wage, employers are required to make up the difference, however many do not. While this alone is an unfortunate reality we live in, it does get worse, especially when we examine where these policies came from, and modern statistics of race and gender of the people working under these conditions.

Tipping originated out in Europe, and was brought back by upper-class Americans, eager to appear sophisticated. The practice however, soon devolved into a way to avoid paying formerly-enslaved workers a competitive wage equal to that of their white counterparts. This, of course, spread rapidly post-Civil-War, and was largely present in the hospitality industry.

A 1902 journalist, John Speed, wrote that black people "take tips, of course; one expects that of them – it is a token of their inferiority." From this quote, the arcane mindset becomes

clear, that a tipping system is given no thought when used with African Americans, but is never to be used with white Americans. It becomes clear that the tipping system is a product of white supremacy in America.

Tipping itself goes against American principles. As William Scott writes: “A citizen in a republic ought to stand shoulder to shoulder with every other citizen, with no thought of cringing, without an assumption of superiority or an acknowledgement of inferiority.” Tipping creates a superiority complex in America, that allows the privileged to take advantage of other people. To wield money as their faith system, doling out tips only to those who they deem worthy, much like religions have allowed for the exploitation of humanity over the years (think of Indulgences prescribed by the Catholic church). The tipping system allows employees to place a lesser value on human life, which is problematic when we recall the law that declared black people as only 3/5ths of a person.

We can see the effects of the tipping system today with testimonials and studies. First, studies convey that 70 percent of restaurant workers are women, and a disproportionate number of these workers are black and brown. The mentality has arisen that tipping is only reserved for prompt and excellent service. However this is extremely not the case. For black women, tips are lower than their white male counterparts on a national average. This can also be attributed to racism in the employment hiring processes, where fine dining will be more likely to hire white men, and casual restaurants, women of colour. In a sense, the effects of segregation continue.

In the pandemic, maskual harassment occurs, in which male customers demand women servers take off their masks to judge their faces in order to base their tips off of looks. While this might appear alarming for a number of us, take a recent comment posted in a Facebook group on February 6, 2021: “Tips are meant for service not just for bringing food and beverages... I will tip 5% the service sucked to 10% doing a little better than just your job. 20% for excellent job... an extra 3.5% if she is good looking...” (Rob Schmidlkofer). Already down 50, even 75 percent, low tips are becoming even more demeaning to workers of colour, and female workers (which it should be noted, are also still working their way to equality).

America is asking restaurant workers to give performances valued at basic minimum for any other human worker, while paying them pennies on the dollar. In fact, tipping is a terrible incentive for performance in servers. In many respects, this is not just poor labor laws, but is a form of slavery reincarnated.

Moving to a more concrete look at how slavery has shifted and been reconstructed, one need look no further than the criminal justice system, specifically the way in which we use prison labor.

The Thirteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution is possibly one of the more powerful Amendments to exist. “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime wherof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” That’s powerful: that’s abolished the legal practice of slavery in the United States.

But there’s a loophole in this sentence, and that is the part where slavery is legal as punishment for crime. The formal definition of “slave” is “a person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them.” By definition of the Thirteenth Amendment, any person who has committed a crime in the US can be put into slavery by the US government, meaning that the US government legally owns the lives of the prisoners, and the prisoners are forced to obey them.

Looking at numbers from a 2019 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were one million, four-hundred-and-thirty thousand, eight hundred, and five US citizens under state or federal jurisdiction. That is one million, four-hundred-and-thirty thousand, eight hundred, and five US citizens that are property of the United States, and legally slaves. Even if this analysis chose to ignore race, that’s a lot of American citizens in slavery, and to make matters worse, the US has the highest prisoner rate in the world, with a total of 655 prisoners per 100,000 citizens.

And we use those prisoners for labor, where inmates make only 90 cents to \$4 per day (an average of \$7.80 in NYC where minimum wage is higher). At a \$2.25 per-day salary after taxes, inmates are left with a total of \$54 dollars a month, which are eaten by necessities such as deodorant, a phone call to loved ones, and even food. There are no sick days, and prisoners are forced into this labor with little, if any, attention spared to their well-being. To be fair, this labor is technically voluntary. However there are very serious consequences for people who decline: they wind up imprisoned for a much longer time. This should sound familiar to working conditions on the railroad.

It is important to highlight that this labor isn’t just helping out around the kitchen, or cleaning duties. A few corporations major corporations that benefit from this labor are our common giants: McDonalds, Wal-Mart, Starbucks, Sprint and Verizon, even airlines and car

rental companies. Just recently, it was brought to light that at least 20 states across the United States were using prison labor to manufacture medical essentials, specifically hand sanitizer, in order to combat the Coronavirus and the price gouging/shortage of such medical equipment in the initial frenzy.

In a for-profit society based around capitalism and cheap labor, this model works really well to increase profits. It's a fairly grim reality of the continued existence of slavery in America. It gets worse when one starts to look at race statistics.

In 2019, there were 452,800 black prisoners and 422,800 white prisoners. This may seem like an even ratio statistic, however the prisoners-by-number stats are misleading to the real issue. As a percentage, .1688% of white Americans are imprisoned, while 1.0295% of black Americans are imprisoned, an approximate 600% difference of black Americans to white. To reiterate the problem in different terms, for every one million white American citizens, an approximate 2,114 are legal slaves; while for every one million black Americans, an approximate 11,320 are slaves.

The disproportionate numbers show that there are more black people being arrested and condemned to slavery than white people. This is evident in our history of racism in the police force and justice system; with judges and cops alike allowing prejudice and racial bias influence their decision-making. We also have systemic racism in these institutions, allowing for racially-disparate outcomes (no this does not mean *every person* in these systems is racist). A recent article in the Washington Post highlighted several points to show how this system perpetuates an imbalance in racial prosecution, these are select passages from that article:

“Policing and profiling

...the problem with trying to dismiss profiling concerns by noting that higher rates at which some minority groups commit certain crimes is that it overlooks the fact that huge percentages of black and Latino people have been pulled over, stopped on the street and generally harassed despite the fact that they have done nothing wrong. Stop-and-frisk data, for example, consistently show that about 3 percent of these encounters produce any evidence of a crime. So 97 percent-plus of these people are getting punished solely because they belong to a group that statistically commits some crimes at a higher rate.

...

A New York Times examination after the death of George Floyd found that while black people make up 19 percent of the Minneapolis population and 9 percent of its police, they were on the receiving end of 58 percent of the city's police use-of-force incidents.

...

The drug war

Black people are consistently arrested, charged and convicted of drug crimes including possession, distribution and conspiracy at far higher rates than white people. This, despite research showing that both races use and sell drugs at about the same rate.

A 2020 ACLU report found that even in the era of marijuana reform, black people are more than 3½ times more likely to be arrested for marijuana offenses than whites. The report also found that “in every state and in over 95% of counties with more than 30,000 people in which at least 1% of the residents are Black, Black people are arrested at higher rates than white people for marijuana possession.” This, again, despite ample data showing both races use the drug at similar rates.

...

Juries and jury selection

Though the Supreme Court made it illegal for prosecutors to exclude prospective jurors because of race in the 1986 case *Batson v. Kentucky*, that ruling has largely gone unenforced. The New Yorker reported in 2015 that in the approximately 30 years since the ruling, courts have accepted the flimsiest excuses for striking black jurors and that prosecutors have in turn trained subordinates how to strike black jurors without a judicial rebuke. A 2010 report by the Equal Justice Initiative documented cases in which courts upheld prosecutors' dismissal of jurors because of allegedly race-neutral factors such as affiliation with a historically black college, a son in an interracial marriage, living in a black-majority neighborhood or that a juror “shucked and jived.”

...

Judges and sentencing

A 2018 review of academic research found that at nearly all levels of the criminal justice system, “disparities in policing and punishment within the black population along the colour continuum are often comparable to or even exceed disparities between blacks and whites as a whole.” That is, the darker the skin of a black person, the greater the disparity in arrests, charges, conviction rates and sentencing.”

The American judicial system has time and time again shown its roots in racist, slave-owning traditions and culture, and an unwillingness to learn and move beyond this. It is evident in our thirteenth amendment, and the fact we have not rectified the continuance of slavery (albeit in a new form) in America.

In a Ted Talk, Bryan Stevenson talks about the injustice in the American prison system. He says:

“My state of Alabama, like a number of states, actually permanently disenfranchises you if you have a criminal conviction. Right now in Alabama, 34 percent of the Black male population has permanently lost the right to vote. We're actually projecting that in another 10 years, the level of disenfranchisement will be as high as it's been since prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

...

we have in this country this dynamic where we really don't like to talk about our problems. We don't like to talk about our history. And because of that, we really haven't understood what it's meant to do the things we've done historically. We're constantly running into each other. We're constantly creating tensions and conflicts. We have a hard time talking about race, and I believe it's because we are unwilling to commit ourselves to a process of truth and reconciliation. In South Africa, people understood that we couldn't overcome apartheid without a commitment to truth and reconciliation. In Rwanda, even after the genocide, there was this commitment. But in this country, we haven't done that.

I was giving some lectures in Germany about the death penalty. It was fascinating, because one of the scholars stood up after the presentation and said, "Well, you know, it's deeply troubling to hear what you're talking about." He said, "We don't have the death penalty in Germany, and of course, we can never have the death penalty in Germany." And the room got very quiet, and this woman said, "There's no way, with our history, we could ever engage in the systematic killing of human beings. It would be unconscionable for us to, in an intentional and deliberate way, set about executing people." And I thought about that. What would it feel like to be living in a world where the nation-state of Germany was executing people, especially if they were disproportionately Jewish? I couldn't bear it. It would be unconscionable.

And yet, in this country, in the states of the Old South, we execute people - - where you're 11 times more likely to get the death penalty if the victim is white than if the victim is Black, 22 times more likely to get it if the defendant is Black and the victim is white -- in the very states where there are, buried in the ground, the bodies of people who were lynched. And yet, there is this disconnect."

It's extremely important to highlight this issue: that Americans haven't gotten past slavery, and are seemingly-unwilling to confront it in our own home turf, and on a historical level. For so many in America, the folk hero of John Henry doesn't just represent the era just after the Civil War, but is representative of the reformation of slavery, and its continuance (and its disproportionate hold on African Americans) in modern times.

Prisons are supposed to be rehabilitation centers, yet instead we disenfranchise the prisoners, and give them a practical non-existent chance of reintegration into society. The majority are forced into homelessness, taking the lowest-paying jobs just to get basic living conditions and a meal. The wage system in restaurant culture still clings to its history of refusal to pay black people an actual minimum and livable wage. In the great society of America, slavery has gone from strictly a racial issue to an economic crisis.

We will explore slavery in the capitalist society through the lens of farmers, and since this section is based off the tale of John Henry, the steel-driving man, it is only fitting to select the historical era of railroad monopolies through Frank Norris's epic of wheat: *The Octopus*.

The Octopus was published in 1901, and is about the conflicts between the wheat growers (producers) of the San Joaquin Valley, and the railroad monopoly. In the fictional account of an actual historic event, Norris is able to convey a few notable things that are prevalent in the folktale of John Henry: the value of human life to large corporate monopolies and the ultra wealthy,

The degradation of human life by corporations is laid clear through the example of Dyke's story arch. At the start of the novel, he quits his job as a mechanic on the P & S.W. (Pacific and South West) railroad due to unfair treatment in wage cuts. The lack in reciprocation of loyalty and care-taking is outlined at the start:

“Why, what's the matter with railroading?”

Dyke drew a couple of puffs on his pipe, and fixed Presley with a glance.

“There's this the matter with it,” he said; “I'm fired.”

“Fired! You!” exclaimed Presley, turning abruptly toward him. “That's what I'm telling you,” returned Dyke grimly.

“You don't mean it. Why, what for, Dyke?”

“Now, YOU tell me what for,” growled the other savagely. “Boy and man, I've worked for the P. and S. W. for over ten years, and never one yelp of a complaint did I ever hear from them. They know damn well they've not got a steadier man on the road. And more than that, more than that, I don't belong to the Brotherhood. And when the strike came along, I stood by them—stood by the company. You know that. And you know, and they know, that at Sacramento that time, I ran my train according to schedule, with a gun in each hand, never knowing when I was going over a mined culvert, and there was talk of giving me a gold watch at the time. To hell with their gold watches! I want ordinary justice and fair treatment. And now, when hard times come along, and they are cutting wages, what do they do? Do they make any discrimination in my case? Do they remember the man that stood by them and risked his life in their service? No. They cut my pay down just as off-hand as they do the pay of any dirty little wiper in the yard. Cut me along with—listen to this—cut me along with men that they had BLACK-

LISTED; strikers that they took back because they were short of hands.” He drew fiercely on his pipe. “I went to them, yes, I did; I went to the General Office, and ate dirt. I told them I was a family man, and that I didn't see how I was going to get along on the new scale, and I reminded them of my service during the strike. The swine told me that it wouldn't be fair to discriminate in favour of one man, and that the cut must apply to all their employees alike. Fair!” he shouted with laughter. “Fair! Hear the P. and S. W. talking about fairness and discrimination. That's good, that is. Well, I got furious. I was a fool, I suppose. I told them that, in justice to myself, I wouldn't do first-class work for third-class pay. And they said, 'Well, Mr. Dyke, you know what you can do.' Well, I did know. I said, 'I'll ask for my time, if you please,' and they gave it to me just as if they were glad to be shut of me. So there you are, Presley. That's the P. & S. W. Railroad Company of California. I am on my last run now.”

Dyke dedicated his life and soul to the railroad company, especially during a strike, which would've been difficult to face the discrimination of his fellow workers while remaining loyal to his company. His description of sacrifice underlines his part in the continuance of the railroad: he was quite literally the life-blood of the beast. And yet he was unfairly treated when it came to cutting his wages. The job was high risk (as established in the discussion of railway work) and no reward, and manipulation in its use of all the workers to make an example for union activity.

The story continues, as Dyke's fortunes continue to fester under the influence of the railroad as the rates on hops are raised without notice by the company in light of Dyke's shift to growing hops and the increase in demand. Pay close attention to the start of this passage, as it reflects a response from the railroad to the coalition formed by farmers earlier in the novel, in which Dyke had no involvement.

Under his feet the ground seemed mined; down there below him in the dark the huge tentacles went silently twisting and advancing, spreading out in every direction, sapping the strength of all opposition, quiet, gradual, biding the time to reach up and out and grip with a sudden unleashing of gigantic strength.

“I’ll be wanting some cars of you people before the summer is out,” observed Dyke to the clerk as he folded up and put away the order that the other had handed him. He remembered perfectly well that he had arranged the matter of transporting his crop some months before, but his role of proprietor amused him and he liked to busy himself again and again with the details of his undertaking.

“I suppose,” he added, “you’ll be able to give ‘em to me. There’ll be a big wheat crop to move this year and I don’t want to be caught in any car famine.”

“Oh, you’ll get your cars,” murmured the other.

“I’ll be the means of bringing business your way,” Dyke went on; “I’ve done so well with my hops that there are a lot of others going into the business next season. Suppose,” he continued, struck with an idea, “suppose we went into some sort of pool, a sort of shippers’ organisation, could you give us special rates, cheaper rates—say a cent and a half?”

The other looked up.

“A cent and a half! Say FOUR cents and a half and maybe I’ll talk business with you.”

“Four cents and a half,” returned Dyke, “I don’t see it. Why, the regular rate is only two cents.”

“No, it isn’t,” answered the clerk, looking him gravely in the eye, “it’s five cents.”

“Well, there’s where you are wrong, m’son,” Dyke retorted, genially. “You look it up. You’ll find the freight on hops from Bonneville to ‘Frisco is two cents a pound for car load lots. You told me that yourself last fall.”

“That was last fall,” observed the clerk. There was a silence. Dyke shot a glance of suspicion at the other. Then, reassured, he remarked:

“You look it up. You’ll see I’m right.”

S. Behrman came forward and shook hands politely with the ex-engineer.

“Anything I can do for you, Mr. Dyke?”

Dyke explained. When he had done speaking, the clerk turned to S. Behrman and observed, respectfully:

“Our regular rate on hops is five cents.”

“Yes,” answered S. Behrman, pausing to reflect; “yes, Mr. Dyke, that's right—five cents.”

The clerk brought forward a folder of yellow paper and handed it to Dyke. It was inscribed at the top “Tariff Schedule No. 8,” and underneath these words, in brackets, was a smaller inscription, “SUPERSEDES NO. 7 OF AUG. 1”

“See for yourself,” said S. Behrman. He indicated an item under the head of “Miscellany.”

“The following rates for carriage of hops in car load lots,” read Dyke, “take effect June 1, and will remain in force until superseded by a later tariff. Those quoted beyond Stockton are subject to changes in traffic arrangements with carriers by water from that point.”

In the list that was printed below, Dyke saw that the rate for hops between Bonneville or Guadalajara and San Francisco was five cents.

For a moment Dyke was confused. Then swiftly the matter became clear in his mind. The Railroad had raised the freight on hops from two cents to five.

All his calculations as to a profit on his little investment he had based on a freight rate of two cents a pound. He was under contract to deliver his crop. He could not draw back. The new rate ate up every cent of his gains. He stood there ruined.

“Why, what do you mean?” he burst out. “You promised me a rate of two cents and I went ahead with my business with that understanding. What do you mean?”

S. Behrman and the clerk watched him from the other side of the counter.

“The rate is five cents,” declared the clerk doggedly.

“Well, that ruins me,” shouted Dyke. “Do you understand? I won't make fifty cents. MAKE! Why, I will OWE,—I'll be—be—That ruins me, do you understand?”

The other, raised a shoulder.

“We don't force you to ship. You can do as you like. The rate is five cents.”

