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QUESTIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

If you have any questions, please contact the journal at elements@bc.edu. All submissions can be sent to elements.submissions@gmail.com. Visit our website at www.bc.edu/elements for updates and further information.

COVER

Mosque in Queens, New York
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PERIODICITY

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EDITOR’S NOTE

Dear Readers,

As an undergraduate research journal, we often confront the question of “so what?” Yes, this article is well written, meticulously sourced, and clearly developed; yes, it presents an interesting concept about a topic rarely considered in depth, but why should I read it? How is it related to my life? Why is this research significant in any sense beyond the purely academic? The “so what” problem presents a challenge to publications like *Elements* that gather work done by students in a wide variety of disciplines without a clear benchmark for “real world” applications. We find ourselves carrying an indispensable obligation to justify the relevance of research to our fellow students. This issue of *Elements* seeks to meet that burden by presenting a unique collection of pieces that clearly articulate why original research is more important in our increasingly complicated, globalized 21st century world than ever before.

In our cover article, Saljooq Asif tackles the endemic post-9/11 problem of “Muslim Identity in 21st Century America” through the lens of author Ayad Akhtar’s works. Given the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East, the recent shooting of three Muslim students at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and the impending trial of alleged Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the questions and conflicts Saljooq explores hold great importance to present and future efforts to resolve the problem of radical Islam and to offer full acceptance to Muslim Americans. Rachel Aldrich’s “Trauma, Fear, and Paranoia” further studies the domestic implications of 9/11 for Muslims in America, while Caitlin Toto examines the international consequences of these sociopolitical phenomena in “Behind the Veil.” These three articles, constructed through approaches and views from three distinct academic fields, offer us insight into some of the most pressing dilemmas, on a national and global scale, that our generation confronts.

Research allows us to better understand the world in which we operate. David Querusio contextualizes the constant debates about Michelle Obama’s role as “mom-in-chief” within the parallel traditions of black and white feminism in “From Mammy to Mommy.” The historical and sociological narrative he creates helps the casual CNN viewer to grasp the layered issues underlying a seemingly superficial controversy. This function of research is not limited to matters of culture or politics, but also extends to our comprehension of the natural world. In “New Research in Solar Cells,” Michelle Solomon and Alison Johnson explain how recent advances in the study of urbach tails open a wide range of possibilities for innovative forms of alternative energy. The potential implications of her work present dynamic options for how we will think of fuel and power in generations to come.

The articles we publish make critical connections between events and issues past and present, tracing threads of intellectual and popular life through the centuries to their contemporary iterations. If *Elements* features a student’s work that provides analysis of the legal and technical nuances behind the Comcast-Time Warner merger, as Harrison Tune’s “Positive Law vs. Good Intentions” does, or unravels some of the complex historical strands that inform our ongoing debates about race in America, a task attempted by Danielle Nista’s “A Vigorous Affirmation of Life,” then we continue to prove the pertinence of research, of a liberal arts education, and of the university model itself. A publication like *Elements* ties together the too-often separated fields of research at a university like Boston College. We encourage you, as you peruse these pages, to look for the ways in which the diverse disciplines we have highlighted inform each other.

Happy reading!

Best,

MARISSA MARANDOLA

Editor in Chief
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RECIPIENT OF THE 2013 PULITZER PRIZE FOR DRAMA, AYAD AKHTAR HAS BEEN LAUDED AS THE DE FACTO VOICE OF THE AMERICAN MUSLIM IN THEATRE AND LITERATURE. AKHTAR, A PAKISTANI AMERICAN, CLAIMS THAT ALL OF HIS WORKS ARE INSPIRED BY HIS LIFE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES; THEY ARE, HE ADMITS, A FORM OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY. IN A POST-9/11 WORLD, HOWEVER, WHERE THE POSITION OF MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY SCRUTINIZED, AKHTAR’S WORKS PURPOSELY PLAY UPON AMERICAN FEARS AND ANXIETY IN REGARD TO ISLAM. INDEED, AKHTAR’S WORKS RELY HEAVILY ON MUSLIM STEREOTYPES IN ORDER TO UNSETTLE AMERICAN AUDIENCES AND GAIN ARTISTIC RECOGNITION. BY DOING SO, AKHTAR NOT ONLY CONTINUES THE CLICHÉD DEPICTION OF MUSLIMS IN AMERICAN MEDIA, BUT ALSO UPHOLDS STEPHEN SPENDER’S THEORY ON AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THAT THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHER, HIS SELF, IS FOREVER FORCED TO SUBMIT TO THAT OF SOCIETY, THE OTHER.
INTRODUCTION

“Everything I write is some version of autobiography,” Ayad Akhtar claimed in a 2014 interview. A well-established actor, writer, and playwright, Akhtar prefers to see himself as a “narrative artist” whose literary works are extensions of his existence, his own narrative. “It’s often a deformed version of autobiography,” he insisted in the same interview, “but everything I write is drawn from personal experience, whether it’s observed or lived.” Born in New York City, and raised in Milwaukee, to Pakistani parents, Akhtar seems to embody the very essence of the American Dream: a second-generation immigrant who received an Ivy League education, he catapulted to fame upon winning the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *Disgraced*. Although the play, described as a “combustible powder keg of identity politics,” has garnered both praise and criticism, one fact remains irrefutable: Ayad Akhtar is now a star artist in modern-day America.

And yet, Akhtar’s rise to fame is not as simple as it may appear to the unsuspecting reader or viewer. Akhtar’s newfound stardom owes quite a lot to not only the controversial content of his own works, but also the current consciousness of the American public. Indeed, the fact that Akhtar has received worldwide attention nearly thirteen years after the September 11th attacks is no coincidence. Only now, when universal concern over religious terrorism continues to grow and Islamophobia has become a serious concern, can Akhtar rise to success. If *Disgraced* is a combustible powder keg, then Akhtar himself is the one who set the match at the right time and the right place to create the loudest explosion possible. After all, never has the position of Muslims in the United States been more scrutinized than in the post-9/11 world.