“Well—but—damn you, I'm under contract to deliver. What am I going to do? Why, you told me—you promised me a two-cent rate.”

“I don't remember it,” said the clerk. “I don't know anything about that. But I know this; I know that hops have gone up. I know the German crop was a failure and that the crop in New York wasn't worth the hauling. Hops have gone up to nearly a dollar. You don't suppose we don't know that, do you, Mr. Dyke?”

“What's the price of hops got to do with you?”

“It's got THIS to do with us,” returned the other with a sudden aggressiveness, “that the freight rate has gone up to meet the price. We're not doing business for our health. My orders are to raise your rate to five cents, and I think you are getting off easy.”

Dyke stared in blank astonishment. For the moment, the audacity of the affair was what most appealed to him. He forgot its personal application.

“Good Lord,” he murmured, “good Lord! What will you people do next? Look here. What's your basis of applying freight rates, anyhow?” he suddenly vociferated with furious sarcasm. “What's your rule? What are you guided by?”

But at the words, S. Behrman, who had kept silent during the heat of the discussion, leaned abruptly forward. For the only time in his knowledge, Dyke saw his face inflamed with anger and with the enmity and contempt of all this farming element with whom he was contending.

“Yes, what's your rule? What's your basis?” demanded Dyke, turning swiftly to him.

S. Behrman emphasised each word of his reply with a tap of one forefinger on the counter before him:

“All—the—traffic—will—bear.”

The ex-engineer stepped back a pace, his fingers on the ledge of the counter, to steady himself. He felt himself grow pale, his heart became a mere leaden weight in his chest, inert, refusing to beat.

In a second the whole affair, in all its bearings, went speeding before the eye of his imagination like the rapid unrolling of a panorama. Every cent of his earnings was sunk in this hop business of his. More than that, he had borrowed money to carry it on, certain of success—borrowed of S. Behrman, offering his crop and his little home as security. Once he failed to meet his obligations, S. Behrman would foreclose. Not only would the Railroad devour every morsel of his profits, but also it would take from him his home; at a blow he would be left penniless and without a home. What would then become of his mother—and what would become of the little tad? She, whom he had been planning to educate like a veritable lady. For all that year he had talked of his ambition for his little daughter to every one he met. All Bonneville knew of it. What a mark for gibes he had made of himself. The workingman turned farmer! What a target for jeers—he who had fancied he could elude the Railroad! He remembered he had once said the great Trust had overlooked his little enterprise, disdaining to plunder such small fry. He should have known better than that. How had he ever imagined the Road would permit him to make any money?

Just as at the start of the book, when Dyke describes his involvement with the railroad strikes, and how he took no part in the strikes but still suffered consequences levied on the strikers, Dyke suffers unjustly from a rise in hops shipping rates as the railroad's response to the farmer coalition, and the rise in hops demand.

In Dyke's case, the railroad drove Dyke out when he wouldn't work for insultingly-low wages, barely enough to put bread on the table, and then ruined him through the rise in prices of rates. It sends a clear message to that the railroad either owns the people, or destroys them outright. Dyke's tale continues woefully in the book as, bankrupt, he robs a train in desperation and goes on the lam, eventually being caught and sentenced as a criminal. From the previous discussion on slavery in the American prison system, we can assume he was put into slave-like

conditions, possibly even working to build the railroad. If not work, then a slow and undignified death behind grey stone walls.

In either case, the P. & S.W. owns the life of Dyke, as it is mentioned earlier in the book that the railroads own the courts:

“They own us, these task-masters of ours; they own our homes, they own our legislatures. We cannot escape from them. There is no redress. We are told we can defeat them by the ballot-box. They own the ballot-box. We are told that we must look to the courts for redress; they own the courts. We know them for what they are,—ruffians in politics, ruffians in finance, ruffians in law, ruffians in trade, bribers, swindlers, and tricksters. No outrage too great to daunt them, no petty larceny too small to shame them; despoiling a government treasury of a million dollars, yet picking the pockets of a farm hand of the price of a loaf of bread.”

Dyke exists as an example of the ruin the railroad monopoly brings upon individuals who try to play by the rules. And an equal degradation exists to those who stand up for themselves. We will analyze the governor, Derrick Magnus, who signs on to be the leader of the Farmer Coalition after the P & S.W. attempts to sell the farmers’ land to the farmers at a criminally-increased rate than was promised.

Magnus not only suffers physical and monetary loss, but also moral loss, just as Dyke after he turned to train robbery. An interaction between Annixter, Magnus, and his wife clue in the good morals of the governor at the start of the book.

“What is it you want to see Mr. Derrick about?” she inquired hastily. “Is it about this plan to elect a Railroad Commission? Magnus does not approve of it,” she declared with energy. “He told me so last night.”

Annixter moved about awkwardly where he sat, smoothing down with his hand the one stiff lock of yellow hair that persistently stood up from his crown like an Indian's scalp-lock. At once his suspicions were all aroused. Ah! this female woman was trying to get a hold on him, trying to involve him in a petticoat mess,

trying to cajole him. Upon the instant, he became very crafty; an excess of prudence promptly congealed his natural impulses. In an actual spasm of caution, he scarcely trusted himself to speak, terrified lest he should commit himself to something. He glanced about apprehensively, praying that Magnus might join them speedily, relieving the tension.

“I came to see about giving a dance in my new barn,” he answered, scowling into the depths of his hat, as though reading from notes he had concealed there. “I wanted to ask how I should send out the invites. I thought of just putting an ad. in the 'Mercury.'”

...

Magnus came out on the porch, erect, grave, freshly shaven. Without realising what he was doing, Annixter instinctively rose to his feet. It was as though Magnus was a commander-in-chief of an unseen army, and he a subaltern. There was some little conversation as to the proposed dance, and then Annixter found an excuse for drawing the Governor aside. Mrs. Derrick watched the two with eyes full of poignant anxiety, as they slowly paced the length of the gravel driveway to the road gate, and stood there, leaning upon it, talking earnestly; Magnus tall, thin-lipped, impassive, one hand in the breast of his frock coat, his head bare, his keen, blue eyes fixed upon Annixter's face. Annixter came at once to the main point.

“I got a wire from Osterman this morning, Governor, and, well—we've got Disbrow. That means that the Denver, Pueblo and Mojave is back of us. There's half the fight won, first off.”

“Osterman bribed him, I suppose,” observed Magnus.

Annixter raised a shoulder vexatiously.

“You've got to pay for what you get,” he returned. “You don't get something for nothing, I guess. Governor,” he went on, “I don't see how you can stay out of this business much longer. You see how it will be. We're going to win, and I don't see how you can feel that it's right of you to let us do all the work and stand all the expense. There's never been a movement of any importance that went on around you that you weren't the leader in it. All Tulare County, all the San Joaquin, for that

matter, knows you. They want a leader, and they are looking to you. I know how you feel about politics nowadays. But, Governor, standards have changed since your time; everybody plays the game now as we are playing it—the most honourable men. You can't play it any other way, and, pshaw! if the right wins out in the end, that's the main thing. We want you in this thing, and we want you bad. You've been chewing on this affair now a long time. Have you made up your mind? Do you come in? I tell you what, you've got to look at these things in a large way. You've got to judge by results. Well, now, what do you think? Do you come in?"

Magnus's glance left Annixter's face, and for an instant sought the ground. His frown lowered, but now it was in perplexity, rather than in anger. His mind was troubled, harassed with a thousand dissensions.

...

"I am so sorry to interrupt," said Mrs. Derrick, as she came up. "I hope Mr. Annixter will excuse me, but I want Magnus to open the safe for me. I have lost the combination, and I must have some money. Phelps is going into town, and I want him to pay some bills for me. Can't you come right away, Magnus? Phelps is ready and waiting."

Annixter struck his heel into the ground with a suppressed oath. Always these fool female women came between him and his plans, mixing themselves up in his affairs. Magnus had been on the very point of saying something, perhaps committing himself to some course of action, and, at precisely the wrong moment, his wife had cut in. The opportunity was lost. The three returned toward the ranch house; but before saying good-bye, Annixter had secured from Magnus a promise to the effect that, before coming to a definite decision in the matter under discussion, he would talk further with him.

...

When they had gone, Mrs. Derrick sought out her husband in the office of the ranch house. She was at her prettiest that morning, her cheeks flushed with excitement, her innocent, wide-open eyes almost girlish. She had fastened her hair,

still moist, with a black ribbon tied at the back of her head, and the soft mass of light brown reached to below her waist, making her look very young.

“What was it he was saying to you just now,” she exclaimed, as she came through the gate in the green-painted wire railing of the office. “What was Mr. Annixter saying? I know. He was trying to get you to join him, trying to persuade you to be dishonest, wasn't that it? Tell me, Magnus, wasn't that it?”

Magnus nodded.

His wife drew close to him, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“But you won't, will you? You won't listen to him again; you won't so much as allow him—anybody—to even suppose you would lend yourself to bribery? Oh, Magnus, I don't know what has come over you these last few weeks. Why, before this, you would have been insulted if any one thought you would even consider anything like dishonesty. Magnus, it would break my heart if you joined Mr. Annixter and Mr. Osterman. Why, you couldn't be the same man to me afterward; you, who have kept yourself so clean till now. And the boys; what would Lyman say, and Harran, and every one who knows you and respects you, if you lowered yourself to be just a political adventurer!”

...

“Give me your word,” she insisted. “We can talk about other things afterward.”

Again Magnus wavered, about to yield to his better instincts and to the entreaties of his wife. He began to see how perilously far he had gone in this business. He was drifting closer to it every hour. Already he was entangled, already his foot was caught in the mesh that was being spun. Sharply he recoiled. Again all his instincts of honesty revolted. No, whatever happened, he would preserve his integrity. His wife was right. Always she had influenced his better side. At that moment, Magnus's repugnance of the proposed political campaign was at its pitch of intensity. He wondered how he had ever allowed himself to so much as entertain the idea of joining with the others. Now, he would wrench free, would, in a single instant of power, clear himself of all compromising relations. He turned to his wife.

Upon his lips trembled the promise she implored. But suddenly there came to his mind the recollection of his new-made pledge to Annixter. He had given his word that before arriving at a decision he would have a last interview with him. To Magnus, his given word was sacred. Though now he wanted to, he could not as yet draw back, could not promise his wife that he would decide to do right. The matter must be delayed a few days longer.

At this stage, Derrick has his morals intact: his word is his bond and he's imbued with rational thought, able to take a step back to consider things. Yet when the railroad increases the farmers' selling price for their land, including Derrick's, the sweeping heartbeat of the people quickly persuade him to reconsider.

Magnus Derrick, who sat next to Annixter, was the first to receive his letter. With a word of excuse he opened it.

"Read it, read it, Governor," shouted a half-dozen voices. "No secrets, you know. Everything above board here to-night."

Magnus cast a glance at the contents of the letter, then rose to his feet and read:

*Magnus Derrick,
Bonneville, Tulare Co., Cal.*

Dear Sir:

By regrade of October 1st, the value of the railroad land you occupy, included in your ranch of Los Muertos, has been fixed at \$27.00 per acre. The land is now for sale at that price to any one.

*Yours, etc.,
CYRUS BLAKELEE RUGGLES,
Land Agent, P. and S. W. R. R.*

S. BEHRMAN,
Local Agent, P. and S. W. R. R.

In the midst of the profound silence that followed, Osterman was heard to exclaim grimly:

“THAT'S a pretty good one. Tell us another.”

But for a long moment this was the only remark.

The silence widened, broken only by the sound of torn paper as Annixter, Osterman, old Broderson, Garnett, Keast, Gethings, Chatter, and Dabney opened and read their letters. They were all to the same effect, almost word for word like the Governor's. Only the figures and the proper names varied. In some cases the price per acre was twenty-two dollars. In Annixter's case it was thirty.

“And—and the company promised to sell to me, to—to all of us,” gasped old Broderson, “at TWO DOLLARS AND A HALF an acre.”

It was not alone the ranchers immediately around Bonneville who would be plundered by this move on the part of the Railroad. The “alternate section” system applied throughout all the San Joaquin. By striking at the Bonneville ranchers a terrible precedent was established. Of the crowd of guests in the harness room alone, nearly every man was affected, every man menaced with ruin. All of a million acres was suddenly involved.

...

Suddenly Osterman leaped to his feet, his bald head gleaming in the lamp-light, his red ears distended, a flood of words filling his great, horizontal slit of a mouth, his comic actor's face flaming. Like the hero of a melodrama, he took stage with a great sweeping gesture.

“ORGANISATION,” he shouted, “that must be our watch-word. The curse of the ranchers is that they fritter away their strength. Now, we must stand together, now, NOW. Here's the crisis, here's the moment. Shall we meet it? I CALL FOR THE LEAGUE. Not next week, not to-morrow, not in the morning, but now, now, now, this very moment, before we go out of that door. Every one of us here to join

it, to form the beginnings of a vast organisation, banded together to death, if needs be, for the protection of our rights and homes. Are you ready? Is it now or never? I call for the League.”

Instantly there was a shout. With an actor's instinct, Osterman had spoken at the precise psychological moment. He carried the others off their feet, glib, dexterous, voluble. Just what was meant by the League the others did not know, but it was something, a vague engine, a machine with which to fight. Osterman had not done speaking before the room rang with outcries, the crowd of men shouting, for what they did not know.

“The League! The League!”

“Now, to-night, this moment; sign our names before we leave.”

“He's right. Organisation! The League!”

“We have a committee at work already,” Osterman vociferated. “I am a member, and also Mr. Broderson, Mr. Annixter, and Mr. Harran Derrick. What our aims are we will explain to you later. Let this committee be the nucleus of the League—temporarily, at least. Trust us. We are working for you and with you. Let this committee be merged into the larger committee of the League, and for President of the League”—he paused the fraction of a second—“for President there can be but one name mentioned, one man to whom we all must look as leader—Magnus Derrick.”

The Governor's name was received with a storm of cheers. The harness room reechoed with shouts of:

“Derrick! Derrick!”

“Magnus for President!”

“Derrick, our natural leader.”

“Derrick, Derrick, Derrick for President.”

Magnus rose to his feet. He made no gesture. Erect as a cavalry officer, tall, thin, commanding, he dominated the crowd in an instant. There was a moment's hush. “Gentlemen,” he said, “if organisation is a good word, moderation is a better one. The matter is too grave for haste. I would suggest that we each and severally

return to our respective homes for the night, sleep over what has happened, and convene again to-morrow, when we are calmer and can approach this affair in a more judicious mood. As for the honour with which you would inform me, I must affirm that that, too, is a matter for grave deliberation. This League is but a name as yet. To accept control of an organisation whose principles are not yet fixed is a heavy responsibility. I shrink from it—”

But he was allowed to proceed no farther. A storm of protest developed. There were shouts of:

“No, no. The League to-night and Derrick for President.”

“We have been moderate too long.”

“The League first, principles afterward.”

“We can't wait,” declared Osterman. “Many of us cannot attend a meeting to-morrow. Our business affairs would prevent it. Now we are all together. I propose a temporary chairman and secretary be named and a ballot be taken. But first the League. Let us draw up a set of resolutions to stand together, for the defence of our homes, to death, if needs be, and each man present affix his signature thereto.”

He subsided amidst vigorous applause. The next quarter of an hour was a vague confusion, every one talking at once, conversations going on in low tones in various corners of the room. Ink, pens, and a sheaf of foolscap were brought from the ranch house. A set of resolutions was draughted, having the force of a pledge, organising the League of Defence. Annixter was the first to sign. Others followed, only a few holding back, refusing to join till they had thought the matter over. The roll grew; the paper circulated about the table; each signature was welcomed by a salvo of cheers. At length, it reached Harran Derrick, who signed amid tremendous uproar. He released the pen only to shake a score of hands.

“Now, Magnus Derrick.”

“Gentlemen,” began the Governor, once more rising, “I beg of you to allow me further consideration. Gentlemen—”

He was interrupted by renewed shouting.

“No, no, now or never. Sign, join the League.”

“Don't leave us. We look to you to help.”

But presently the excited throng that turned their faces towards the Governor were aware of a new face at his elbow. The door of the harness room had been left unbolted and Mrs. Derrick, unable to endure the heart-breaking suspense of waiting outside, had gathered up all her courage and had come into the room. Trembling, she clung to Magnus's arm, her pretty light-brown hair in disarray, her large young girl's eyes wide with terror and distrust. What was about to happen she did not understand, but these men were clamouring for Magnus to pledge himself to something, to some terrible course of action, some ruthless, unscrupulous battle to the death with the iron-hearted monster of steel and steam. Nerved with a coward's intrepidity, she, who so easily obliterated herself, had found her way into the midst of this frantic crowd, into this hot, close room, reeking of alcohol and tobacco smoke, into this atmosphere surcharged with hatred and curses. She seized her husband's arm imploring, distraught with terror.

“No, no,” she murmured; “no, don't sign.”

She was the feather caught in the whirlwind. En masse, the crowd surged toward the erect figure of the Governor, the pen in one hand, his wife's fingers in the other, the roll of signatures before him. The clamour was deafening; the excitement culminated brusquely. Half a hundred hands stretched toward him; thirty voices, at top pitch, implored, expostulated, urged, almost commanded. The reverberation of the shouting was as the plunge of a cataract.

It was the uprising of The People; the thunder of the outbreak of revolt; the mob demanding to be led, aroused at last, imperious, resistless, overwhelming. It was the blind fury of insurrection, the brute, many-tongued, red-eyed, bellowing for guidance, baring its teeth, unsheathing its claws, imposing its will with the abrupt, resistless pressure of the relaxed piston, inexorable, knowing no pity.

“No, no,” implored Annie Derrick. “No, Magnus, don't sign.”

“He must,” declared Harran, shouting in her ear to make himself heard, “he must. Don't you understand?”