Akhtar is in a strange and unprecedented situation as a Pakistani American writer. Until recently, very few Muslim voices have dared to speak about their thoughts and experiences, let alone achieve recognition. Akhtar, by default, has become one of the most significant Muslim artists in America today. His works, he admits, are essentially a portrait of himself and form his own autobiography. Nevertheless, Akhtar insists that he is in no way obliged or responsible to depict Islam in a way that will correct Western misapprehensions. Several of his works, including *Disgraced*, have ignited serious controversy over Akhtar’s incendiary depiction of Islam and Muslims. Akhtar’s narratives may explicitly deal with Muslim identity in a post-9/11 world, but he broaches the subject in a manner that incites rather than enlightens. Akhtar’s recognition stems from his artistic decision to readily play into American anxiety and concern over the role of Muslims and Islam; only then can he provoke and discomfort his audience. Although based on his own personal experiences, Akhtar’s pseudo-autobiographies seem to be shunted through another channel. Indeed, in an attempt to grasp the internal essence of his life as an American Muslim, perhaps Akhtar has been forced to approach his own existence through an external viewpoint – the Western perspective that associates Islam with hostility and aggression.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

Some academics would claim that the roots of the autobiographical genre originate somewhere during the Middle Ages. This period in European history, after all, not only witnessed the rise of increasingly complex art, architecture, and social structure, but also laid the foundation for the Renaissance. At the turn of the fifteenth century, an English mystic named Margery Kempe chronicled her life, travels, and divine revelations in written form; her resulting work, entitled *The Book of Margery Kempe*, is credited as the first autobiography in the English language.
Perhaps the autobiographical genre does owe its birth to the union between the fallow Medieval period and fertile Renaissance, and perhaps Kempe’s literary work is in fact the very first English autobiography. Nevertheless, the exact origins of autobiography are of little consequence; more important is the fact that the autobiographical genre was created and has persisted ever since. Indeed, the birth of autobiography is less important than its permanency and resulting urgency. What lies inside the autobiography, and what is at its very core? What is its essence, and what does it demand from both the author and reader?

The autobiography is a work that contends with time in an attempt to eternally preserve something about the self. According to Georges Gusdorf, the autobiography is simply “a useful and valuable thing to fix [man’s] own image so that he can be certain it will not disappear like all things in this world.” Man is in constant dialogue with himself in order to secure his own immortality through autobiography, “the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image.” William L. Howarth similarly describes the autobiography as a “self-portrait,” while James Olney goes a step further and refers to it as “an attempt at explaining something about human nature and the human condition.” The essence of the autobiography is the essence of its own author, “the isolate uniqueness that nearly everyone agrees to be the primary quality and condition of the individual and his experience.”

The goal of the autobiography, therefore, is to offer the reader a sense of the autobiographer himself by creating a soulful reflection of the autobiographer. Only then can the reader grasp the essence of the autobiographer, and only then can the autobiographer master time by becoming the “rightful possessor of his life or his death.”

Certainly, the autobiography has flourished and undergone several transformations since Margery Kempe recorded her divine visions several centuries ago. The Victorian era offers countless examples and innovations of the genre, including fictionalized autobiographies. Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre and Charles Dickens’ David Copperfield exemplify the creative and metaphysical powers that belong to the genre. Both literary works not only allow the reader a glimpse into the emotional and psychological turmoil of their eponymous characters, but are also rooted in the authors’ own personal experiences. Such novels, therefore, are examples of a two-fold autobiography; they detail both the fictional narrator’s life and journey while also building from the author’s authentic essence. Indeed, “the man is forever adding himself to himself,” as Gusdorf remarks. The autobiography is a mirror as well as an addition to the autobiographer:

Every autobiography is a work of art and at the same time a work of enlightenment; it does not show us the individual seen from outside in his visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he was, not as he is, but as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been. What is in question is a sort of reevaluation of individual destiny; the author, who is at the same time the hero of the tale, wants to elucidate his past in order to draw out the structure of his being in time.

Jane Eyre is an extension of Charlotte Brontë, and David Copperfield is an extension of Charles Dickens. Both of these characters are fictional, but they nevertheless stem from the most private essence of their respective authors and add to the self-portrait that each autobiography attempts to illustrate.

Gusdorf clarifies that the autobiographer, however, is acting on a much larger scale by trying to provide more than “only an exterior presentation of great persons.” The autobiographer combines his multiple faces as an artist, model, and historian in order to depict himself as “a great person, worthy of men’s remembrance.” Gusdorf offers Jean-Jacques Rousseau as an example, who, being “no more than a common citizen of Geneva,” was nevertheless “a kind of literary adventurer.” Indeed, Rousseau begins his Confessions by proclaiming, “I am not made like any that I have seen; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist.” Rousseau offers such an intimate account of his self, but goes even further by lacing his autobiography with a sense of self-confidence that verges on egoism. The autobiographer takes on a herculean task by...
writing his autobiography; it requires an unparalleled sense of self-assurance and conviction. Only with this aplomb, Gusdorf implies, can the autobiographer truly offer his private and most intimate self. He claims:

Our interest is turned from public to private history: alongside the great men who act out the official history of humanity, there are obscure men who conduct the campaign of their spiritual life within their breast, carrying on silent battles whose ways and means, whose triumphs and reversals also merit being preserved in the universal memory.\textsuperscript{19}