Again the crowd surged forward, roaring. Mrs. Derrick was swept back, pushed to one side. Her husband no longer belonged to her. She paid the penalty for being the wife of a great man. The world, like a colossal iron wedge, crushed itself between. She was thrust to the wall. The throng of men, stamping, surrounded Magnus; she could no longer see him, but, terror-struck, she listened. There was a moment's lull, then a vast thunder of savage jubilation. Magnus had signed.

Harran found his mother leaning against the wall, her hands shut over her ears; her eyes, dilated with fear, brimming with tears. He led her from the harness room to the outer room, where Mrs. Tree and Hilma took charge of her, and then, impatient, refusing to answer the hundreds of anxious questions that assailed him, hurried back to the harness room. Already the balloting was in progress, Osterman acting as temporary chairman on the very first ballot he was made secretary of the League pro tem., and Magnus unanimously chosen for its President. An executive committee was formed, which was to meet the next day at the Los Muertos ranch house.

Derrick is caught up in the tentacles of the railroad company, against the advice of his wife. His spur to action to fight for his, and his friends', land and life becomes a grim reality. The unfortunate problem that Derrick now faces is attempting to be in the light of justice while dealing with an unjust and corrupt monopoly.

Lemony Snicket has a saying: "in a world too often governed by corruption and arrogance, it can be difficult to stay true to one's philosophical and literary principles." This is all too-true in Norris' book, as Magnus falls to deceitful means to earn a win for the coalition, bribing election chairmen to swing the vote in his favor. This action can be traced back to the start of the book, when it is noted the railroad has bought out the courts, and Osterman's assumed bribery to win votes out in Disbrow (news which Anixter used in attempt to get Derrick on their side during their conversation earlier in this essay).

The fallout of this single action of dishonesty is grave, allowing for the newspaper editor to blackmail the governor, and later exposing the town to Derrick's actions, pulling any credibility Derrick might have had.

But the interruption of the Governor's speech was evidently not unpremeditated. It began to look like a deliberate and planned attack. Persistently, doggedly, the group in the gallery vociferated: "Tell us how you bribed the delegates at Sacramento. Before you throw mud at the Railroad, let's see if you are clean yourself."

...

"YAH! talk to me of your police. Look out we don't call on them first to arrest your President for bribery. You and your howl about law and justice and corruption! Here"—he turned to the audience—"read about him, read the story of how the Sacramento convention was bought by Magnus Derrick, President of the San Joaquin League. Here's the facts printed and proved."

With the words, he stooped down and from under his seat dragged forth a great package of extra editions of the "Bonneville Mercury," not an hour off the presses. Other equally large bundles of the paper appeared in the hands of the surrounding group. The strings were cut and in handfuls and armfuls the papers were flung out over the heads of the audience underneath. The air was full of the flutter of the newly printed sheets. They swarmed over the rim of the gallery like clouds of monstrous, winged insects, settled upon the heads and into the hands of the audience, were passed swiftly from man to man, and within five minutes of the first outbreak every one in the Opera House had read Genslinger's detailed and substantiated account of Magnus Derrick's "deal" with the political bosses of the Sacramento convention.

Genslinger, after pocketing the Governor's hush money, had "sold him out."

Keast, one quiver of indignation, made his way back upon the stage. The Leaguers were in wild confusion. Half the assembly of them were on their feet, bewildered, shouting vaguely. From proscenium wall to foyer, the Opera House was a tumult of noise. The gleam of the thousands of the "Mercury" extras was like the flash of white caps on a troubled sea.

Keast faced the audience.

“Liars,” he shouted, striving with all the power of his voice to dominate the clamour, “liars and slanderers. Your paper is the paid organ of the corporation. You have not one shadow of proof to back you up. Do you choose this, of all times, to heap your calumny upon the head of an honourable gentleman, already prostrated by your murder of his son? Proofs—we demand your proofs!”

“We've got the very assemblymen themselves,” came back the answering shout. “Let Derrick speak. Where is he hiding? If this is a lie, let him deny it. Let HIM DISPROVE the charge.” “Derrick, Derrick,” thundered the Opera House.

...

Keast turned away with a gesture of impatience. He pushed his way farther on. At last, opening a small door in a hallway back of the stage, he came upon Magnus.

The room was tiny. It was a dressing-room. Only two nights before it had been used by the leading actress of a comic opera troupe which had played for three nights at Bonneville. A tattered sofa and limping toilet table occupied a third of the space. The air was heavy with the smell of stale grease paint, ointments, and sachet. Faded photographs of young women in tights and gauzes ornamented the mirror and the walls. Underneath the sofa was an old pair of corsets. The spangled skirt of a pink dress, turned inside out, hung against the wall.

And in the midst of such environment, surrounded by an excited group of men who gesticulated and shouted in his very face, pale, alert, agitated, his thin lips pressed tightly together, stood Magnus Derrick.

“Here,” cried Keast, as he entered, closing the door behind him, “where's the Governor? Here, Magnus, I've been looking for you. The crowd has gone wild out there. You've got to talk 'em down. Come out there and give those blacklegs the lie. They are saying you are hiding.”

But before Magnus could reply, Garnett turned to Keast.

“Well, that's what we want him to do, and he won't do it.”

“Yes, yes,” cried the half-dozen men who crowded around Magnus, “yes, that's what we want him to do.”

Keast turned to Magnus.

“Why, what's all this, Governor?” he exclaimed. “You've got to answer that. Hey? why don't you give 'em the lie?”

“I—I,” Magnus loosened the collar about his throat “it is a lie. I will not stoop—I would not—would be—it would be beneath my—my—it would be beneath me.”

Keast stared in amazement. Was this the Great Man the Leader, indomitable, of Roman integrity, of Roman valour, before whose voice whole conventions had quailed? Was it possible he was AFRAID to face those hired villifiers?

“Well, how about this?” demanded Garnett suddenly. “It is a lie, isn't it? That Commission was elected honestly, wasn't it?”

“How dare you, sir!” Magnus burst out. “How dare you question me—call me to account! Please understand, sir, that I tolerate——”

“Oh, quit it!” cried a voice from the group. “You can't scare us, Derrick. That sort of talk was well enough once, but it don't go any more. We want a yes or no answer.”

It was gone—that old-time power of mastery, that faculty of command. The ground crumbled beneath his feet. Long since it had been, by his own hand, undermined. Authority was gone. Why keep up this miserable sham any longer? Could they not read the lie in his face, in his voice? What a folly to maintain the wretched pretence! He had failed. He was ruined. Harran was gone. His ranch would soon go; his money was gone. Lyman was worse than dead. His own honour had been prostituted. Gone, gone, everything he held dear, gone, lost, and swept away in that fierce struggle. And suddenly and all in a moment the last remaining shells of the fabric of his being, the sham that had stood already wonderfully long, cracked and collapsed.

“Was the Commission honestly elected?” insisted Garnett. “Were the delegates—did you bribe the delegates?”

“We were obliged to shut our eyes to means,” faltered Magnus. “There was no other way to—” Then suddenly and with the last dregs of his resolution, he concluded with: “Yes, I gave them two thousand dollars each.”

“Oh, hell! Oh, my God!” exclaimed Keast, sitting swiftly down upon the ragged sofa.

There was a long silence. A sense of poignant embarrassment descended upon those present. No one knew what to say or where to look. Garnett, with a laboured attempt at nonchalance, murmured:

“I see. Well, that's what I was trying to get at. Yes, I see.”

“Well,” said Gethings at length, bestirring himself, “I guess I'LL go home.”

There was a movement. The group broke up, the men making for the door. One by one they went out. The last to go was Keast. He came up to Magnus and shook the Governor's limp hand.

“Good-bye, Governor,” he said. “I'll see you again pretty soon. Don't let this discourage you. They'll come around all right after a while. So long.”

He went out, shutting the door.

And seated in the one chair of the room, Magnus Derrick remained a long time, looking at his face in the cracked mirror that for so many years had reflected the painted faces of soubrettes, in this atmosphere of stale perfume and mouldy rice powder.

It had come—his fall, his ruin. After so many years of integrity and honest battle, his life had ended here—in an actress's dressing-room, deserted by his friends, his son murdered, his dishonesty known, an old man, broken, discarded, discredited, and abandoned.

It would appear at this point the railroad had achieved its goal, however Norris' story continues, and much like Dyke's imprisonment, Derrick faces severe consequences as well, on the same vein (although not as severe) as Dyke's. He's summarily acquired by the railroad, and forced to obediently work for them as an assistant in the freight manager's office. Norris describes the fear apparent in Derrick with the presence of railroad officials, and equates the

behavior to that of a lion in the presence of its trainer. The railroad monopoly is clearly not just out to win over a case, but to completely annihilate the other side, and any hope of further rebellion.

This relates to John Henry's tale, as Henry steps up to challenge the steam-powered drill, and after an initial success, winds up dying from a stroke, having worked himself to death. The metaphorical death of the governor symbolizes the death of just morals and good intentions in the presence of system governed by corruption and arrogance. It expresses the full power and capabilities of these kinds of monopolies, especially when they are allowed to buy out the courts and legal system. If money is to govern the land, then the rule of "all the traffic will bear," as S. Behrman yells, leaves scraps for the people, allowing for the top officials to eat up the majority of profit.

We can see this today, with corporations using money to buy out senators for their own personal gain, and to stamp out science. This is evidenced in companies such as the Koch brothers, who (along with oil and coal companies) lobbied with millions of dollars to suppress climate change action; and the sugar industry, which quietly paid scientists to point obesity's cause to fats instead of sugar. These have had dire consequences in our world, with climate change being one of, if not the, top issues of the entire world, and unhealthy diet habits, specifically amongst Americans.

The suppression of the lower and working classes is also a common theme in American history. As evidenced by this section, corporations are able to pay below minimum wages, which are often never a livable wage. The notion that working harder earns success is an outright lie when faced with the majority of real-life cases, but is used to incentivize the working class, tricking them into believing the American Dream is about hard work and lots of labor. Interestingly enough, this lie seems to be perpetuated quite heartily by stories of or revolving around the railroads and train engines.

The little engine that could (another American folktale) uses the idea that motivational phrases and perseverance will ultimately be rewarding in hard work. Thomas the Tank Engine is described as a "fussy engine" that thinks no one works as hard as him. Garth Nix's *Grim Tuesday*, while not American, describes a mine with a steam engine where workers are subjected to cruel and unusual labor. Even the Polar Express can be seen to revolve around notions of good labor: timeliness, leading, teamwork, etc... even elf labor. But I digress.

With suppression, of course, comes revolts and strikes, with which our history is riddled. One of the major holidays in the US, which many aren't even allowed as a holiday, came from a strike against the railroads. The Pullman strike shut down much of the nation's passenger and freight traffic west of Michigan. Nearly 4,000 employees boycotted the corporation for unfairly punishing workers for union activity, absence of democracy in Pullman, the inability of workers to own and buy houses, and excessive water/gas rates.

Within four days, 125 thousand workers had joined, quitting work for the railroad. As with many major strikes in the US, the opposition organized for the federal government to interfere. President Grover Cleveland ordered the Army in to stop the strikers, which resulted in violent riots, claiming the lives of 30 railroad workers, injuring 57 more. After the strikes, President Cleveland was forced to make Labor Day a national holiday in attempts to try and salvage his declining popularity (it didn't work).

Labor Day is a reminder of what collective action can bring (although it has since devolved into a corporate excuse to sell more product). Even with the disparate story John Henry and *The Octopus* bring, the messages that they have are those of hope. John Henry is the testament to man's perseverance and victory over machines and corporations which act like machines.

As for *The Octopus*, it may be hard to distill the tragic ending into one of hope. Nearly all of the main characters either die or wind up as corporate slaves, and the railroad continues on. However Norris points out that individual suffering doesn't mean the end, that the good things in life win out in the end:

“Does the grain of wheat, hidden for certain seasons in the dark, die? The grain we think is dead resumes again; but how? Not as one grain, but as twenty. So all life. Death is only real for all the detritus of the world, for all the sorrow, for all the injustice, for all the grief. Presley, the good never dies; evil dies, cruelty, oppression, selfishness, greed—these die; but nobility, but love, but sacrifice, but generosity, but truth, thank God for it, small as they are, difficult as it is to discover them—these live forever, these are eternal.”

A last thought of folklore before moving on, which is that of the presence of naturalism in our folktales. John Henry has a history of many African American men which the tale could be based on, and the tale is indeed centered around a real railroad operation and company. Yet John Henry didn't exist except in analogy and metaphor. The same can be noted in Frank Norris' *The Octopus*, which is based on a very real dispute over Californian land titles in the San Joaquin Valley: The Mussel Slough Tragedy.

What's interesting about American folklore is the absence of forgotten years: we have a very clear and historical history that can be traced by historians, and backed up by evidence and first-hand accounts. This is unlike other cultures which have been around for thousands of years, and have more mythical tales to serve as their folklore and traditions. Our folklore is fairly unique in its existence around the real world.

We will explore this idea further, but this section has already been somewhat long-winded, so we'll put a pin in this discussion and sing a few songs.

Approximated time: 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes.

Interlude

“Casey Jones,” “John Henry,” “Little Boxes,” “Home on the Range”

Two songs that come to mind when thinking of the railroad: one’s about our man John Henry, the other’s called Casey Jones. Feel free to sing along if you know the lyrics. We’re all about singing along, cause there’s not enough music nowadays it seems.

*John Henry when he was a baby
Settin' on his mammy's knee
Picked up an hammer in his little right hand
Said "Hammer be the death of me me me
Hammer be the death of me!"*

*Some say he's born in Texas
Some say he's born up in Maine
I just say he was a Louisiana man
Leader of a steel-driving chain gang
Leader on a steel-driving gang*

*"Well", the captain said to John Henry
"I'm gonna bring my steam drill around
Gonna whup that steel on down down down
Whup that steel on down!"*

*John Henry said to the captain (what he say?)
"You can bring your steam drill around
Gonna bring my steam drill out on the job
I'll beat your steam drill down down down
Beat your steam drill down!"*

*John Henry said to his Shaker
"Shaker you had better pray
If you miss your six feet of steel
It'll be your buryin' day day day
It'll be your buryin' day!"*

*Now the Shaker said to John Henry
"Man ain't nothing but a man
But before I'd let that steam drill beat me down
I'd die with an hammer in my hand hand hand
I'd die with an hammer in my hand!"*

*John Henry had a little woman
Her name was Polly Anne
John Henry took sick and was laid up in bed
While Polly handled steel like a man man man
Polly handled steel like a man*

*They took John Henry to the graveyard
Laid him down in the sand
Every locomotive comin' a-rolling by by by
Hollered "there lies a steel-drivin' man man man
There lies a steel-drivin' man!"*

[breath]

*The Workers on the S. P. line to strike sent out a call;
But Casey Jones, the engineer, he wouldn't strike at all;
His boiler it was leaking, and its drivers on the bum,
And his engine and its bearings, they were all out of plumb.*

*Casey Jones kept his junk pile running;
Casey Jones was working double time;
Casey Jones got a wooden medal,
For being good and faithful on the S. P. line.*

*The workers said to Casey: "Won't you help us win this strike?"
But Casey said: "Let me alone, you'd better take a hike."
Then some one put a bunch of railroad ties across the track,
And Casey hit the river bottom with an awful crack.*

*Casey Jones hit the river bottom;
Casey Jones broke his blessed spine;
Casey Jones was an Angelino,
He took a trip to heaven on the S. P. line.*

*When Casey Jones got up to heaven, to the Pearly Gate,
He said: "I'm Casey Jones, the guy that pulled the S. P. freight."
"You're just the man," said Peter, "our musicians went on strike;
You can get a job a-scabbing any time you like."*

*Casey Jones got up to heaven;
Casey Jones was doing mighty fine;*

*Casey Jones went scabbing on the angels,
Just like he did to workers of the S. P. line.*

*They got together, and they said it wasn't fair,
For Casey Jones to go around a-scabbing everywhere.
The Angels' Union No. 23, they sure were there,
And they promptly fired Casey down the Golden Stairs.*

*Casey Jones went to Hell a-flying;
"Casey Jones," the Devil said, "Oh fine:
Casey Jones, get busy shovelling sulphur;
That's what you get for scabbing on the S. P. Line."*

That's a fun little tune.

[breath]

This one's called "Little Boxes"

*Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes made of ticky tacky
Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes all the same*

*There's a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same*

*And the people in the houses
All went to the university
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same*

*And there's doctors and lawyers
And business executives
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same*

*And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school*

*And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same*

*And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family
In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same*

*There's a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same*

[breath]

Alright how's everyone feeling? I think we'll sing one more song and then move on. This is considered an unofficial anthem of the American West and was originally a poem. It goes something like this:

*Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day*

*Home, home on the range
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day*

*The red man was pressed from this part of the west
It's not likely he'll ever return
To the banks of Red River where seldom if ever
His flickering campfires still burn*

*Home, home on the range
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day*

*How often at night when the heavens are bright
I see the light of those flickering stars
Have I laid there amazed and asked as I gazed
If their glory exceeds that of love*

*Home, home on the range
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day*

Brer Rabbit
Story

I'd like to start this section with an introduction, because the elephant in the room must be addressed before we tell these tales. Brer Rabbit is an African American folktale originally passed about in the Southern states, about a trickster rabbit who uses his wits to outsmart the animals around him. Its origins can be traced back to Africa, prominently West, Central, and Southern African regions. Joel Chandler Harris's books (including *Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit*) includes these tales, plus stories with Native American (specifically Cherokee) origins, and even some European origins.

In their modern form, these stories have become severely and inappropriately appropriated by white men, and large corporations (also owned by white men). The most notable of these adaptations was the original books by Harris, who himself was a white journalist; Enid Blyton, a white children's author; and the 1946 Disney film *Song of the South*, which not only appropriated these tales, but also included (amongst other things): the romanticization of white Southern plantations and their owners, minstrel characters and dialogue, black characters used only to support the needs and destinies of white characters, and a famous song with racist lyrical roots.