If Rousseau immortalizes his private self through excessive self-confidence, then Saint Augustine does the same with the help of Christianity. Saint Augustine offers quite an unabashed record of his life in his \textit{Confessions}, and does not attempt to hide his sins or misdeeds. By exposing himself to the reader, showing himself naked and vulnerable, Saint Augustine finds his greatest strength: only by revealing his most private self can he become invulnerable. Saint Augustine claims, “I intend to remind myself of my past foulnesses and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God.”\textsuperscript{20} By bluntly discussing his terrible acts, ranging from promiscuous sex to stealing pears, Saint Augustine convinces the reader that “every destiny, however humble it may be, assumes a kind of supernatural stake.”\textsuperscript{21} Saint Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} is a self-examination of his own relationship with God and Christianity, a mirror “whence a new fascination with the secret springs of personal life.”\textsuperscript{22} Rousseau and Saint Augustine succeed, according to Gusdorf, by exposing their private selves to the utmost degree and reveling in their own intimacy.

Perhaps the autobiography is something even more intricate, mired in the complexities of both the inner and outer selves. Stephen Spender believes that the autobiography is a genre that “is no longer the writer’s own experience” as “it becomes everyone’s.”\textsuperscript{23} The autobiographer searches through “the vast mine” of his personal experiences to discover the “ore” of his inner essence – but this personal ore is not enough. Indeed, Spender argues that the autobiographer must “convert this ore into forms that are outside the writer’s own personal ones,”\textsuperscript{24} thus rendering the autobiography a product caught between the inner and outer selves. Spender maintains:

Yet unless one is to oneself entirely public, it seems that the problem of an autobiographer, when he considers the material of his own past, is that he is confronted not by one life – which he sees from the outside – but by two. One of these lives is himself as others see him – his social or historic personality – the sum of his achievements, his appearances, his personal relationships. All these are real to him as, say, his own image in a mirror. But there is also himself known only to himself, himself seen from the inside of his own existence. This inside self has a history that may have no significance in any objective “history of his time.” It is the history of himself observing the observer, not the history of himself observed by others.\textsuperscript{25}

The autobiographer is caught in a peculiar dilemma: the autobiography consists of observations that not only he makes about himself, but also observations made by others about himself. Thus, the autobiographer is a dual product consisting of the inner self – the ‘ore’ mined by the autobiographer from his own personal field – and the outer self – the ‘ore’ mined by the autobiographer from stranger fields. The autobiography, consequently, is a product formed by the inner, personal self as well as the perspective and impressions made by society, the outsiders, the observers.

Spender’s theories about the autobiographer and his two lives have some serious implications. Few autobiographies exist that unite these two lives, and according to Spender, even Rousseau and Saint Augustine fail to do so. What about the personal life prevents such a union? Spender insists that “the inner life is regarded by most people as so dangerous that it cannot be revealed openly and directly.”\textsuperscript{26} The true Self cannot handle exposure to the Other, as it will be criticized, dissected, and ripped apart. Perhaps, then, Spender is correct when he states that the autobiographer is indirectly “commenting on the values of the age in which he lives.”\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, the perspective of the autobi-
oographer, his very Self, is shunted through another channel, that of society and the Other. Ayad Akhtar’s case is no different, but to examine his autobiography, one must first gain a deeper understanding of the Self and the Other with which he interacts – Muslims and the American public, respectively.

**PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS IN THE POST-9/11 WORLD**

Although negative sentiments toward Muslims can be traced back to Qur’anic times, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 seem to have ushered in a new age of Islamophobia in the annals of history. While American media was intensely focused on Osama bin Laden and the nation’s relations with the Middle East, few headlines reported on hate crimes against those of South Asian or Middle Eastern decent. Anti-Islamic incidents were the second least reported hate crimes before 9/11, but are now the second highest among religious-bias incidents. Indeed, from pre-9/11 to post-9/11, a startling increase of 1600% in anti-Islamic incidents took place.²⁸

More than thirteen years later, the 9/11 attacks continue to serve as a reminder of the United States’ vulnerability in regard to international relations and terrorism. Indeed, perhaps more pressing today is the ongoing ISIS crisis. The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was both unexpected and startling, immediately appearing in headlines across the globe and striking fear into the hearts of millions. The very goal of ISIS – to “establish[…] an independent Islamic state”²⁹ – is the ultimate fear that terrorized the American public following 9/11. A group constructing a caliphate in the Middle East, with the threat of apocalyptic expansion, forms the basis of nearly every post-9/11 nightmare. And certainly, the ISIS crisis does seem to be a cause for concern: the organization has seized a considerable amount of area stretching from northern Syria to central Iraq. The fact that 57% of American citizens approve of U.S. military action against Islamic militants in Iraq and Syria should therefore be no surprise.¹⁰

The ISIS threat has stimulated mass anxiety in the American public, and prominent speakers are adding to the hysteria of the supposed threat against Western democracy. On his October 3rd, 2014 episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher*, cable talk show host Bill Maher insisted that the fraction of Muslim extremists in the world is more “than just a few bad apples.” He also related Muslims to the Mafia and even derided Islam as “the mother lode of bad ideas.”³⁰ Maher is one among countless individuals who equates Islam with terrorism and questions the allegiance of the American Muslim population. Perhaps the most noticeable Islamophobe is Pamela Geller, executive director and cofounder of Stop Islamization of America (SIOA) and the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI), an umbrella group including SIOA.³¹ Although both organizations are classified as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Geller continues to spread her campaign via anti-Islamic ads on buses, taxis, and subway stations in New York and Massachusetts.³², ³³, ³⁴