I recognize the injustice that has been done to these tales and African-American culture through the appropriation, and hope that this representation does them justice. I hesitated to add this folklore because it made me scared and uncomfortable to tackle these topics and issues, however they are an important part of our collective culture, and a key to discussing racism perpetuated in film and media. We will, of course, discuss after the story.

Brer Rabbit lived comfortably in his briar patch along with several other animals in the nearby lands and woods. There was Brer Fox, a family of Bears, Old Man Tarrypin (a big turtle), and Sis Cow to name a few. Brer Rabbit was a troublemaker: his wits got him into trouble, but they also got him out of it.

A while back, Brer Fox had planted a large patch of goober peas, and now they had grown tall and long. The peas had ripened and were ready for eating. Now Brer Rabbit had asked if Brer Fox would share the peas, but the Fox wasn't willing: what was in it for him after all? So

in the middle of the night, Brer Rabbit and Mrs. Rabbit, along with their children, snuck into the field and grab the goober peas by the handful and run off.

The next morning, Brer Fox came along and found a near-empty patch of goober peas. Brer Fox got very angry: he had worked hard to make his garden grow. Suspecting Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox came up with a plan. He found laid a rope trap in a spot where Brer Rabbit and his family hadn't gotten to yet, tying the rope to a hickory sapling, and left to his den.

The next morning, early before the sun had risen, Brer Rabbit slipped through a hole in the fence to nab himself a few more goober peas, and stepped right into the Fox's trap! The hickory tree snapped right up, the rope tightening around Brer Rabbit's legs, and he found himself stuck swinging upside down without a prayer to escape.

He swung there for an hour, trying to think up of some explanation to tell Brer Fox when he came along. But just then, a-rumbling and a-bumbling was heard down the road: it was Brer Bear looking for a honey tree for his morning meal.

"Brer Bear!" the rabbit called cheerfully from his tree. Brer Bear looked around, finding no one, and wondering where the voice had come from. "Up here!"

"Howdy Brer Rabbit," the bear rumbled. "How're you this morning?"

"Oh dandy. Just dandy," Rabbit replied. "I'm just up here earning a dollar a minute from Brer Fox!"

"A dollar a minute!?" Bear exclaimed. "For what?"

And Rabbit explained: "Well I'm keeping the crows out of his goober peas, and for every minute I'm up here, I get a dollar."

Well Brer Bear had a large family to feed, and a dollar a minute (even by today's standards) is good money. So he asked: "do you think Fox would let me help?"

Rabbit paused, thinking for a moment, before replying: "Well it's really a one-person job, but I'll tell you what: I've been up here all night and I need a break. What if we switched and you could have the job?"

Bear liked that, and helped Rabbit free. Once Brer Bear was hanging aloft from the poor hickory sapling, the rabbit bid him a good day and ran along his merry way. It was just then however that Brer Fox came by to check on his trap, and found Bear, instead of Rabbit. Brer Fox accused Bear of being a thief, to which Bear responded that he'd very much like his one dollar a

minute, which confused Fox. After much confusion and shouting, they eventually realized they had been played. Fox let Bear free, and Bear ran down the road in hot pursuit of Rabbit.

Well Brer Rabbit knew he couldn't outrun Bear, and he was still hungry. So he hidden in some mud by a pond, making bullfrog sounds so when Bear ran along and asked: "Hey Brer Bullfrog, have you seen Brer Rabbit anywhere?"

Rabbit croaked: "Yes! He's just down the road!"

After Bear was a safe distance away, Rabbit shook the mud from himself, and went back to nab the rest of the goober peas.

Naturally, this further enraged Fox, who woke up the next morning desperately wanting to kill Brer Rabbit. And boy did he have the ultimate plan: to steal an idea from the Anansi and make a little baby out of tar. So he goes and gathers up some tar and turpentine, and mixes it up in his mixing pot, shaping it into the form of a baby. He gives it some eyes, a nose, and places a wide-brimmed hat on top, and winds up with a pretty cute baby. In fact it's apparently the cutest baby ever... made from tar and turpentine

anyway so Brer Fox goes out to the road he knows Rabbit will be passing along, and sticks the baby right in the center, and goes off to hide in the bushes. Sure enough, along comes Brer Rabbit, whistling along his merry way, and he sees the baby. "Howdy! How're you?" He says, walking right along expecting a return greeting.

Instead, he's met with silence.

Rabbit pauses, scratches his ears, and hops back: "I said Howdy! How're you?"

Still nothing.

So Brer Rabbit gets a little angry at this baby: after all, who did it think it was? Sure it may be the cutest baby ever but it had no manners. "Are you deaf or rude!?" the Rabbit shouted. "I can't stand folks that are stuck-up. If someone says howdy, you say howdy back!"

Still there's no response from this baby. Made from tar. Now Brer Fox is in the bushes, curled up in a ball trying not to laugh: everything's going according to his plan.

"Ok, last time: Howdy! How're YOU?" Rabbit asks, and he waits for a reply. When none comes, his temper gets the best of him. "Get ready to catch these paws!" he shouts, and swings a hefty left hook straight into the tar baby's head. And what happens when you hit a tar baby is your paw gets stuck.

No matter how hard he tried, Rabbit couldn't pull his paw free, he cursed and yelled: "let my paw go or I'll smack you with my other paw!" So when the lump of tar didn't respond, or let Rabbit's paw go, Rabbit punched the baby again, this time with his left paw. And what happens when you hit a tar baby is your paw gets stuck. And Rabbit gets so angry, he tries kicking the tar baby. And what happens when you kick a tar baby is your feet get stuck. And pretty soon, Brer Rabbit was all stuck and could hardly move. But that's not all: Brer Rabbit reasoned, "Well I still have my face," so Rabbit tries to head-butt the tar baby. And what happens when you head-butt a tar baby is your head gets stuck.

That's when Fox comes laughing out of the bushes. He laughs right on up to the Rabbit, and says: "Rabbit, I've wanted to kill you for so long, I'm going to make sure you suffer a slow death. But how..."

While Fox tries to think of the ultimate way to slow-kill Brer Rabbit, Brer Rabbit takes in his surroundings, and notices a briar patch with lots of thorns. And Rabbit's mind kicks into high gear and pleads with the fox: "Ok Brer Fox, you got me. Please do whatever you want. Roast me."

And the Fox says: "Nah cause I don't want to eat you, I just want to kill you. What if I drowned you?"

So the Rabbit says: "Ok well drown me me, hang me, stab me, whatever. I don't care do what you want, but please: whatever you do, don't throw me into that briar patch. That one, over there. Pretty pretty please I'm begging you."

Brer Fox thinks about this for a second, takes a good look at the briar patch with all its thorns, forgets Brer Rabbit lives in a briar patch, and smiles. "Too bad Rabbit," Fox says. "I'm going to throw you into that briar patch and watch as you get torn into pieces!" And that's just what he does.

Rabbit plays his part well, screaming out in protest as Fox chucks him into the briar patch. Fox listens to Brer Rabbit's scream, and then starts walking along his merry way when he realizes he's not the only one chuckling. And where are the death screams of Rabbit?

So Fox scampers back, and peers into the briar patch, and there's Rabbit, chuckling in the darkness. Rabbit looks up, waving merrily, and says something like: "Oh you thought briar patches were your ally, but you merely adopted the briar patch. I was born in it, moulded by it." And with that, disappears.

Fox and Rabbit weren't always at each other's throats. After this dispute had settled, and winter had come and gone, the animals decided to work together to plant a garden full of corn to roast later that summer. It was a hot day, and Brer Rabbit, being a lazy fellow, decided to take a little siesta. "Ow!" he shouted as loudly as possible. "A bramble got into my hand!" He quickly stuck his paw into his mouth, while the other critters sent him off to go wash his paw before it got infected.

Well Brer Rabbit went off and found a nice well with a few buckets hanging from it: one at the top, and one at the bottom. "This'll be a great place to nap," Rabbit thought. He hopped right into the bucket and plummeted straight down to the bottom of the well, hanging on to the sides of the bucket for dear life. Splash! The bucket fell into the water, and there Rabbit stayed, afraid to move in case the bucket toppled over.

It was just his luck that Fox suspected Brer Rabbit hadn't actually been injured on the job, and had followed him out to the well. As soon as Fox saw Rabbit jump down the well, Fox became extremely puzzled. What on earth was Rabbit doing down a well? He waited, and waited, and after a while, Brer Fox went up to the well and shouted: "Hey Rabbit! What're you doing down there?"

Rabbit perked up at once: this was his chance. Fox was for sure heavier than he and would be able to off-set the weight to get him back up. "Oh well hi Brer Fox!" Rabbit called. "I'm just down here fishing. I thought I'd surprise everyone with a mess of fish for lunch cause there's some really nice fish down here."

"Well how many fish are there?" Brer Fox asked skeptically, starting to suspect Rabbit was actually counting a secret stash of gold.

"Scores!" cried the Rabbit. "So many that I... I don't think I'll be able to carry them all out! Why don't you come on down and help me? Just uh... just jump into that bucket there."

And that was all the invitation Fox needed to jump into the bucket to try and steal some of Rabbit's gold. Just like Rabbit, Fox plummeted straight down. About half-way, he passed Brer Rabbit, who was clinging to the sides of his bucket for dear life on account it was moving so fast.

Brer Rabbit hopped out of the well as fast as he could and, spotting a hunter coming along the road, called back down: "There's a hunter coming along to get a drink of water, Brer Fox. When he hauls you up, you'd better be ready to make a dash for it!" And with that, Rabbit hopped back to the garden patch with the rest of the animals.

Sure enough, a few minutes later, the thirsty hunter reached the well, and hauled up the bucket he hoped was full of water. Instead, he pulled out a wet and shivering Fox, which sprang out and ran away before the hunter could even open his mouth. Fox ran back to the garden patch, and he and Rabbit went back to work as if nothing happened. Except every once in a while, they'd both look sideways and catch each other's gaze, and break out into a grin, and laugh. Both of them had been the fool that day.

Analysis

What makes Brer Rabbit so controversial is its ties to the Antebellum South. The folklore itself isn't in itself racist (although it could be said that the term "Brer," which is slang for "brother" could be considered on the line by modern standards) however, the ways in which it has been appropriated, are. As discussed in the intro, these tales were originally published by white authors: Joel Chandler Harris and Enid Blyton.

Visiting the original text from Harris' version, the Southern dialect and African American slang are extremely powerful, as he treats the stories as if they were being translated from a foreign nation. This slang persists even in modern forms of the tale – which this performance has done away with in preference for a more-modern, standardized dialect – from authors such as S.E. Schlosser. Using slang to represent a period in time isn't exactly a bad thing except when done to provoke a minstrel feel – which I argue these with this stylized writing have done – it becomes a much more serious issue. One can recognize this story being of an era through contextual clues (ie. "goober peas" was a popular term for boiled peanuts, which the Confederate soldiers relied on after their access to the rail lines was severed) which can also be used to identify the story's cultural origin (ie. Brer is an informal term for "brother" used by African Americans of the 19th century).

The most infamous of adaptations is Disney's 1946 *Song of the South*, about a kid who visits his grandmother's plantation and learns the African-American folklore of Brer Rabbit. Walt Disney produced this film after purchasing the rights to the *Uncle Remus* stories, and subsequently faced backlash. Disney was very aware of this fact, even being warned by his publicist that there were "many chances to run afoul that could run the gamut all the way from the nasty to the controversial." And certainly, the film has warranted criticism, though not all of it against the film.

Of the more interesting divides in criticism spurred by the film was the chasm between its writers and producers/actors. If you look at the IMDB page for *Song of the South*, there are six writing credits that deal directly with the film's screenplay and story (minus Harris who only wrote the book, and the double credited Dalton S. Reymond). As a general note from a writer, if the writers don't want to write something, and you have to hire a bunch of them who point to

problems with the story, you probably should take the hint. However Disney wasn't too sensitive to these issues, and went against the advice given.

The film was originally to be done by the animators, however that quickly fell through, and Disney hired Dalton Reymond to pen the script. Reymond was hired to prepare the original story behind *Song of the South*. This was problematic as Reymond (as far as my research could tell) was a white man, and his portrayal of African Americans in the script (which also suffered literary problems) was far from savory. The term "old darkie" in reference to Uncle Remus' character had to be removed, and the Hays Office demanded even more terminology be removed from the script.

Instead of hiring a new writer however, Disney decided on consultants to Reymond, which mostly ended poorly. The first was African-American performer and writer Clarence Muse, who quit when Reymond continued to ignore Muse's suggestions to portray African-American characters as humans and not undignified stereotypes. Muse went on to black publications asking for their criticism in the depictions of African Americans, and was slammed by Disney's claims that Muse was simply attacking the film because he didn't get to play the role of Uncle Remus.

This was probably false, as requests to see the film's treatment were denied to Walter White (NAACP executive secretary) and June Blyth (director of the American Council on Race Relations).

After Muse, Disney tacked on Maurice Rapf, who himself was considered Hollywood royalty (his father was one of MGM Studio's founders). Rapf, another white man, was considered radical at the time, and was later blacklisted in 1947 due to his unionizing activities and support for the Communist Party. After telling Disney to his face that he shouldn't make the film on account for the racist material in the script, Disney responded: "That's exactly why I want you to work on it – because I know you don't think I should make the movie. You're against 'Uncle Tom-ism' and you're a radical."

Uncle Tomism, a term derived from the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is defined as a pattern of social behavior characterized by a willingly submissive attitude on the part of the Black participants in a given interaction and a benevolent but patronizing attitude on the part of the white participants. Ironically, the film was just this.

Rapf worked with the film until he found out that Reymond had stolen his identity to hit it with a girl, and that if she went out with him she might get a good job at MGM. Enter Morton Grant, who replaced Rapf, and subsequently all of Rapf's changes to the script. Even though the script was still inherently racist under Rapf's drafts, the script became even more racist under Grant with changes such as: a poverty-stricken family to a wealthy family with a mansion on a plantation, the father's motive for leaving the family, the elements of the reconstruction era, and brief discussions on freedom.

The film itself is about Johnny, a white kid who goes on vacation to his grandmother's mansion (on a plantation) and learns that it's a distraction from his father leaving to run a newspaper. He comes across Uncle Remus, and is told tales of Brer Rabbit to help him cope. During a party, Johnny's mother gets angry at Uncle Remus for filling her son's head with nonsense, prompting Remus to leave. As Remus is leaving, Johnny runs after him and is attacked by a bull, only recovering when hearing Remus tell a tale from Brer Rabbit.

There are several issues with this narrative. The appropriation of Brer Rabbit as a symbol of the smaller and less powerful Black person who must outwit their White masters (Brer Fox and Bear) is perhaps the largest issue with the film (one which Rapf had fought against). The other main grievance with the film was its portrayal of Black characters, using stereotypes not only in the live action sections, but also in the cartoon characters with their slang and minstrel-influenced characteristics.

Interestingly enough, the actors were mainly on board with the film. Hattie McDaniel, the first black actress to win an Academy Award (for her performance in *Gone With the Wind*) said in an interview for *The Criterion*: "If I had for one moment considered any part of the picture degrading or harmful to my people, I would not have appeared therein." Her co-star, James Baskett (Uncle Remus), echoed her support, even after being denied admittance to the film's premiere due to the racist laws governing Atlanta at the time.

In the preamble we talked about who a folksong, or folktale, belongs to, that being The People. It would be an oversight of us to not talk about the "ownership" of Brer Rabbit tales, especially as it relates to adaptations such as Disney.

The versions of Brer Rabbit should be recognized for its place in the American Slave Trade, and their African roots acknowledged. Brer Rabbit represents an uprooted culture and people, who must use their wits to survive. Many of these stories have come to be seen, as noted

previously, for their direct analogies to the relationship between slave and master. Brer Rabbit's behavior itself isn't taught of as morally-just, even though he is considered a folk hero; rather the actions of Brer Rabbit reflect an extreme form of survival. Survival neither seeks to be "good" or "evil" in morality. "Survival," as my outdoor survival teacher says: "is doing whatever it takes to live." This places him as a complex character, not something that's very common in American folklore or narratives.

Brer Rabbit's lack of positive restraint can shed negative light on the character. For example, the farming story where he decides to try and sneak out of hard labour by pretending to have a briar stuck in his paw. In that story, Rabbit isn't using his trickery to escape a harmful situation. He uses it to escape a communal activity.

These tales track in modern history, and are imbedded in some of our culture. For example, we can look at the methods in which African Americans need to find ways to thwart the police state just to cross the road, the unionizations of workers against the larger monopolies and corporations. The relationship between Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox et al are evident in our cartoons such as Tom and Jerry, and Wille the Coyote and the Roadrunner.

And certainty: the issues of Johnny are valid, as he worries about the separation with his father, and stories (especially folklore) can be a wonderful way to learn and help children (and adults alike) with their troubles. To its credit, the film does portray the magic in these tales, as well as the power of imagination in young children. Brer Rabbit is of course a folktale, belonging to The People. The issue of *Song of the South*, *Uncle Remus*, etc. is not with the story, but with the way these stories were presented.

The ways in which Disney appropriated Brer Rabbit goes to show how harmful the media can be in representing culture and an entire group of people. This of course, isn't the only time Disney has run into issues with portrayal of race. In nearly all of its animated cartoons (especially those with anthropomorphized animals), people of colour have been negatively represented, or have been white washed, or characters of colour are diminished in their roles. A few of these examples include: *Peter Pan* (portrayal of Native Americans), *Lady and the Tramp* (portrayal of Chinese), *Mary Poppins* (iffy blackface), *The Jungle Book*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *The Princess and the Frog*, and even the recent 2020 release *Soul*.