Maher and Geller are only two vocal figureheads who have the resources to broadcast their message to the American public – and yet, perhaps most unsettling is just how many American citizens agree with their sentiments. According to a 2010 *TIME* poll, 61% of Americans opposed the construction of the Park51/Cordoba House project, or as Geller herself calls it, the ‘Ground Zero Mosque.’ Furthermore, 28% of respondents believe that Muslims should not be eligible to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court, while

![Ground Zero Mosque Protester (Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ground_Zero_Mosque_Protester.jpg)
nearly one-third of the nation thinks Muslims should be forbidden from running for presidency.\textsuperscript{35} Such attitudes, unfortunately, do not seem to have diminished with time. According to a 2014 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, the American public views Muslims in the coldest manner and least favorably out of several other religious groups.\textsuperscript{36} Findings from another 2014 poll conducted by the Arab American Institute are consistent with such data. In addition, the latter poll revealed that “a growing percentage of Americans say that they lack confidence in the ability of individuals from either [the Arab or Muslim community] to perform their duties as Americans should they be appointed to an important government position.”\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, never has the position of Muslims in the United States been more precarious than in the post-9/11 world.

**PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIMS IN AMERICAN MEDIA**

The inclusion of minorities in American television and film has been an ongoing issue, with many critics claiming that the American media whitewashes important characters of color. The portrayal of Muslim characters, however, may be a bit more problematic; indeed, whenever Muslims are represented in media, they are constantly depicted as violent or terrorist individuals. Depictions of Muslims that gain success are often those that somehow associate Islam with terrorism or other stereotypes, and as a result, Muslim characters in television or film are always defined by these qualities or themes.

One might think that this issue arose after the 9/11 attacks, but such demeaning depictions of Muslims have been present throughout the Western world for ages. Disney’s 1992 animated blockbuster *Aladdin* is only one example of racism and stereotyping.\textsuperscript{38} The winner of two Academy Awards, *Aladdin* is a loose adaptation of “Aladdin and His Magic Lamp,” a tale in the famous literary collection *Arabian Nights*. Although an extreme success for Disney, the film met with such controversy upon release that *Entertainment Weekly* ranked it in a list of the most controversial movies in history.\textsuperscript{39} The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) objected to the opening lines of the movie, also the opening lines of the song “Arabian Nights”:

\begin{verbatim}
Oh, I come from a land,
From a faraway place
Where the caravan camels roam,
Where they cut off your ear
If they don’t like your face,
It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.
\end{verbatim}

The ADC claimed that these verses perpetuated the view that the Islamic world is a realm of barbarism and aggression. The lyrics “Where they cut off your ear / If they don’t like your face” were ultimately changed to “Where it’s flat and immense / And the heat is intense” after the theatrical release of the movie. The ADC and other critics, however, continued to point out several issues with *Aladdin*. The depiction of Princess Jasmine, who is trapped and oppressed by her patriarchal society, aligns with the stereotypical belief that Muslim women are trapped and subjugated. Similarly, the citizens of the fictional kingdom of Agrabah are uncivilized, rude, and barbaric; at one point in the film, a merchant nearly cuts off the princess’ hand after she gives an apple from the merchant’s cart to a poor boy. The ADC also took offense to the depiction of the two main characters, Princess Jasmine and Aladdin, for having more Anglican features and accents, whereas the citizens of Agrabah possess darker skin, heavy accents, and grotesque facial features. Disney’s film, the ADC argues, promotes the idea that the Arab world is “alien, exotic, and ‘other’… a place of deserts and camels, of arbitrary cruelty and barbarism.”\textsuperscript{40}

After 9/11, however, the American media became a hotbed for Muslim characters. Now, Muslims and the Middle East provide perfect characters and settings for real-world drama and conflict. In 2011, the political thriller television series *Homeland* premiered on Showtime and won a series of awards and accolades, including the 2012 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series. Nevertheless, the show has been criticized for its portrayal of Muslims and the Middle East, with American journalist Laila Al-Arian lambasting *Homeland* as “TV’s most Islamophobic show.” “All the standard stereotypes about Islam and Muslims are reinforced,” she claims, “and it is demonstrated *ad nauseam* that anyone marked as ‘Muslim’ by race or creed can never be trusted, all via the deceptively unsophisticated bureau-jargon of the government’s top spies.”\textsuperscript{41} Al-Arian’s argument is not unfounded: the first three seasons of the show revolve around Marine Sergeant Nicholas Brody, a prisoner of war by al-Qaeda who is finally rescued after eight years. Although hailed by the American public as a war hero, CIA officer Carrie Mathison suspects that Brody is now a sleeper agent on American soil. The crux of the television show raises the neurotic question: can a white, male American turn against his own country after converting to Islam? Al-Arian insists that Brody “is such an awful pastiche of American fears and pseudo-psychology that only an audience conditioned by the Islamophobic, anti-Arab tropes in our media could
find him consistent.” Mathison’s fears about Brody are ultimately grounded: not only does he attempt to commit a suicide bombing, but he also aids al-Qaeda in assassinating the Vice President.

Depictions of Muslims in a positive light are rather rare; more importantly, any such attempts are often unsuccessful in mainstream American media. In 2005, the television drama Sleeper Cell also premiered on Showtime and won rave reviews. The show centers on an undercover Muslim FBI agent who must infiltrate a terrorist sleeper cell. Actor Michael Ealy, who portrays the main Muslim character in the show, claims, “That’s the one thing I think is very subversive about this show that we set out to sort of do, is to say, ‘We want Americans to root for a Muslim.’” Although some critics maintain that the show perpetuates stereotypes, Ealy makes an important point: Sleeper Cell subverts stereotypes to a greater extent than Homeland ever has. Despite the accomplishments of Sleeper Cell, a range of critics insisted that the show is far too sympathetic to terrorists and their motivations. The show ultimately ran for only two seasons and a little more than a year; no proper explanation was given for its abrupt cancellation.