While Disney has gotten better at these issues, it hasn't gotten over them. A huge problem in diversity representation in animated films is the actual lack of seeing people of colour

on screen. What may have started as a fun double-casting stint in *Song of the South* (although this was present long before this film's release, but significant in its oscillation from live action to animation) has, over time, become dehumanizing towards people of color.

This has happened in two ways: the first is the realization that anyone can voice an animated character as there's hardly any association with the actual face of the actor; the animated character is all you see. So in films such as *Peter Pan*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*, characters of color are voiced by white actors, which not only takes away the opportunities from minorities, but also contributes to an exclusionary culture within Hollywood where the "right person for the job" is less about talent and more about who you know. As my mentor, Colleen, has said on multiple occasions, people will look for similar kinds of people. This is the case not just in animation, but Broadway, tech, legal firms, an essentially every area of our workforce.

It also comes from a historical standpoint that Black actors were never asked to portray heroes or sidekicks, or even a dignified featured character. They were restricted to portrayals of themselves which the media helped stereotype: lazy, dim-witted, illiterate, subservient. By continuing to deny people of color opportunities to play a more-accurate portrayal of themselves, we not only continue the restriction of the fool role to these people of color. I also argue that it sends a message from white Americans (albeit nowadays may be more unintentional than not due to the nature of the existing system) that people of colour can't be trusted to portray themselves: an example of the white savior complex in film and media.

The problem with whitewashing characters isn't restricted to just Disney. Popular animations such as *Central Park*, *BoJack Horseman*, *Family Guy*, *Kung Fu Panda*, and even the beloved children's TV show *Avatar The Last Airbender* all suffer from a non-white cast voiced by white actors. It's not even just limited to animation. For example, the recent live Disney feature, *Mulan*, promised diversity through casting. Instead, among other issues, it only put on the face of diversity, while the entire creative team was white. This, it was pointed out, was incredibly problematic as a story set in period China wasn't given the opportunity to represent their own culture in a tasteful manner (the cultural understanding was surface-level at best, and inherently Western with fantasy concepts).

Not only does this kill off opportunities for minorities wanting to work in those jobs, but it also kills off our respect and understanding of the culture. By perpetuating false narratives, the film and animation sector furthers stereotypes of an entire culture.

The second way in which white actors voicing characters of color has been dehumanizing happens when a story purporting to be cultural, turns its characters of color into animals. The question this asks is: is this representation if the person of color's characters are unrecognizable as even human for the majority of the film and their character development? Members of these films' target audience, kids, don't really see themselves represented as they are. They must watch themselves as animals.

Films that follow this trope include *Brother Bear*, *Princess and the Frog*, *Spies in Disguise*, and yes, *Soul*. The 2020 Disney film, *Soul*, may have shown Joe, the main character, for a good portion of the film, but for the majority of that he was voiced by a white woman while the character's psyche was trapped in the body of a cat.

It is unfortunate this is the legacy of an American folktale, but it shines as an example of the work we still need to do as Americans.

George Washington And The Cherry Tree
Story

When George Washington was but a wee lad, no more than yea tall (just about the height of an average 6-year old (or about 3/100ths of the length of an American football field)) his father, Mr. Washington, sat the youngster on his lap. “Now George,” Mr. Washington said. “Truth is the loveliest quality of youth. I would ride fifty miles, my son, to see the little boy whose heart was so honest and lips so pure that I could depend upon every word he said.” And likewise, offered the antithesis: “But oh how terrible is the boy who is given to lying, for nobody can believe a word he says. He is to be looked at with aversion, his parents dread his sight amongst their other children. I would rather give up my children than to see him become a common liar.”

“Pa,” said George. “Do I ever tell lies?”

“No, thank the Lord you do not, my son; and I hope you never will. At least, you will never have any reason to be guilty of so shameful a thing from me. Whenever by accident you do any thing wrong, which must often be the case, as you are but a poor little boy yet, without experience or knowledge, never tell a falsehood to conceal it; but answer to it honestly, like a man. Instead of beating you, I will but the more honour and love you for it my dear.”

When George was about six years old, he was gifted a beautiful hatchet of which, like most youngins, he took immediate liking to. He went around everywhere, constantly chopping every thing that came in his way including his mother’s pea-sticks. Towards the edge of his garden was a beautiful young English cherry tree, which became the unlucky victim of George’s rampage through his gardens. George barked up that tree so badly, he wound up cutting it down.

The next morning, Mr. Washington was out for his morning stroll when he saw his beloved cherry tree in shambles. He ran back to the house, asking anyone if they had seen who had destroyed his cherry tree. At long last, he came upon George, and asked: “George, do you know who killed my beautiful little cherry tree yonder in the garden?”

This was a tough question, but George grit his teeth, looked at his father with the sweet face of youth, and bravely stated: “I can’t tell a lie, Pa. I did cut down your cherry tree with my hatchet.”

And just as young George was a boy of his word, so was his father a man of his. “Run to my arms you dearest boy!” Mr. Washington cried, bending down with outstretched arms. “I’m so glad you killed my tree, for you’ve paid me a thousand fold for it with such an act of honesty and heroism. To me, that is worth more than a thousand trees, though blossomed with silver and their fruits of pure gold.”

Analysis

Ironically, the story of George Washington being honest and not being able to tell a lie to his father is a lie. I don't think this comes as a surprise to anyone; the myth has been debunked way before this performance was written. More interestingly is to look at where this mythology came from, and its evolution throughout history.

After George Washington's death, clergyman and book agent Mason Locke Weems (commonly known as Parson Weems) thought they could make a lot of money out of the founding father (and not just on the dollar bill) and set out to write Washington's biography. The book, and subsequent editions, were filled with fictitious anecdotes of Washington, painting him as a saint among men.

While, at the time of publication, Weems' book received criticism for being fanaticism and absurdity, it quickly became a bestseller. It can largely be attributed to the image of George Washington most commonly-known today, and reveals a great deal of the American public's relationship with national heroes, often mixing fact with fiction (a common trope with American folklore in general) and cutting out the unsavory parts.

One might assume it would be easy to debunk these myths, especially at a time when people close to Washington would've still been alive. Unfortunately Washington's documents were either burned by his wife, passed around to the point they became damaged, or simply lost. Authentic correspondence or written documents from Washington are hence hard to find, with loads of forgeries floating around in the mix, no thanks to Robert Spring et al. With this in mind, it becomes clear to see how these myths about our founding fathers would've been easy to fabricate and pass off as the authentic truth. Weems was not so much as writing Washington's life than he was recreating America's founder.

This push for spectacle over truth for a quick fortune wasn't just Weems and Spring. From 1800 to 1860 over 400 books and essays about Washington were published, all of them greatly embellished. This exploitation wasn't restricted to Washington's life either. We can look at P.T. Barnum's ownership of Joice Heth, an elderly slave who he claimed was 161 years old and had a personal connection to Washington (although the connection was unclear and later questioned). She was sold to Barnum and his partner for \$1,000 dollars and shown throughout America.

Heth would tell stories about Washington on stage, ending sometimes in spirituals, which only furthered the myth and fictional accounts of Washington's life, up until her death where she was unceremoniously presented with a public autopsy in front of about fifteen hundred spectators all charged at fifty cents admission. It was confirmed that Heth was actually only about 80 years of age, but Barnum insisted on rewriting the stars so much he claimed the body was a fraud, and Heth was actually still traveling around the US.

The craze and spectacle for George Washington continued on through the 1800s and early 1900s, to the point where the name "Washington" became a selling point for companies. You could see the room Washington slept in before a battle and sleep in the same hotel, buy Washington cigars and replicas of the axe he used to chop the cherry tree. If this sounds familiar, it should: this directly parallels the current fanaticism expressed by the far right.

Around the 1920's, after the First World War, a shift in thinking occurred towards new ideas and morals. Rupert Hughes sought to debunk the myths of George Washington, seeing him as a relic of the past that would eventually lead to more ruin. Side note: the term debunk comes from this effort. The Hollywood mogul, along with W.A. Woodward, wrote a three-volume biography cynical of Washington's life and myths, tearing him down to the gutter.

This campaign was extremely successful, sparking a loss of interest in Washington. Grant Wood later painted the famous picture *Parson Weems' Fable* in 1939, wherein the image of George Washington with the axe talking to his father by the cherry tree is depicted, Weems himself painted in front, holding back a red curtain. Interestingly enough, the image includes two slaves in the background. The topic of slavery and its association to the founding fathers hadn't really been discussed or talked about prior to this era, and it really shows the shift in idolizing a leader to exposing his flaws and baseless mythologic background.

Early on in the 19th century, the association of Washington with the idealized religious zealot as images and stories surfaced about his devout Christianity. The 1800s and 1900s were marked by American's strong ties to their religion, which inevitably seeped into the image of Washington. The Valley Forge tales of Washington kneeling in prayer in the snow, and being baptized after the battle (in the winter...), are not backed up by any evidence, and was invented by Weems. This iconography has developed over time, ingraining itself into our culture and politics. Very little is known about Washington's ties to religion. If he was Christian, then he was certainly not an extremist that he's been painted as.

The problem, again, comes back to the lack of evidential documents. Entire volumes of his diaries are just gone, and there are large gaps in his life where historians are completely in the dark about exactly what was going on in Washington's life at the time. What we mostly have are the larger historical dates and achievements (ie it is an indisputable fact that George Washington was the first president of the United States).

This phenomenon has carried on past Washington's life in general however, and has entered into our modern textbooks and histories, which paint the founding fathers in a devout light. They were revolutionaries, they fought for freedom, they stood for all good things. These are things that are taught in survey courses across America from elementary school to high school, and even most likely academia. It is unfortunately a propagandist history that relies on the sparse evidence, and is designed to champion nationalist views.

We can even look at modern media in its portrayal of the founding fathers. To keep in the theatrical realm, we'll analyze the recent Broadway musical HAMILTON, in its depictions of our nation's origins.

HAMILTON, written and directed by Lin Manuel Miranda, tells the heroic tale of the start of modern democracy in America, from the start of the Revolutionary War in 1776 up to Hamilton's death in 1804. Obviously, there are historical timeline inaccuracies for the sake of dramatic narrative such as the chronology of Hamilton's personal life mixed with the politics in the second act, and the meeting of Hamilton, Burr, Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan in 1776 (they'd met previously and it's never been recorded they were all ever in the same room at the same time).

The analysis that we'll be providing looks at the idealized versions of our founding fathers, and their continued place on pedestals. Hamilton's character is set up in the opening number as the underdog, which is a common way to gain support and interest in a character (audiences like to root for the underdog). Miranda writes him as a "hero and a scholar" who worked harder and smarter than the people in his community. This reflects our society's value on hard work and furthers the notion that education will land people in greatness. This is just the first two stanzas.

Act I centers its main conflict on the Revolutionary War itself, citing King George's tyrannical rule as the source of their misery and lack of freedom. It even sets up our side of the story in a biblical analogy: "We roll like Moses, claimin' our promised land."

In actuality, this is fairly historically inaccurate, and could be considered nationalist propaganda as it shares similarities with how this portion of our history is taught in our schools. It also contributes to the notion of Manifest Destiny, that our founding fathers had the divine right to this land when in actuality the land was being “cleared” from indigenous populations by disease and violence.

To understand the historical motives behind the revolution, we must first look at the warres that preceded, specifically that of the Seven Years Warre (also known as the French and Indian Warre) fought between 1754 and 1763. During this warre, the colonial territory of North America was determined in favor of the British/colonists. It began with disputes over the upper Ohio River Valley, and control over the fur trade.

When the French developed new trade routes along the Maumee, Wabash, and Ohio rivers, they came into sharp conflict with the colonies who laid claim to the same areas. After the French built forts in the area, the colonists reacted with skirmishes led by members of our founding fathers, including George Washington himself. The French remained victorious however, able to overwhelm the Virginia militias with the aid of their Native American allies. To be one hundred percent clear: the British Government wanted nothing to do with these battles, and even warned the colonists not to engage, fearing the renewal of warre with France after years of peace, as well as the costly nature of battle over such a distance. As his prime minister said: “Let Americans fight Americans.”

Thus, the French continued on their path of victory, successfully scoring the majority of victories over the colonists. Had it not been for William Pitt’s assumption of the British warre effort, the British may never have gotten involved. Pitt focused on the importance of victory out in North America as the key to dominance as a world power, and convinced Parliament to grant near-limitless funds to fight the warre. After the British, with the help of the colonies, took Quebec and negotiated the Treaty of Paris, which gave Great Britain the lands east of the Mississippi River, there remained the problem of replenishing the Crown’s finances.

The British Government started to enforce the tax laws on the colonists more strictly than before the warre to which the colonial governments of New York and Massachusetts protested. To be clear, the taxes imposed on the American colonists were nothing compared to the taxes British citizens living in Britain paid. The average colonist’s taxes per year was one shilling, while residents in Britain paid 26 shillings per year for an arguably lower standard of living than

in the colonies. British merchants also began requesting repayment of debts incurred by the colonists, specifically in British pounds sterling and not the colonial currency that had a questionable value, especially during the postwar recession. This prompted the Currency Act of 1764, forbidding colonies from issuing paper currency.

After that came the Stamp Tax, requiring colonists to purchase government-issued stamps for legal documents and other paper goods, which caused riots and outrage in the colonies. It served as a common cause uniting the 13 colonies in opposition to the British Parliament, and was soon repealed as the American boycott of British goods along with lobbies from British merchants contributed to the recession.

Following the Stamp Tax came the Townshend Acts, which sparked further protests including the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773. Parliament reactively shut off Boston's port until the East India Company was compensated for the destroyed goods. It also passed legislature attempting to place Massachusetts (seen by Britain as the center of colonists' disloyalty) under direct British control, which were known as the Intolerable Acts in the colonies. Coupled with the fact that without powerful enemies on their borders, the American colonies didn't really have a need for protection from Britain, loyalty wavered greatly.

The famous phrase: "no taxation without representation" is widely taught in schools, but it should be clear by now that taxes, while a large part of the cause, were not the primary instigators of the revolution. The problem comes from most of America seeing it as the leading cause, and not understanding what the taxes were actually for, and the rate of those taxes. In today's US dollars, we'd be paying approximately eight dollars and twenty cents per year, plus some change on the additional taxes. Considering the colonists' average incomes exceeded those of British residents (ie. The colonists were the fairly wealthy getting pretty much a free ride) there really isn't too much of an argument that validates the disproportionate rage that came from taxation (although ironically, post-revolution, many states sought to free themselves of the financial responsibilities of the war).

To focus on the representation aspect of the famous phrase, we must look historically to events pre-Revolutionary War, as well. The English Civil War a hundred years earlier saw Parliamentarians overthrow and behead King Charles I, allowing Oliver Cromwell to step into power. Cromwell was very sympathetic to the grievances raised by the American colonies, and supported expansion of representation in government beyond landowners. He

died in 1658 however, and Royalists returned to power. As the monarch was still recovering from its upheaval, it was less considerate to the colonies' requests for representation.

Synonymous with the misrepresentation, half-truths, and vague reasoning of why the American colonies went to war in HAMILTON is the theme of immigration. Due to the extremely low tax rates in the American colonies, along with tax exemptions periodically throughout history, America was a haven for immigrants. This isn't a revolutionary idea: every single person not from a Native American origin were immigrants. The problem in HAMILTON comes from the representation of these immigrants as people of colour traditionally held as slaves by the founding fathers.

Circling back on the 1939 painting by Wood, which points out the lack in mentions of slavery by the founding fathers, so too does HAMILTON fall into the same mistake in its lack of representation of authentic characters. The musical briefly mentions slavery, but also compares the oppression of the British empire on the colonists of power to that of the fight of freedom from slavery, which it was certainly not the case. It further mucks up the issues of slavery by placing people of colour in roles of power that would've owned that person's ancestors. The musical, for all intents and purposes, is a continuation of the myths and half truths American history textbooks teach students, and it is inherently "white."

For example, one half-truth HAMILTON and American textbooks argue is that there were African Americans who participated in the war. The lyric from "My Shot" exemplifies this: "Wait till I sally in/ On a stallion with the first black battalion" but fails to represent any battles in which Hercules Mulligan plays a role. The fact is, more African Americans sided with the British forces. There is also no representation of Native American presence in the musical, and hardly any in current texts (it's a hit-or-miss topic, and when 'hit,' is more a gloss over). Slavery doesn't really become a topic in textbooks until after the Revolutionary War, leading up to the Civil War and then stops, reappearing as the Civil Rights movement in the mid to late 1900s.

The issue with our representations of our nation's founding is that it lacks the cultural awareness and historical context necessary to properly understand the American Revolution. How can we have authentic conversations about the founding fathers, modern day American politics, democracy, and freedom, if we don't even have an authentic representation and understanding of our origins?

The cultural values we hold are based on myths and illusions dedicated to elevating our founders to a saint-like level, which they were not. They gloss over important aspects, and contribute to the propagandist history that holds our nation above the rest of the world. Perhaps it is an entertaining notion to create mythology surrounding the Revolution, but this becomes problematic when it obscures facts and an authentic sense of culture.

We've glossed over authenticity of culture and folklore in Paul Bunyan's section, specifically talking about commercialism's influence on perpetuating Bunyan's stories. The same can be analyzed with the tale of George Washington's life, and the founding fathers of America: a lot of it comes from a capitalist desire to make a quick buck. What we haven't analyzed too much is the effects it might be having in our society, and we're going to analyze this through two different lenses: politics and media (specifically the news, as this essay's already analyzed pop culture media through HAMILTON).