Nevertheless, there have been other creative attempts at television shows that focus on Muslim characters without the backdrop of terrorism. In 2011, TLC premiered All-American Muslim, a reality television program that followed the daily lives of five Lebanese-American Shia Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan. The show generated significant controversy during its run, with the Florida Family Association labeling it as “propaganda that riskily hides the Islamic agenda’s clear and present danger to American liberties and traditional values.” Ultimately, All-American Muslim turned out to be a bit too bland for viewers: the premiere attracted 1.7 million viewers while the finale garnered only 900,000 viewers. TLC cancelled the program after one season because, as Adam Martin for The Wire points out, “nobody wants to watch a show about a normal, all-American family.” Indeed, the show met its end not because viewers were repelled by its supposed Islamic propaganda, but because of its boring and average depiction of American Muslim families. A similar situation happened with the sitcom Aliens in America that aired on The CW from 2007 to 2008. The show, about a Muslim exchange student from Pakistan who moves in with a host family in Wisconsin, earned positive reviews but failed to attract any viewers. Aliens in America was also cancelled after just one season.

In early 2014, controversy erupted over ABC Family ordering the pilot for a new television drama entitled Alice in Arabia. The show was intended to be a “high-stakes drama series” about a “rebellious American teenage girl” who is “kidnapped” by her Saudi Arabian relatives and forced to be a “virtual prisoner in her grandfather’s royal compound” while “surviving life behind the veil.” ABC Family’s announcement of the pilot program was lambasted by nearly all American Muslims; Buzzfeed derided Alice in Arabia as “the latest in a line of simplistic stereotypes of Muslims on American television,” while TIME declared it “racist.” Four days after the pilot was picked up, ABC Family announced that it was no longer moving forward with the project.

Of particular interest in the entire Alice in Arabia scandal is the role of Brooke Eikmeier, the creator of the show as well as an Arabic-speaking U.S. army veteran. In a piece for The Hollywood Reporter, Eikmeier insists that her concept for the show was drastically different from the way ABC Family decided to advertise it. Eikmeier states that she envisioned a unique program, “a series that showed [Muslims] fairly and with admiration and complexity, that
would give opportunities to Arab writers and Arab actors,” and that ABC Family’s press release left her “horrified.”

Although the full story will likely remain unknown, the scandal around Alice in Arabia hints at a deeper and more complex issue: exactly how does the American television industry – and by extension, American arts and media – choose to depict Muslims and Islam? If Eikmeier is telling the truth, then ABC Family purposely and needlessly advertised her show through the most stereotypical lens possible.

The ADC and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) insisted that Alice in Arabia perpetuated stereotypes and Islamophobia, and that American media continually misrepresents Muslims. What these organizations and critics fail to note, however, is that the American media has attempted to put forth accurate and positive depictions before. Perhaps Alice in Arabia was a step in the right direction marred by terrible wording and advertising, but shows like All-American Muslim and Aliens in America were heavily divorced from any stereotypes or Islamophobia – and unfortunately, that is what led to their respective downfalls. Several shows that have attempted to holistically portray Muslims, including Sleeper Cell, All-American Muslim, and Aliens in America, were cancelled shortly after their premieres due to low viewership and interest. In contrast, Aladdin reigns as one of Disney’s stunning achievements while Homeland will be entering its fifth season in 2015. The protests of the ADC and CAIR are futile; the general American public does not wish to change its opinions, and they do not want to waste their time on a show that does not appease their presupposed notions of Muslims and Islam. In such an atmosphere, how can Muslims voice themselves and be heard?

Few Muslim artists have gained success or recognition in American society, and one cannot help but wonder if Spender was correct in his theories about the autobiographer and his dual lives. He insists that “the inner life is regarded by most people as so dangerous that it cannot be revealed openly and directly.” Likewise, Muslims are unable to depict their own narratives in American media due to ignorance and lack of interest. If the true Self cannot be exposed to the Other, then perhaps the autobiographer is indeed indirectly “commenting on the values of the age in which he lives.” The perspective of the autobiographer, his very Self, is forced to be told through that of society and the Other – and Ayad Akhtar has done exactly that.

CULTURE CLASH: AYAD AKHTAR AND HIS LIFE AS AN AMERICAN MUSLIM

Born in New York City and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Ayad Akhtar always struggled with his identity and place in American society. From a very young age, Akhtar was drawn to his faith and even went through a phase of intense religious commitment. His parents, both doctors who emigrated from Pakistan in the late 1960s, are “secular humanists,” according to Akhtar, who did not impress religion upon their children. Akhtar, in fact, taught himself how to pray and read the Qur’an. In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR), Akhtar had this to say about his childhood:

I was obsessed with what [the Qur’an] meant and understanding how I should live, and it was a very important part of my childhood but it really didn’t come from my parents... I think it had a lot to do with trying to understand how and why I was different and what that meant, growing up in Milwaukee, where we really were the only Muslim family in the ’80s in our area of town.

Akhtar admits that in his youth, he struggled with his identity and was caught between two worlds. “I didn’t have a place in the [American] culture in the same way that my white friends did.” Akhtar recalls in another interview.

After studying theatre at Brown University, Akhtar traveled across Europe and studied acting under renowned actor and director Jerzy Grotowski. And yet, Akhtar was not ready to explore his heritage or culture in his work; indeed, his first novel, centered on a poet who works at Goldman Sachs, only tangentially related to Islam and failed to secure a publisher or literary agent. By the time Akhtar enrolled in Columbia University as a graduate film student in the 1990s, however, he was ready to confront his identity. With two fellow students, Akhtar co-wrote a screenplay entitled The War Within, focusing on a radicalized Pakistani student who plans on carrying out a suicide bombing in New York’s Grand Central Station. The film, released in 2005, proved to be a creative turning point for Akhtar. “The film was the preparatory gesture,” he claims. “It was part of a process of coming out in some way. It was me fully accepting that I was going to represent myself as Pakistani, as Muslim.”

Akhtar’s comparison of his own cultural acceptance to ‘coming out of the closet’ is rather fascinating. Similar to how closeted individuals may feel shame or guilt, Akhtar
implies that he, too, used to feel a sort of discomfort as a Pakistani American. Akhtar used his creative epiphany to propel his career forward—and with startling success. Less than a decade after the release of The War Within, Akhtar irrevocably found himself “the de facto voice of the American Muslim in theater.”

THE SELF AND THE OTHER: AKHTAR’S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORKS IN THE POST-9/11 WORLD

Akhtar has repeatedly insisted that the inspiration for all of his works stems from his culture, religion, and heritage. “Everything I write is some version of autobiography,” he said in a 2014 interview. “It’s often a deformed version of autobiography, but everything I write is drawn from personal experience, whether it’s observed or lived.” In another interview, Akhtar elaborated on his relationship with the autobiographical genre:

Guernica: What do you make of the American preoccupation with memoir and the autobiography? Novelists will write a book in the first person and many readers will think, “That has to have happened to them in real life.”

Ayad Akhtar: Especially if you’re a writer of color or if you’re a woman. Because if you fall into either of those categories, you’re expected to be writing of your experience. But if you’re not, then you can write about anything.

It’s always perplexing to me, the ways in which my own autobiography has found its way into my work. And it’s often very misleading. I’ll take details, and they are working in the opposite way from which they existed in my life. The story begins to have its own demands: I need this, that, and the other, and I could use this thing, but I have to change it. And so that comes into the story, and it has the register of authentic life, and people think, of course, it must have happened exactly like that.

They’re going to get confused if they keep reading what I’m working on. They’ll think, “How can he be that and that? It doesn’t make any sense!”

Akhtar maintains that although his works are based on his own life, they nevertheless occupy a different sphere, one of artful authenticity and literary fantasy—and yet, the very nature of these works is what seems problematic. His works may be a blend of reality and fiction, but that they all paint Muslims in a negative light is somewhat disturbing. Akhtar distances himself from his bigoted, oppressive, and violent characters, but the question remains—why solely create characters like these in the first place?

Akhtar’s first novel, published in 2012, was instantly met with critical acclaim. His manuscript American Dervish, in fact, was picked up by Little, Brown and Company for a six-figure sum only one day after the publisher received it. The New York Times, among others, reviewed it quite favorably, calling the novel a “pleasure,” a “self-assured and effortlessly told” debut. American Dervish centers on a young boy named Hayat Shah, a Pakistani American living in suburban Milwaukee who must grapple with his culture, faith, and identity as he enters adolescence. Although his novel resembles a bildungsroman in many aspects, the inclusion of bigoted Muslim characters interrupts Akhtar’s narrative and forces it to take on a darker tone. One pharmacist idolizes Adolf Hitler, and in one of the novel’s most upsetting scenes, the imam at the local mosque delivers an anti-Semitic khutbah and calls the Jewish people “loathsome.” Even Akhtar’s protagonist is unable to resist such prejudice: when Mina, the object of Hayat’s adolescent affections, begins to fall in love with a Jewish doctor, Hayat “turns to a more conservative, literal version of Islam” and unfortunately “gravitate[s] toward those aspects of Muslim scripture and culture that cast Jews in a negative light.” Other Muslim characters, in addition, are subtly misogynistic, and as Hayat becomes jealous of Mina and her Jewish lover, the reader cannot help but wonder how toxic of a combination anti-Semitism and misogyny can truly be.

Akhtar continues his discussion of women in his 2014 play The Who & The What. Described as a “fiery-flavored stew” that stirs “matters of faith and family, gender and culture,” Akhtar’s play centers on Zarina, an Ivy-educated young Muslim woman who ruminates on the role of women in Islam. Controlled by her rigid father, Zarina critiques both Islamic history and the veil; she is convinced that “misogyny [lies] at the heart of Islamic history” and longs to pen an exposé. “I hate what the faith does to women,” she admits in one scene. “For every story about [Prophet Muhammad’s] generosity or his goodness, there’s another that’s used as an excuse to hide us. And the story of the veil takes the cake.” Where Zarina is critical, her father is conservative: when instructing another male Muslim about how he should treat his wife, Afzal states, “She has more power over you than she really wants. She can’t help it. And she won’t be happy until you break her, son. She needs you to take it on, man.” Akhtar describes his story, about the clash between two different generations, as a “very old tale which is told again and again.”
many aspects, Akhtar is correct – but despite the play’s forced happy ending, the issues of misogyny and oppression are raised and subsequently left dangling, never truly resolved for the audience.

But compared to either American Dervish or The Who & The What, Akhtar’s 2012 play Disgraced is probably the most controversial work of all, as well as the most praised. Indeed, the winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Disgraced began its highly feted Broadway run in October 2014. The play centers on mergers and acquisitions lawyer Amir Kapoor who lives with his wife in a post-9/11 Upper East Side. Ashamed of his Pakistani heritage and desirous of a successful career, Amir goes as far as to change his name and renounce his faith. Whereas at least two other characters are supporters of Islam, Amir emerges as Islam’s most aggressive critic in the play. Amir constantly equates Islam with violence, oppression, and bigotry; at one point, despite his wife’s counterargument, he even maintains that the Qur’an endorses wife-beating. In a hateful rant at the dinner table, Amir spews the following to his wife and guests:

[Islam] goes way deeper than the Taliban. To be Muslim – truly – means not only that you believe all this. It means you fight for it, too. Politics follows faith? No distinction between mosque and state? Remember all that? So if the point is that the world in the Quran was a better place than this world, well, then let’s go back. Let’s stone adulterers. Let’s cut off the hands of thieves. Let’s kill the unbelievers. And so, even if you’re one of those lapsed Muslims sipping your after-dinner scotch alongside your beautiful white American wife – and watching the news and seeing folks in the Middle East dying for values you were taught were purer – and stricter – and truer ... you can’t help but feel just a little bit of pride.  