Let's talk politics. The top attributes on ranker's website (a crowd-sourced voting site) has the first five attributes we want in politicians as honesty (no surprise with what we've been discussing) integrity, intelligence, determination, and diplomacy. Other top values include: professional, self-aware, authentic, ethical, conservative but forward-thinking, vulnerable. Yet a recent pew research poll has a 19% trust rate of government officials.

There is bipartisan agreement that the government should keep the country safe from terrorism, respond to natural disasters, ensure safe food and medicine, manage immigration, and manage infrastructure. Where we start to see divides are over environmental and economic problems. There also seems to be a disconnect between the values we want in politicians, and what we want politicians to do in office.

The fact of the matter is the American government was set up to protect individual rights on the principal that each person should be able to govern themselves as a free-thinker, born equal to all others (although at the time, this notion was restricted to wealthy, land-owning, white men). Those rights are:

1. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

2. A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.
3. No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.
4. The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.
5. No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.
6. In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.
7. In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.
8. Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.
9. The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.
10. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

These are the ten original federal amendments. Other significant amendments include the abolition of slavery (except prisoners) women's right to vote, definition of citizenship, protection of citizens' privileges and immunities, and income tax. These laws apply as blanket rights of our citizenship. Anything not covered in the US constitution is taken care of on an individual state basis. On the state level, laws can vary drastically, and as any lawyer knows: there is often no one-answer to a case rather, arguments are often built around pre-existing courtroom decisions (precedents).

What is most interesting about a citizens' rights is the disagreement in interpretation of these laws, as well as the divide between personal rights and national responsibility. What is authentically individual in a country that needs taxes to help build infrastructure and protect citizen's rights? Was there ever such a thing? Is equality in its truest sense an American trait if the founding documents were exclusive to one demographic?

The myths we're proposing in schools and popular media do not fit the realities and conflicts we face today. There seems to be no discussion, historically, on what our democracy is and quite often perpetuates the notions that everyone is the government, which is handily untrue. While individuals can spark change, seldom do we see this change work its way up to proper implementation. Even the scraps that do manage to fall through may not be implemented correctly (take the abolition of slavery and the work that's being done to correct racism in the US).

I like to model my examples from American politics off of Frank Capra's 1939 film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (which would fall in the same era as Hughes and Woodward's efforts in debunking American mythology of George Washington). I think it's a great look at authentic values and honesty in our politics, and how corruption is present within our republic.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington is about Jefferson Smith who is selected to replace a deceased senator in hopes that Smith's wholesome image pleases the people while his inexperience would make him easy to manipulate. Quickly torn apart by Washington's press, Smith is taken under the wing of the secretly-crooked politician Joseph Paine, who suggests Smith propose a bill to distract him from the press. Smith proposes a bill to authorize a federal loan to purchase land for a national boys' camp, which would be paid back by Boy Rangers across America to much initial success, specifically from the youngsters. Unfortunately the

proposed site is part of a scheme included in a bill by Jim Taylor, backed by Senator Paine, for their personal gain.

When he introduces the bill in the Senate, Smith is accused of trying to profit off of the bill. He launches into a filibuster the next day to postpone the appropriations bill giving the land to Jim Taylor, and show he's innocent in order to avoid being expelled from congress. He talks nonstop (much like this performance seems to be keen on doing) for 25 hours, reaffirming American ideals of freedom and revealing Taylor and Paine's motives. Smith's home state refuses to report Smith's speech, distorting facts against the senator instead.

To combat this, the Boy Rangers try to spread news in support of Smith, and are viciously attacked by Taylor's minions. Nearing exhaustion, Smith is presented with bins of letters/telegrams from his home state demanding his expulsion. He vows to press on, and then collapses on the floor.

It's striking to look at the similarities between depictions of congress in the 1930s to depictions of congress and politics in modern times. There is an overwhelming sense of corruption that has been pointed to in senators, and a disproportionate amount of power and control the state officials have. Interestingly enough, it reflects and echoes the initial reasons the American colonies fought for independence: lack of true representation within government.

While the film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* has a positive and happy ending (perhaps a product of current Hollywood trends and story restrictions) the truth is hardly such. Further, the separation between "good" and "bad" causes a striking rift in our views of historical figures and events. Our common story arcs examine the good vs the bad, and neglects the complexity imbued within a person. Washington's story of the cherry tree does this subtlety as well: there is a good choice and a bad choice, and the hero selects the good choice (honesty).

Another paradox is the relationship between individual and community, and our need to see Christ-like leaders. Christ was all about helping the needy, and healing the sick, feeding the hungry. He wasn't about collecting money and taxes. Christianity is so ingrained in our culture that 205 million American citizens follow the religion. Yet our government is not representative of Christian values, and the individuality that prevails in our stories is hardly evident in our current systems. There is little room for generosity and charity in a capitalist economy, for it relies on the poor and needy to give a public example of what happens without money.

America used to be a free market economy, set up by the principals of supply and demand with little to no government control. This quickly got out of hand, with monopolies and corporations gaining significant influence and power within the government, and promoted self-interest in getting rich quick. We talked a lot about this in the railway monopolies during John Henry's section.

It has been proven time and time again that left unregulated, big businesses will bring harm to the world, even if indirectly, be it through unfair prices and wages, pollution (look at the oil industry) or personal health (look at the sugar industry). Even Ayn Rand, in her book *The Fountainhead*, was against total corporate control, clearly specifying that anyone was free to do whatever they liked so long as it didn't infringe on the liberties, rights, and freedoms, of other people.

A very recent and real example of a purely capitalist (market-driven) system's failures and shortcomings is the recent 2021 storm in Texas and their power grids. About 85% of Texas is supplied by unregulated electric resellers, which offers ERCOT's (Electric Reliability Council of Texas) electricity under the wholesale market conditions. This means that prices will fluctuate from low to very high depending on ERCOT's prices. With the cold wave, not only were Texas' power grids not built to regulation, causing severe and sustained power outages, the market prices from ERCOT rose to nine thousand dollars per megawatt hour for nearly a week.

The choice that many Texans faced was a crippling-high power bill, many above fifteen thousand dollars, or attempt to find another way to not freeze to death. After a week, ERCOT was short near 1.3 billion dollars in payments, and Texas faces the very real possibility for a large-scale filing of bankruptcies from electric providers. The other damaging fact was that due to the limited amount of electricity and fuel, ERCOT had to schedule service interruptions which they did by neighborhood. Texas, like many states, still suffers from the effects of redlining, and the majority of the low-income (majority non-white) neighborhoods were left without power while the wealthier areas received preferential treatment.

What was supposed to be corrected by crisis pricing failed on a large scale, with large economic and social waves that will most likely persist through the decade. Referencing the new research statistics, two of the main responsibilities of government were responding to natural disasters, and maintaining infrastructure. In Texas, there was neither, with politicians taking a

hands-off approach to regulation and not ensuring protection against emergency situations (in fact, there have been concerns over Texas' electric grid for the past six years).

Over time, the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of allowing corporations to act as people and donate money as they wished in federal, state, and local elections (this was solidified in 2010 with Citizens United). The Court's majority decision equates money to speech, and as such did not find it constitutional to discriminate against corporate speech. This does bring into question exactly what the term "speech" entails. Even before this, corporations were able to find ways to influence policy-makers' decisions.

It's been shown that congressional members hold investments in firms they're supposed to be regulating. Senators are directly benefiting from private investments they would have insider knowledge about, which begs the question of are Senators really invested in the public good, or in personal gain? There's a famous quote that come to mind in how government has started to behave, specifically the Republican side, but more and more the Democratic side as well. It's Ronald Reagan's, he said: "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Public service has seen a diminish in importance, even with views that government needs to protect and look out for its people. Regan's point of view was to give money to the rich, because it will trickle down; however that has not been the case, and the economic divide is at an all-time high.

To combat this quote, JFK famously said: "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." While this may sound similar to Reagan's quote, JFK was explicitly referencing the importance of public service and civic action, that every American had to contribute to be a true democracy and make America work. The quote challenges us to think of the greater public good, and not just for ourselves and individual rights.

The question we must ask ourselves when telling the folktale of George Washington in modern times is whether or not our government is honest and authentic, if it's not being run by the American people. What are authentic American values, and what do we actually want from our government and politicians? Is it honesty and truth, representation in government? Or is it the freedom of a select demographic to control policy and make national decisions? Are we truly a democratic republic, or an oligarchy? Where is our accountability for unlimited individual rights?

Another rabbit hole that comes up with George Washington's mythology is the ideas behind truth and authenticity in American news and media. Our current television model (not streaming, we'll get to that) is based off the Nielsen ratings, which measures ratings points and shares. Rating points is a percentage of all television-equipped households tuned to a specific program (regardless of if their television was on or off), while shares represent the percentage of households, that were actually watching TV, which were watching the specific program. A rating of 3/7 would mean that 3% of all televisions, regardless of being on or off, were tuned in to a program, while 7% of households that were actually watching TV were tuned in to the program.

Not only does this give market researchers accurate data as to which shows are doing well, it also gives them a slew of other information such as which age groups are watching which shows, when the majority of televisions are on or off, the average time Americans watch TV (as of 2020 it's over four hours for adults aged 18 and over). Prime time television are the hours where the majority of viewership of a network will come from, and it's extremely important that the best shows are slotted for those times as that's where they'll make the most money (through advertisements). TV networks, as Paddy Chayefsky has said, will do anything for ratings.

This should sound familiar, as it's the same strand of thought that was probably going through Parson Weams' head: how to make the most money from media through spectacle. Each news show is very specifically produced to fit a certain mold and entertain a demographic. We have what is known as an oligopoly, where a few firms are dominating the TV industry (Comcast, Walt Disney Company, AT&T, ViacomCBS, Fox Corporation). Shows, even the news, are structured around appearances and characterizations rather than real life.

Take for example, Paddy Chayefsky's 1976 film *Network* which details the life of a network production. When Howard Beale, a news anchor for UBS, threatens to kill himself on camera, he becomes an overnight sensation with ratings skyrocketing for the company. Rather than fire him, UBS (spurred by Diana Christensen) decides to exploit Beale's outburst to develop a new segment. *The Howard Beale Show* attracts the highest ratings on television as Beale preaches angry messages as the mad prophet of the airwaves. In learning the network conglomerate which owns UBS is to be bought out, he uses his influence to urge viewers to pressure the White House into stopping it, which panics the network, as the merger is essential in handling UBS's debt load. The executives decide to hire the terrorist group, the Ecumenical

Liberation Army (ELA) to assassinate Beale on-air, also hoping it will boost season-opening ratings.

An analysis on the two characters mentioned, Howard Beale, and Diana Christensen, reveal parallels to the George Washington myths and their popularity. Howard Beale can be viewed as a George Washington of sorts: he speaks “truth” on the news, or allows an authentic version of his self on air. He goes on to speak about the “real” and “authentic” state of things, and validates emotions not normally condoned by network stations (news is supposed to be level-headed, unbiased). He gains a lot of traction for this, however it’s very hard to say whether or not his later fame is due to his production by Diana Christensen, or by what he’s actually saying. One clue is that a sentence he used during his first prophecy (“I’m as mad as hell and I’m not going to take this any more!”) is turned into a catchphrase for audience to yell out.

Diana Christensen is analogous to Parson Weams, who spun fallacies to promote Washington’s life and evangelical nature. Diana’s actions are all driven by ratings and television culture. Her move to assume production of *The Howard Beale Show* is due to the spike in ratings of Howard’s news segment. Likewise, the choice to assassinate Howard Beale at the end is done in order to gain more ratings (and also to protect the network). She cannot face truth without spinning it into obscurity to increase viewership ratings and popularity. The truth, for her, is a show.

Diana’s personal life also reflects this postmodern copying from television, as she turns her relationships into scripted events. This is reflected in her affair with Max Schumacher, the former head of the UBS news division (close friend of Howard Beale). In their breakup fight, Max says: “It’s the truth. After six months of living with you, I’m turning into one of your scripts. But this isn’t a script, Diana. There’s some real actual life going on here... I’m part of your life. I’m real. You can’t switch to another channel.” Diana’s inability to face truth in her profession is paralleled by her inability to cope with human emotion outside and in person. It expresses an inauthentic self, an argument *Network* makes as a danger to television and conglomerate narratives.

This concern is reflected widely in our culture today, especially as postmodern trends push our society towards a less-defined set of narratives. As psychologist Kenneth Gergen writes about, the boon in technology and rapid development of new media (principles defined by Lev Manovich) emphasizes truth and power from the diversification of voices and the recognition

that all things (specifically societal rules) are arbitrary. Of course, this doesn't imply all facts are arbitrary and socially-constructed, but that the systems we use to come to those conclusions might be.

The postmodern culture is a double-edged sword, as it does empower a larger number of people to challenge power, and democratize conversations previously left to "professionals" and the popes and kings of old. For example, the spread of false news and misinformation has grown rapidly with conspiracy theories gaining popular traction, and fake news sites and personalities (such as Q-Anon) to spread ideologies that do plenty of harm in society.

This doesn't just apply to people who harbour mal-intent though, as people who are less educated in spotting fake news, and more triggered by headlines and clickbait articles, contribute to this process. It also extends to modern influencers on popular apps. For example, @onlyjayus, a popular tiktok content creator with over 9.6 million followers, has garnered her popularity from taking quick psychology facts and sharing them in video format. The problematic side of this is that most of the facts she shares are unverified, biased, questionable, and sometimes just plain incorrect. Fortunately @dr_inna has popped onto the site to fact check claims not only made by @onlyjayus, but the larger psychology and science side of TikTok.

On a personal level however, the exposure to media can feel somewhat like a robot. As humans, we learn societal cues through copying which, as the case of Diana Christensen expresses, can lead people to try and structure their life as a television show. Gergen draws attention to this in his book, noting that watching TV could generate pre-recorded responses to questions and phrases, and a new kind of lexicon for social interaction.

To understand this, we will first look at a non-media example in the form of a greeting. When we greet a familiar face, we might say "hey, how's it going?" and expect an answer of "ok" or "good and you?" or "eh, you?" Generally we assume the belief that the other person is doing well, even though we don't know this as a fact. It's unexpected to respond "I'm really sad," or "I'm angry because a swarm of giant mosquito bees took over our campsite." We use these expected phrases to greet each other, in a similar fashion as two people might say "hi," in sequence. This arises from repetitive use in society, as a lexicon amongst a community and culture.

Now take an example from media: weddings. The lovely and fantasy realm of the romance perpetuates the idea of a traditional marriage: girl falls in love with guy (or vice versa),

they get married, and live happily ever after. Maybe there's a relationship scare in between to spice up the drama, however the formula and ultimate outcome remains the same. In this way, we set up our expectations of love life to be the standard on television, which usually ignores other factors of reality.

We can even look at how these films and shows are usually cast as white, and written by a white American, who grew up around these traditions (most likely perpetuated in media they saw growing up, and as such, are simply passing along the torch of societal tradition). We then limit our understanding of a relationship and love through these programmed narratives, only wanting what we see on television, which can be extremely damaging to BIPOC kids.

The lovely thing is the media industry is starting to break away from these plotlines and monomyths of the white American society, and showcase more diverse voices, even though some continue the same story arc just with a "diverse" cast. Regardless, our culture still revolves around the ideals of love that were formed long before our time. As the artist MARINA wrote in her song 'Oh No!': "TV taught me how to feel/ Now real life has no appeal/ ...I know exactly what I want and who I want to be/ I know exactly why I walk and talk like a machine/ I'm now becoming my own self-fulfilled prophecy."

The deconstruction of truth and definition of self is one of the defining principles of the new era, and one that will continue to evolve in the coming century, especially as the new generations figure out how to define a century that's started with war, famine, disease, government propaganda, and access to seemingly unlimited information (curated specifically for them), and plenty of death.

The Monomyth Story

Once upon a time, there was a hero. This hero, usually a man, goes about normal day-to-day life; they perform menial tasks, and conduct menial interactions with the townsfolk. They're well-known, or perhaps they're just well-known in their small circle of friends and acquaintances. One day, the hero makes a discovery. This discovery is so earth-shattering and mind-boggling, so compelling, that it forces the hero to embark on an adventure into the unknown to resolve the problem.

The hero isn't alone though, they make some friends that help them along the way, and even encounter a supernatural being that grants them a special power to help protect them on their quest. Along their way, the hero encounters many challenges and temptations that threaten their life, or tempt them into abandoning their quest.

Eventually though, the team of heroes make it to their final destination, and are ready to confront the main problem, to conquer it and bring peace back to their home. Except they're not powerful enough. The villain overpowers them, and they fall into an abyss, a dark place where they're all alone and all hope seems lost. Suddenly, they have a revelation, they're imbued with an even deeper knowledge or power and reborn from the ashes like a Phoenix bird.

Armed with their new perceptions, knowledge, and power, the hero resolves themselves to complete what they had previously failed to do. As the hero approaches the main conflict, they have an atonement with their ancestors, their past, or their mentor-figure. They must depart their past to return as an independent and strong hero.

In a final battle, the hero confronts and defeats his foe. Yet the story's not done; our hero must make it back against all odds. They've become the master of the new world, filled with bliss and enlightenment, they might not want to return to the ordinary world. The hero undergoes a rescue from without, guidance from their friends they made along the way which rescues them and brings the hero back to everyday life.

The returning hero, wounded from his experience, now faces the impact their quest had, and survive as master of the two worlds. They undergo an intense personal battle to master their freedom from their fear of death and return to living in the moment, back to their everyday life before their adventure began.

Analysis

Did you recognize the story? It should sound familiar. According to Joseph Campbell, this is the defining structure of folklore that appears across all cultures and religions. He based his claim off of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, Freudian psychoanalysis and ritualism, as well as collected stories from a wide array of cultures. It's what's known most popularly as "The Hero's Journey," and "monomyth," with implications that the archetype is singular and recurring in every culture.