Akhtar, ever the keen playwright, uses Amir’s “blush of pride” at the 9/11 attacks to invoke the doubt and suspicion of the American audience toward Muslims in a post-9/11 world. Indeed, Akhtar effectively plays upon the fears of the American public to create shock value and controversy – so when Amir admits, “I guess I forgot ... which we I was,” and when Amir’s guest calls Amir a “fucking closet jihadist,” the lines between ‘them’ and ‘us’ are quite clearly drawn.

But Akhtar takes everything a step further. In one of the play’s most harrowing scenes, Amir viciously beats his wife when he discovers her infidelity. He assaults her in a “torrent of rage” until he realizes the inhumanity of his own actions; by the end of the scene, his wife’s face is covered with blood. Amir’s violence connects to his earlier comments about how Islam promotes wife-beating – the
paradigm, however, is that Amir detests Islam and is an apostate. Consequently, how could the American Amir slip into the supposed behavior of his ancestors? “It’s tribal,” Amir tells his guests. “It is in the bones... You have to work real hard to root that shit out.” Akhtar paints a disturbing portrait of a man who angrily flees from Islamic culture, only to discover it silently lurking within himself. Indeed, Amir becomes the bigoted and violent stereotype that he so detests, and consequently, Akhtar’s protagonist perpetuates Muslim stereotypes in a society that is already anxious about the role of Muslims and Islam. Akhtar does the same with the only other Pakistani character in the play, Amir’s nephew. Near the end of the play, Abe tells his uncle, “[Americans have] conquered the world. We’re gonna get it back. That’s our destiny. It’s in the Quran.” Abe’s dreams of establishing a worldwide Islamic caliphate are eerily similar to the current goal of ISIS, and once again, play upon American fears. Akhtar’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play ends with a tragic silence and no redeemable Muslim character standing on the stage. What exactly is the American audience supposed to take away from a work like this?

All three of Akhtar’s main works have a common theme: Muslim characters that are painted in a less than flattering light. Indeed, while “some Muslims have accused Akhtar of employing negative stereotypes for dramatic effect,” others even claim that he is “airing the Muslim community’s dirty laundry for an outside audience.” Akhtar, however, maintains that instead of purposely depicting unlikable Muslim characters, he is simply “writing about the American experience.” In regard to such criticism, Akhtar responds:

[Readers] have wondered why, in an age of very real anti-Muslim bigotry, I am choosing to delve into the more shadowy elements of modern Islamic identity. The issue is not unimportant. And the response to it is not simple. “Correcting” the impression many in the West have of Islam is not an artistic project; it is a public relations matter. As such, the optics of how Islam is perceived cannot be of concern to me except insofar as it is of moment to the characters I am writing about.

Akhtar echoes his sentiment about the game of public relations and optics in a 2012 interview with Bill Kenower:

I think there’s this sense that as a Muslim American artist of some visibility, where there’s a real dearth of that in the culture today, that I am seen as having some sort of responsibility and that that responsibility is unfortunately seen as a, or formulated as, almost a PR strategy or an optics game, in which I am called upon to reflect back an image of Islam that is going to correct the [Western] misapprehension or misperception of it. And that is a very valiant job; it’s just not the job of an artist.

Akhtar insists that as an artist, he should not be expected to clear up any misunderstandings about Islam or Muslims, and perhaps he is right. Akhtar has repeatedly stated that it is not his responsibility to offer a “message or some higher meaning” to his American audience.

There is no doubt that Akhtar’s formula has succeeded: now a Pulitzer Prize-winner in the midst of elite company, Akhtar has become the most prominent Muslim voice in American literature and theatre. And yet, although he admits his works are autobiographical, Akhtar continually attempts to divorce them from the aura of Muslims, the Other. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Akhtar says:

I think the alleged proposition is you are going to go see my work and learn something about “those” people. And a lot of times people come away thinking, “Actually, I’m illuminated about myself.” But that’s my intention. I’m writing to the universal. I’m not writing to some specific ideal that fits in with the zeitgeist. I just happen to be situated, because of my history, my upbringing, my passions, my ecstasies and my demons, to be writing about subject matter that seems to be meeting the world in an unusually direct way. But that’s not a conscious strategy on my part. That’s just luck. I think I’m writing about the American experience.

According to Akhtar, his works are not about Muslims or the Muslim condition; instead, they focus on Americans and the American condition – but to make the American experience the centerpiece of one’s works, Akhtar claims one must “wrestle with your demons and your passions, and to celebrate and criticise your traditions and your community.”