This approach to mythology and folklore is problematic. The first point of this problem is the generalization of stories into one structure, which is written in American terms and influenced more heavily in Western culture. We can even look at the Americanized folktales of Brer Rabbit, which many (if any) don't really follow this monomyth closely. In fact, many researchers have accused Campbell's work as being selective, citing only stories that fit the preconceived mould which leaves out equally-valid stories which don't fit the pattern. The generalization is even rejected in anthropology, as it overgeneralizes cultures and religions, and fits them into a Western viewpoint that can be damaging to the authenticity of the culture and religion.

Beyond hand-picking his narratives, Campbell ignores other facets of the hero in his model, only skimming the cream off the top. For example, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh is cited in hacking down an entire forest (much like our folk hero Paul Bunyan) and raping many women subjects. Even one of the most-well-taught Greek myths, *The Illiad*, isn't a "hero's" journey as it is a hissy fit between Achilles and Agamemnon. The other well-known myth, Homer's *The Odyssey* also ignores the complexities of Odysseus's character, painting him as a hero after the war crimes committed during the Trojan War, as well as the unsavory acts he commits on the way back home.

Campbell uses *The Odyssey* as a prime example of his Hero's Journey, yet he gets many details incorrect, and rewrites Homer's work to better fit his needs. Odysseus was not sent to the underworld by Circe to recognize the unity of man and woman from Tiresias, but instead journeyed to the land of the dead to ask Tiresias of the forthcoming problems and how best to deal with them. Tiresias offers Odysseus nothing in terms of self-discovery.

There's a lack of specificity in the trials Campbell proposes in the Hero's journey. For example, what is the "belly of the beast?" If we look at an old tale such as *Beowulf*, we see Beowulf fight off Grendel, and then Grendel's mother... and then a dragon, which he ultimately falls. Where are the tests in Beowulf, what is the reward, where is the resurrection? We can look towards American folklore and ask such questions, take John Henry. John Henry doesn't cross any threshold per say, his one test he accomplishes without a metaphorical death and rebirth, or a visit to the belly of the beast. There's no temptation, no mentor... Where is Campbell's monomyth in even our most basic of American tales?

One of the most blaring issues with Campbell's oversimplification of his hero's journey is the idea of rebirth, which is actually seldomly seen in mythology beyond Christian Western cultures and religion. It certainly doesn't exist as a theme in Asiatic folklore and mythology. This whitewashing of worldly cultures is typical, and purports heroes as Christ-like saviors, when in reality they are not. The trials "heroes" go through may not even be for a good cause, as can be seen in Br'er Rabbit.

The second major problem with Campbell's monomyth is the psychological aspect. His myth relies heavily upon the psychoanalysis and psychological theories of two main people: Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, both of which are extremely problematic and have been widely disproven by modern psychology. For example, there is no proof of Freud's id, ego, or superego; a large proponent of Campbell's interpretation of the monomyth in culture and everyday life.

Campbell proposed that mythology and stories were a reflection of the self and revealed an alternate identity in our subconscious minds, which we can learn to "unlock" in a sense and develop an awareness for. He says: "Slowly, we trade dependency for psychological self-responsibility," in *The Power of Myth*, a documentary series on his work. He was also quoted largely with the saying "follow your bliss," as the power of life is locked within our unconscious minds. For example, the slaying of a dragon could be representative of one's ego. Unfortunately, this thinking is completely wrong, as there is no proof that the mind is split into parts, but exists in a continuity.

Even worse, Campbell accepts the psychoanalysis of Jung. What's wrong with Carl Jung, one might ask. Well aside from being a literal Nazi (we'll circle back to this), Jung's perception of psychoanalysis was wholly inaccurate. Campbell accepts the Jungian philosophy that proposes myth representing the process of individual development. He (no surprise) uses an example from

The Odyssey with Telemachus, who goes from Ithaca to the mainland to find his father. While Campbell emphasizes the psychological meaning of this journey, the source offers no insight into Telemachus's psyche, and the point of his journey isn't growing into adulthood, it's to gain knowledge of his father so he can recognize Odysseus when he returns home. The message of a good son honoring his father was taken extremely out of context.

To further implicate Campbell's ideology, we can examine the unfortunate misogyny inherent in his assertions. On one side is Campbell's constant prioritization of male figures in myth and folklore, projecting that the "hero" is almost always male. Another aspect comes heavily from Campbell's acceptance of a Jungian doctrine which states the decisive moments in a woman's life are physical, and inflicted upon her. For example, Campbell states initiation of a hero's journey, or coming-of-age story is harder for the boy because he needs the intentionality of becoming a man, whereas for a girl, life just "overtakes" her and she becomes a woman. This is in reference to menstruation or pregnancy, or loss of virginity.

The unfortunate effect of this is a reduction of women into objects, and that a unity between the two is completely mystical. The experience, Campbell implies, is fundamentally different from that of a male's. The archetypal female is passive and giving, her ability for childbirth is sacred and a form of worship. It is the body that takes the spotlight in the female's journey, and not the determination of her mind. In fact, we can see areas in which Campbell treats women as objects existing for the sole purpose of helping a male on his journey. For example, the woman as temptress ordeal, in which the hero is tempted by a woman to defect from his journey. This paints the woman as a dangerous sexual force, rather than an actual person that has her own complex backstory.

Rather than a universal hero-pattern, what Campbell asserts in his books and interviews is actually the typical Western, Christian, pattern of the life of men in our own time, which is quickly becoming obsolete in a postmodern era. His philosophy has enabled a culture of male-centric heroes to persist, and contributes to a long history of misrepresentation in mythology and folklore. To examine this, we'll be looking at these story arcs in American media, specifically the problematic folktales of Disney, and *Star Wars*.

Let us first examine the history of folklore, and by doing so, remind ourselves of what folklore is. Lore, or stories, of the folk, or people. To examine one (and the most relevant) area of folklore, we can look at Grimm's fairytales as an example of folklore. These fairytales were

originally told by spinsters, who used them to stay up all night on their spindles. They were then recorded by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm into a written collection, which underwent 7 editions before being called “definitive.”

The methods with which the Grimm brothers collected the folktales parallels folktales commonly told by American media. A man goes to a woman’s home and records the stories and songs, often staying late into the night. Symbolism-wise, we can look at this encounter as its own hero’s journey, as a young man traveling to collect information from a woman to bring back to the enlightened world. In such cases – and as it happens due to historical restrictions on women in academia: most – the woman folklorist is merely an object to serve a man’s personal quest for fame. To further this, when presented with two folktales, one transcribed by a male, and one by a female, the folktale scribed by the man is almost always chosen above the one penned by a woman.

The inadvertent parallel between the method in which folktales have been collected and the ones we choose to circulate in pop culture is extremely telling of our society. Grimm’s fairytales include plenty of fantastical tales of which a select few were popularized as children’s cartoons (mostly by Disney). The ones chosen by Disney not only rewrite a significant portion of the original, but are also heavily misogynistic.

Analyzing the first animation from Disney, *Snow White*, we can start to build a pattern for these tales and portrayal of women. The film plot revolves around the most beautiful woman in the land who is forced to run away because of a jealous step-mother. She finds a home with seven dwarves who invite her in protect her. When the step-mother finds out Snow White has survived, she creates a poisoned apple which she gives to Snow White, subsequently causing Snow White’s death. She then tries to kill off the dwarves but is struck down by a force de majeure. A year later, a prince comes along and, saddened by Snow White’s apparent death, decides to kiss her which breaks the spell and awakens the young princess whereupon she is swept away in the prince’s arms.

The gender roles are apparent in this film, and only continue to reinforce themselves throughout the decades. Attractiveness (especially youthful attractiveness) is the most important attribute of a woman, paired with passivity. It is the heroine’s beauty that drives the plot, and not her actions.

Women that aren't beautiful are, in modern terms, "sus," and through evil means, will seek to take advantage of the helpless young maidens. Interestingly, the evil women in these Disney films exhibit traits that directly threaten society's feminine ideal. They are strong, determined, greedy, smart. They exist in an undesirable situation and they make plans to change it, often without the presence of a man.

The male hero, and yes it is always a male hero, has the easy role of swooping in and saving the day. Their role is often limited, existing only in the ends of the film to defeat the woman in power.

With these roles in mind, it is clear that the messages these fairy tale films portray are as such: that women must be attractive to achieve happiness, women who seek to change the status quo are evil and must be defeated, and men are the valiant heroes that are to resolve the main conflict of the story. Women are objects to be protected from themselves, a theme shared closely with Campbell's "woman as the temptress" element, and are expected to passively wait for a man to come along to settle down and marry.

Placing importance on the role of beauty in a woman's journey is also damaging. It undercuts a woman's personal achievements, and makes it easier to dismiss their successes and discoveries. I assert that our culture of male-dominated idea theft is attributed to this notion that a woman can only focus on her beauty, and cannot offer knowledge to any discussion. Further, the ideals of beauty become intangible, especially for women of colour who don't see themselves represented as the definition of "beautiful" on screen.

This mould also associates men closely with violence (no, it wasn't video games). The idea that the hero's journey involves a physical and violent clash of good and evil is prominently displayed in media types like this. It becomes a necessity to have men arm themselves to protect the object of desire, and to protect their own power and dominance within the world of actions. Think of *Sleeping Beauty*, wherein the prince must murder an angry and violent woman in the form of a dragon. These roles stick in our minds, even as children. When asked about a character that seemed to be victimized, children think about a girl; whereas if the character suggested is independent, or leaving home on an adventure, children will think about a boy.

At first glance, it would seem that these are the fairy tales and folklore that were collected by the brother's Grimm, however Disney (being Disney) conveniently left out many facts from their retellings, as well as neglected a great deal of folklore. A good portion of Grimm's

fairytale (and folklore in general) have men as the villains, who brutally rape or murder young women. Not only this, but in a great deal of these folktales, the women prove themselves with something such as housekeeping skills and aren't just passive. Not to mention the actual gruesome ramifications of the wrongdoers unsuited for children (which, to be fair, most of the Grimms' collected work were never meant for children).

The original Snow White tale reads quite differently from the original 1930's animation. A young maiden is forced to flee a queen envious of Snow White's beauty, and finds a house of dwarves who allow her asylum in exchange for housework and cooking meals. The queen tries several times to kill Snow White through various items before succeeding with an apple. A year later, a prince comes along, and has his servants carry away the young maiden. The servants drop the coffin, and the poison apple comes out of Snow White's throat whereupon the prince offers his hand in marriage, which she accepts. They get married and on their wedding night, invite the evil queen over and subsequently force her into a pair of red-hot iron shoes to dance until she dropped down dead.

While in this version, beauty is still the main driving force behind the plot, it is not the prince that swoops in to save the day. It is by accident she awakes, and she is offered a place by his side, rather than him forcing a kiss and sweeping her off. She is also the one to get revenge on her antagonist, not a mystical force.

We can also analyze another film mentioned, *Sleeping Beauty*. The original tale goes

There once lived a great lord, who was blessed with a daughter, whom he named Talia. He sent for the wise men and astrologers in his lands, to predict her future. They met, counseled together, and cast her horoscope, and came to the conclusion that she would incur great danger from a splinter of flax. Her father therefore forbade that any flax, hemp, or any other material of that sort be brought into his house, so that she should escape the predestined danger.

when Talia had grown into a young and beautiful lady, she was looking out of a window, when she beheld passing that way an old woman, who was spinning. Talia, never having seen a distaff or spindle, was pleased to see it twirling and she was so curious as to what thing it was, that she asked the old woman to come to her. Taking the spindle from her hand, she began to stretch the flax. As fate would

have it, Talia ran a splinter of flax under her nail, and she fell dead upon the ground. When the old woman saw this, she became frightened and ran down the stairs, and is running still.

As soon as Talia's father heard of the disaster which he had Talia, laid out in one of his country mansions. There, servants seated her on a velvet throne under a canopy of brocade. Wanting to forget all and to drive from his memory his great misfortune, he closed the doors and abandoned forever the house where he had suffered this great loss.

After a time, it happened by chance that a neighboring king was out hunting and passed that way. One of his falcons escaped from his hand and flew into the house by way of one of the windows. The falcon did not come back when called, so the king had one of his party knock at the door, believing the palace to be inhabited. Although he knocked for a length of time, nobody answered, so the king had them bring a vintner's ladder, for he himself would climb up and search the house, to discover what was inside. Thus he climbed up and entered, and looked in all the rooms, and nooks, and corners, and was amazed to find no living person there. At last he came to the salon, and when the king beheld Talia, who seemed to be enchanted, he believed that she was asleep, and he called her, but she remained unconscious. He beheld her charms and felt his blood course hotly through his veins. He lifted her in his arms, and carried her to a bed, where he gathered the first fruits of love. Leaving her on the bed, he returned to his own kingdom, where, in the pressing business of his realm, he for a time thought no more about this incident.

Now after nine months Talia delivered two beautiful children, one a boy and the other a girl. In them could be seen two rare jewels, and they were attended by two fairies, who came to that palace, and put them at their mother's breasts. Once, however, they sought the nipple, and not finding it, began to suck on Talia's fingers, and they sucked so much that the splinter of flax came out. Talia awoke as if from a long sleep, and seeing beside her two priceless gems, she held them to her breast, and gave them the nipple to suck, and the babies were dearer to her than her own life and she names them Sun and Moon. Finding herself alone in that palace with two children by her side, she did not know what had happened to her; but she

did notice that the table was set, and food and drink were brought in to her regularly. although she did not see any attendants.

In the meanwhile, the king remembered Talia, and telling his wife that he wanted to go hunting, he returned to the palace, and found her awake, and with two cupids of beauty. He was overjoyed, and he told Talia who he was, and how he had seen her, and what had taken place. When she heard this, their friendship was knitted with tighter bonds, and he remained with her for a few days. After that time he bade her farewell, and promised to return soon, and take her with him to his kingdom. And he went to his realm, but he could not find any rest, and at all hours he had in his mouth the names of Talia, and of the children, Sun and Moon, and when he took his rest, he called either one or other of them.

Now the king's wife began to suspect that something was wrong from the delay of her husband while hunting, and hearing him name continually Talia, Sun, and Moon, she became hot with another kind of heat than the sun's. Sending for the secretary, she said to him, "Listen to me, you are living between two rocks, between the post and the door, between the poker and the grate. If you will tell me with whom the king your master, and my husband, is in love, I will give you treasures untold; and if you hide the truth from me, you will never be found again, dead or alive." The man was terribly frightened. Greed and fear blinded his eyes to all honor and to all sense of justice, and he related to her all things, calling bread bread, and wine wine.

The queen, hearing how matters stood, sent the secretary to Talia, in the name of the king, asking her to send the children, for he wished to see them. Talia, with great joy, did as she was commanded. Then the queen, told the cook to kill them, and to make them into several tasteful dishes for her husband. But the cook was tender hearted and, seeing these two beautiful golden apples, felt pity and compassion for them, and he carried them home to his wife, and had her hide them. In their place he prepared two lambs into a hundred different dishes.

When the king came to feast, the queen, with great pleasure, had the food served. The king ate with delight, saying, "By the life of Lanfusa, how tasteful

this is"; or, "By the soul of my ancestors, this is good." Each time she replied, "Eat, eat, you are eating of your own."

For two or three times the king paid no attention to this repetition, but at last hearing the theme continued, he answered, "I know perfectly well that I am eating of my own, because you have brought nothing into this house"; and growing angry, he got up and went to a villa at some distance from his palace, to solace his soul and alleviate his anger.

Meanwhile the queen, not being satisfied of the evil already done, sent for the secretary and told him to go to the palace and to bring Talia back, saying that the king longed for her presence and was expecting her. Talia departed as soon as she heard these words, believing that she was following the commands of her lord, for she greatly longed to see her light and joy, knowing not what was preparing for her. She was met by the queen, whose face glowed from the fierce fire burning inside her.

She addressed her thus, "Welcome, Madam Busybody! You are a fine piece of goods, you ill weed, who are enjoying my husband. So you are the lump of filth, the cruel bitch, that has caused my head to spin? Change your way, where I will compensate you for all the damage you have done to me."

Talia, hearing these words, began to excuse herself, saying that it was not her fault, because the king had taken possession of her when she was drowned in sleep. But the queen would not listen to Talia's excuses, and had a large fire lit in the courtyard of the palace, and commanded that the young woman should be cast into it.

Talia, perceiving that matters had taken a bad turn, knelt before the queen, and begged her to allow her at least to take off the garments she wore. The queen, not for pity of the unhappy lady, but to gain also those robes, which were embroidered with gold and pearls, told her to undress, saying, "You can take off your clothes. I agree." Talia began to take them off, and with every item that she removed she uttered a loud scream. Having taken off her robe, her skirt, the bodice, and her shift, she was on the point of removing her last garment, when she

uttered a last scream louder than the rest. They dragged her towards the pile, to reduce her to lye ashes which would be used to wash royal clothes.

The king suddenly appeared, and finding this spectacle, demanded to know what was happening. He asked for his children, and the queen -- reproaching him for his treachery -- told him that she had had them slaughtered and served to him as meat. When the wretched king heard this, he gave himself up to despair, saying, "Alas! Then I, myself, am the wolf of my own sweet lambs. What evil deed is this which you have done? Begone!"

So saying, he commanded that the queen should be cast into the fire, the very fire the queen prepared for Talia, and the secretary with her, because he had been the weaver of this wicked plot. He was going to do the same with the cook, whom he believed to be the slaughterer of his children, when the man cast himself at the king's feet, saying, "In truth, my lord, for such a deed, there should be nothing else than a pile of living fire, and no other help than a spear from behind, and no other entertainment than twisting and turning within the blazing fire, and I should seek no other honor than to have my ashes, the ashes of a cook, mixed up with the queen's. But this is not the reward that I expect for having saved the children, in spite of the gall of that bitch, who wanted to kill them and to return to your body that which was of your own body."

Hearing these words, the king was beside himself. He thought he was dreaming, and he could not believe what his own ears had heard. Therefore, turning to the cook, he said, "If it is true that you have saved my children, be sure that I will take you away from turning the spit, and I will put you in the kitchen of this breast, to turn and twist as you like all my desires, giving you such a reward as shall enable you to call yourself a happy man in this world."

While the king spoke these words, the cook's wife, seeing her husband's need, brought forth the two children, Sun and Moon, before their father. And the king never tired at playing the game of three with his wife and children, making a mill wheel of kisses, now with one and then with the other. He gave a generous reward to the cook, he made him a chamberlain. He married Talia to wife; and she

enjoyed a long life with her husband and her children, thus experiencing the truth of the proverb:

Those whom fortune favors
Find good luck even in their sleep.

This isn't Grimm's version, which is more similar to Disney's telling, but sans the violence and shapeshifting. The thirteenth fairy was simply angry she wasn't invited, and had no ill will towards the royal family. The prince just walks in and kisses the sleeping beauty, Briar-Rose.

We start to see the propagation of Christian values within the retelling of folk and fairy tales with the inclusion of elements from The Hero's Journey (before Campbell's proposed monomyth, but as determining factors within his conclusion). We can also study the editors and anthologists and scribes to look at which cultural and religious influences were present in their collections. The Grimm Brothers were Christian and male, and had their own biases in telling, and then directly editing, their collected stories. To say, sexist bias is not the fault of the folklore and their oral narrators, but more the fault of the collectors that knocked on the women's doors.

It should also be pointed out that many of Disney's animated classic fairytales are Germanic, and that we have very strong ties to Germany as a culture. Disney's propagation of a beauty standard and fairness (aka whiteness) can be tied to the Nazi ideals of eugenics. The promotion of a highly-masculine culture and extreme sexism is also a Nazi trait. Coupled with Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, it is clear that our imperialist restraints on creativity have only contributed to Neo Nazism and the far right ideals.

Let's continue our analysis of Campbell in this light. Recall Campbell's oversimplification of mythology and folklore into a Westernized view of story. This is singlehandedly drawn from the bible, and most-closely parallels itself with the journey of Jesus. Jesus is called to adventure, has supernatural aid and many followers. His trials consist of Roman culture and politics, specifically Pontius Pilate. He undergoes a road of trials, and falls into temptation, facing an ultimate stand off whereupon he is crucified. He returns three days later as the master of both worlds, and bestows his boon upon all mankind. This archetype does actually appear many times within the bible (think Moses, Daniel and the Lion's Den, Jonah and the Whale (the tale where Campbell gets his "Belly of the Beast" element)).

The archetype, recall, does not fit into other cultures' mythologies and folk tales. It is telling of Campbell and his ideology, as well as the prophets and disciples of his work, that they slap on this Christian-valued one-size-fits-all mould to all cultures and religions. It is nothing more than cultural imperialism, and a whitewashing of stories and identities, a claim that Western Christianity is more valuable than all else.

We can see this happening today, with a prime example of a work that was directly inspired by Campbell's assertions: *Star Wars*. George Lucas has repeatedly gone on record to cite Joseph Campbell as his inspiration for the story behind his most famous work. To him, Campbell was a Yoda figure, a guide in storytelling.

Indeed, the first *Star Wars* fits this Hero's journey mould: Luke is called to action by a spiritual guide, Obi Wan Kenobi. Aided by companions, he crosses the threshold into space to find and rescue the Princess Leia. He faces a road of trials on board the famous Death Star, where Kenobi is slain, and he must escape with Leia to the rebellion. There, he restores order by destroying the Death Star with spiritual guidance and The Force, and is rewarded.

The rest of the original trilogy is simply an extension of Luke's journey, and a larger Hero's Journey example, each film in itself its own tiny Hero's Journey. The prequels fare no better, themselves an exact replica of the monomyth of Joseph Campbell, promising diversity in a very non-diverse way. And such it is with the sequel trilogy as well, minus *Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*, which is an actual diverse plotline with a divergence in storytelling and screen representation.

The critical and fan response to this difference was less than savory however. User-generated reviews gave the film a 42% on Rotten Tomatoes, while on Metacritic the score was 4.2 out of 10. The fanbase widely regards it as one of the worst *Star Wars* films, even worse than the prequel trilogy (which at least offered premium memetic value). Their refusal and lack of acceptance of diversity was clearly seen in two ways: the first was the cyberbullying of actress Kelly Marie Tran, who received hate comments for her portrayal of Rose Tico. Perhaps it should be noted that she is Asian, but this essay will not comment on this coincidence that the actress is the only member of the cast who was cyberbullied due to her characters' actions (nor that most of the hate comments were highly racist and sexist).

Marie Tran's character was so hated that she was forced off of social media having received several death threats and a barrage of angry fandom comments. Her character was

significantly reduced in screen time and essentiality to plot in the final film as a response, ironic seeing as the films promote anti-hate messages.

The second way we can see a fandom's refusal of Episode VIII boils directly down to the plot itself. It is not a traditional Hero's Journey: Rey's spiritual guide turns out to be no help at all; and can be argued that she becomes Luke's spiritual guide instead. The side plot pushes anti-capitalistic methods, and is ultimately a red herring, having no significant bearing upon the main action. Even the final battle isn't a great duel between good and evil as followers have been conditioned to watch: it was a battle between two conflicted characters both searching for something greater. And it's not actually the final battle: that happens on a remote planet, where the main characters and rebellion choose to distract the enemy while escaping to fight another day. It's not an uplifting message or film at all, and instead offers a grittier, and grimmer outlook on the sacrifice of the war.

The refusal of this new story is an equivalent to Plato's cave dwellers, which Campbell himself uses as an example in his book (Rian Johnson, the director, being the "hero" in this case). The whole thing is an example of just how much we, as a culture, have allowed Campbell to euthanize other stories and points of view, how we have become the Nazis of storytelling, which in turn, has severe cultural and political ramifications which we are seeing to this day.

I have witnessed this first hand, seeing several stories from various backgrounds get slammed for being "not interesting enough" due to its lack of conformity to this mould. Students were praised by their clarity of a Hero's Journey monomyth-type plot and 2-dimensional characters, while more complex and intriguing and new ideas were pushed down and out of conversation. Even my own stories have been held up in mockery by old white men of Campbell's order.

This doesn't just exist at an academic level either. The stories being promoted and backed with large budgets are generally stories that conform to Campbell's monomyth and such. Studios are only now starting to look at diversification (true diversification) of media, which it's struggling with (recall the discussion of Br'er Rabbit).

Beyond storytelling, we can see the effects of a "Hero's Journey Mindset" within American culture. We are more self-centered and individualistic, focused on self improvement without taking into account a larger community. It is the promise of bliss, and excitement, that draws us to Campbell's theories. We want to be the hero, but in doing so, we disregard what it

means to be a “hero.” When we place humans on pedestals, they become non-human. They are now an icon, someone that is to be revered and exemplified.

We see this manifest in movements, even within the NAACP, which promoted Rosa Parks over Claudette Clovin due to concerns over how Clovin would appear to the public. Clovin sat in front of the bus before Rosa Parks, but was a teenager (less reliable) and didn’t look like she belonged to the right socioeconomic class. And even more sinisterly, we’ve seen this in Trump’s movement, with the far right idolizing a president, many to the point they believe Trump has the divine right of kings.

To put it simply, I am saying we [Americans] are Nazis of a new order.

In light of this past discussion, we come to the reason you will not see other American myths within this performance. No Asian-American, no Native-American, no Mexican-American. While certainly these cultures are an important aspect, and should be studied on their own, the unfortunate fact is that most of these cultures’ tales have been retold and processed through the eugenics of Campbell’s storytelling to a point where I am not in a position to discuss the intricacies of these folktales. It would be a heinous attempt to analyze the mythology and folklore of cultures.

While I have included African American folklore, they are a strong part of our current culture and needed to be discussed in-depth. We could look at the absence of other cultures’ folktales as a lack of care for other communities, and a lack of proper resources to delve into these tales in a respectful manner that doesn’t sow distrust amongst the communities.

We can ask ourselves: what does it say about our culture that we haven’t established trust and a strong connection to the native people and land? What does it say about our culture that we didn’t include native and other cultures’ folklore in American folklore? That most cultures don’t even trust our media system to produce accurate and faithful representations of their heritage? Why have we promoted the stories we promote?

There is also the other problem of time. This show is only six hours long, and my focus had to be geared more toward the popular legends.

Ecology

Hey.

Are you ok?

We've been saying some pretty controversial things here. Some things that might go against what you've previously held to know as true.

That can be rough.

That can be angrifying.

That can be terrifying.

That's ok.

It's ok. We're here together.

Let's breathe. When was the last time we've taken a good breath?

Ok.

...and in: *[leads audience in breathing exercise. In for four, hold for four, out for four. Repeat four times].*

And one big breath in: *[inhale as much as you can. Hold for seven. And release]* and release.

We're going to end this performance with a brief discussion on ecology. Ecology is important: it's the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. We're an ecology of humans: a pattern with relations between us. Here, in this room (or digital sphere). It's important to talk about how we relate, how we're relating, how we could better relate. It's the principle that governs theatre, business, society, nature.

How has our folklore affected our ecology?

Let's look at the natural world first: our ecology to our surroundings. We touched on this slightly with Paul Bunyan, looking at the deforestation of early American forestry, and corporate greed. The lack of replenishment to the earth is a concerning factor in these folktales, as there's only mention of logging, and the cutting down of forests.

It's a problem that continues to this day, and one that Seuss warns about in *The Lorax*: the concept of corporations taking from the earth as if it's a limitless well of goods. In our society and economy, very little thought is given to the limitations of our resources on Earth. Most companies will turn a blind eye to terrible production practices in order to get the most profit possible, while many will throw money to buy politicians to keep the status quo, or even push it back to benefit a company.

A modern example of this is the oil industry, which is responsible for the release of Gigatons of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere per year. Oil is used in everything from transportation to heat to plastics, all of which contribute significantly to greenhouse gasses, gasses that trap heat in the atmosphere. Most of the products created from oil are pretty damaging to us on a base level.

Plastics, which might be used over and over to store things, emit gasses as they decompose over time due to unstable chemical reactions. This has become a problem in museums where plastics have invaded the art and product scene as everything from acrylic paints to large sculptures to cultural artifacts (space suits, designer chairs, etc) are composed from the mouldable materials. The breakdown of plastics is not only dangerous to the artifacts themselves, but also to surrounding exhibits. The gasses increase erosion or even cause erosion of objects, and can even be explosive (cellulose nitrate film decomposes into an explosive gas).

Yet the problem is oil is everywhere, and seemingly in every thing. Computers, buildings, cars, pens, the kitchen, the bedroom... everywhere. Campaigns focused on the reduction of plastic have been far too little, focusing more on individual consumer, and far too late; or just blatantly ineffective.

The lack of care for the Earth and environment has led to a global crisis that everyone is familiar with: global warming. We can see the effects of global warming on our planet even now. A few examples are as such:

1. The world is spinning faster. This is due to melting icecaps, as less friction with the atmosphere is being produced on Earth.
2. The melting ice has caused sea levels to rise significantly, causing more dangerous storms and natural disasters.
3. The warmer and drier months are worsened by increased heat, which in turn creates a deadlier and longer wildfire season.

4. Extreme weather conditions created by global warming disturb crops and livestock, which has impacts on cost of food, variety available, and abundance.

This is a problem in the economy and our society of consumerism and capitalism. The problem is that the systems don't work if we don't consume and purchase items, yet the items produced are terrible for us. Where is the responsibility of corporations? In capitalism, there is none. The rule of "all the traffic can bear" is a law. The consumer is directly responsible for the demand, even when the other options either don't exist, are too expensive, or are unknown to the consumer.

The ecology of our society is exploitation, and rapid increase in sales. Little concern is given to how and what we exploit. Even something that seems great for society can have severe and lasting impacts on the environment.

Take for example, bitcoin. Bitcoin at first glance seems like a wonderful system. It's practically free from government scrutiny due to its anonymous trading methods. You can transfer any amount of money to someone free and instantly. And it's now backed by the US dollar and several hundred thousands of users (including Elon Musk) making it a strong form of exchange. And this goes for most, if not all, digital forms of commodity (note, Bitcoin et al are not currency).

Yet mining just one Bitcoin (prior to the halving in June 2020) has the equivalent of releasing about 33 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the world. This is due to large mining centers dedicated to mining bitcoin, which suck a lot of energy to power the GPU's, plus the cooling centers, plus facility utilities, plus... In a digital age, Bitcoin makes a ton of sense, yet environmentally it's wasteful, and it's contributing to the rising global crisis.

When we use products, and start new things, we need to start considering the environment and how we're impacting the world. We think very short term, as is evidenced by how most people play the stock market, or when making decisions that affect their life. Our society has stopped valuing the consideration for the future generations, or for each other as a community. If we use all the resources for ourselves, what is left for everyone else? What kind of world does that put us in?

This leads us directly into our next ecology: the ecology between ourselves. The tale of John Henry, and the larger monopolies of the railroad teach us a lot of how we value each other as human beings, which is to say, how we devalue our humaneness.

It is very clear that to these corporations that we, as people, exist only to earn them profit. This idea isn't new or revolutionary, in fact it extends far back in literature: the idea that we are simply cogs, or gears, in a machine. This concept increases during the modern era, where we did start to view the world as a giant machine.

When that starts to happen, we forget to ask ourselves what makes us human, and what we need to live and thrive as human beings. We see this in the exploitation of John Henry by the railroad, working through conditions that are harmful to human workers. The railroad could have easily gone around the mountain, instead the company demanded they drill through. I assume this was done without a clear idea of the kind of rock they were asking the workers to drill. This caused even more human casualties, as drilling through a mountain is significantly more difficult than going around it, and seeing as the tunnel kept collapsing post-build... it is clear that the company acted to ensure the largest share of profits at the expense of their human workers.

In fact, America's railway network is one of the (if not the) least energy-efficient railway network in the world. When scientists used fungus and slime moulds to replicate railway systems around the globe, and to look at the most energy-efficient pathways between stations, they found the least efficient railway networks were in the United States and in Africa (both products of imperialism, slavery, and capitalist greed). In the US, this can be traced historically to the monopolies which developed its railway network based on the amount of profit they could collect, and not on natural landscape features.

This exploitation manifests itself in our politics as well, as we allow slavery to continue under a different name in our prison systems. Are we truly valuing human life if we gladly allow it to be exploited in imprisonment? Are we helping people, or finding an excuse to cut back on costs of labor? And on the cutting back of labor costs, where is the dignity in paying workers the bare minimum, often subminimum, wage? To excuse this behavior by saying it's "unskilled" and thus not deserving of a living wage undermines the worker and labor they provide.

Is it unskilled to stand for eight hours a day and smile at people regardless of if they smile back, or throw their drink at you, while offering excellent customer care and service? What does "unskilled labor" actually mean to us as a culture and society? When the pandemic hit, and the essential workers were forced to remain stationed at their jobs, most of the employees fell into the "unskilled" category. America doesn't value these people, as is evidenced by the wages we pay, and the way we treat, them.

It is no secret large corporations take advantage of the prison labor system, while simultaneously offering the bare minimum wage, often times subminimum wage, to its employees. The message America has tried to promote is that hard work will be rewarded greatly, yet little is actually rewarded with hard work. Our ecology to one another has turned into an individualistic, and selfish ideology. It ignores questions of ethics and humaneness, human dignity and emotion. We're only just now starting to realize the importance of mental health, and a recent study showed that most Americans are completely unaffected by emotions.

And what about the ecology between us and truth? Between us and the outside world and foreign ideas? As the last three sections have discussed, we appear to have very little care about how we situate our media and thinking around diverse communities, and truthfulness. This last section has asked more questions than it has answers, and that's because it doesn't know where we'll go in the future. But we know what's happened in the past, and how it's shaped us, and we hope it can shape a better future.

It asks you these questions for you to consider what kind of future we want as a society, as Americans. It asks these questions because it wants to know who you are. Are you part of this performance? Are you the audience, or are you the characters? Both? What is your role here tonight? What will it be tomorrow? In a week? A month? Ten years?

I'll end with an analogy. It's a forestry analogy, that links us directly to trees. See, trees aren't individual. When we speak of trees, we speak of a forest without realizing it. Underneath the ground, a vast network of roots exists, connecting each tree to each other. These roots send out signals and nutrients to their fellow trees. If one tree is lacking in water, the surrounding trees will send support through the roots system. What this means is that forests are one large tree. And the tree takes care of itself, its individual sprouts.

Is a community, or society, not like a tree? On the outside, sure we may appear to be individual beings. Yet inside, we're connected to each other through actions and communal events. If one gets sick, do we send support? If a new disease pops up, should we not act with the best interest of The People? I think this is the most important thing to take away from this performance. America has struggled with a unifying identity for such a long time, even after the Revolutionary War, we were divided and the only ways to get us to stay together was through Religion, myth, and debt. Is it not enough to be human together, to recognize our differences and

work towards solutions to our problems? To recognize that this is our land, and simultaneously, this is not our land?

Good night, and Good luck.

End Credits

[“Light One Candle” by Peter Paul and Mary plays]

Virtual Theatre of Arizona Presents:

AMERICAN FOLKLORE

Songs, Tales, and Ideas collected by Ethan Fox

Production Stage Manager

Lucy Primiano

Performed by

Shonda Royall

Mary Timpany

Alex Parra

Matt Venrick

Music Director

Kathrin Fox

Produced by

Dayna Renee Donovan & Jason White

The Virtual Theatre of Arizona

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