And so, consciously or unconsciously, Akhtar seems to have realized Spender’s theories on autobiography. By casting the American Muslim community in a negative light, Akhtar is “commenting on the value of the age in which he lives.” No one except Akhtar himself truly knows whether or not he is using the American anxiety of Muslims and Islam to jumpstart his career, but the American artist is quite open about his literary difficulties:
So my idea of being a writer meant writing like a European modernist, and I needed 15 years to get over that. I was working for a long time with the wrong idea, which was not bringing me close to my own subject matter, because I never thought that anything I experienced as a kid or that I saw in my community would be of interest to anybody else. That imprimatur took a long time to work out of my system, and it didn’t happen until my early 30s.53

The implication is clear: only when Akhtar began to focus on his own community and heritage was he able to achieve success – but success itself stems from society and its consciousness. In a society that immediately discards any medium that portrays Muslims in a positive light on the basis of it being boring or average, such as *All-American Muslim*, while championing medium that perpetuates Islamic stereotypes, such as *Homeland*, how can a Muslim or Pakistani artist ever expect to achieve recognition? Even Akhtar himself admits that he is sometimes taken aback at the incendiary and unsettling things he has written: “An actor will say something and suddenly I’ll be shocked that I’ve written this thing. I can’t believe it. I want to leave the room.”84

And certainly, one cannot blame Akhtar for his shock and disquiet. The mercurial and tempestuous Hayat from *American Dervish*, the impetuous Zarina and prejudiced Afzal from *The Who & The What*, and the conflicted yet callous Amir from *Disgraced* – they are all characters that Akhtar himself created, characters formulated from his own personal experience. Who knows what Akhtar will write next? What stories will he tell, and what characters will populate them? To firmly claim that Akhtar has totally bowed to American consciousness, the Other, and let his Self and experiences be dissected and shunted through another channel, another pair of eyes, another consciousness is a bit extreme. And yet, with the material that Akhtar exploits in his works, one cannot help but wonder what role he is playing on the stage of American media and politics in a post-9/11 world. In fact, perhaps Abe Jensen from *Disgraced* has the final word in these matters:

For three hundred years they’ve been taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want to be like them. Look like them. Marry their women. They disgraced us. They disgraced us. And then they don’t understand the rage we’ve got?85

But then again, who knows?

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Why is the proportion of female terrorist attacks in Chechnya high compared to the rest of the world? Chechnya has undergone years of trauma, and a number of Chechen females, labeled “Black Widows,” have attempted to enact social justice through terrorism. However, why is it that fewer females are engaged in terrorist attacks in other war-stricken parts of the world? To explain why Chechnya is an outlier in this respect, this article will analyze Chechen terrorism on the individual, organizational, and strategic levels and then compare these findings to the terrorist dynamics of al-Qaeda in Iraq. This comparison will allow the reader to gain a better understanding of the types of environments that are more likely to foster female participation in terrorist attacks.
INTRODUCTION

During the winter of 2014, as people from around the globe finalized their travel plans to watch the Sochi Olympics in Russia, the country was preparing itself for certain, more malicious visitors: Chechen Black Widows, who claimed they were going to make an appearance at the games. Although the Chechen insurgency ended in 2009 and the city of Grozny had risen from the ashes, the infamous female terrorists continued to partake in attacks and threatened the security of the Olympics. The city of Volgograd experienced this terrorist activity with full force. Between October and December of 2013, women carried out two of three suicide attacks by blowing themselves up on public transportation. Certain Chechen female terrorists released videos, claiming that there would be bloodshed in Sochi as a means of revenge for the loss of their loved ones. Thus, the saga of the Black Widow once again captivated Russia and the world.

Female engagement in terrorist attacks is far from a rarity in Russia. Since the beginning of the Chechen insurgency in 2000, women have participated in 80% of terrorist attacks and comprised 41% of suicide bombers. This is compared to female terrorism in Iraq, which accounted for only eight percent of all suicide bombings since 2003. The global count averages six percent female involvement, thus distinguishing the Chechen structure and strategy of female terrorism from the norm. This article seeks to explain this disparity and understand terrorism in Chechnya on the individual, organizational, and strategic levels compared to terrorism in other regions. The “individual level” refers to the personal reasons as to why one may join a terrorist organization, while “organizational” and “strategic” levels refer to the recruiting processes of the group and their strategies for carrying out successful attacks. Embedded in this research question are discrepancies regarding the degree of agency within a woman’s decision to become involved in terrorism. Are women actively seeking out these organizations? Are the organizations seeking out the women? Or is it both? How does this differ from the dynamics of other organizations?

To begin unpacking these questions, this article will analyze the term “Black Widow” and explain the current studies on female terrorism in Chechnya. It will then break down its hypothesis and subsequently delve into a comparative case study of female terrorist participation in Chechnya and Iraq, testing the variables predicted to be factors for this gender divergence. The case studies will explore female liberties in the two regions, the proximity of females to recent political violence in the regions, and organizational dynamics of the Chechen terrorists in Russia and Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Finally, it will attempt to identify how distinct the Chechen case is. Studies show that female terrorism is on the rise. Would the answers to the questions posed help us understand why females participate in terrorist organizations, or is the Chechen case an outlier?

WHAT IS A BLACK WIDOW?

Before analyzing the current literature concerning female terrorism in Chechnya, it is important to first ask who the Black Widows are and where the term originates. In recent history, “Black Widow” has come to describe murderous women who have committed crimes directed at men in their lives. Just as the Black Widow spider poisons her male victim after mating and leaves him to an agonizing death, a woman described as a Black Widow is supposedly cruel and vengeful when carrying out her crime. This term appeared in the Russian media after to the Moscow Theatre Crisis, in which women dressed in black Islamic garbs comprised almost half of the 43 terrorists who took the auditorium hostage. Journalist Leela Jacinto commented on the event, “Covered from head to toe in all-black Islamic robes with only their determined, kohl-lined eyes showing, they quickly came to be called the ‘Black Widows’ as the horrified world watched a new Chechen female suicide squad in action last week.” The term, since 2002, has been blanketed over all Chechen female terrorists. The description of the Chechen female terrorists is an interesting play on words, as it is meant to not only capture their...
crimes, but their garments and grief. The Chechen female terrorists are usually dressed in their full length black hijabs when recording a propaganda video for the public and carrying out attacks. Additionally, the term is meant to describe the sorrow and grief of Chechen females, as many of the terrorists lost their husbands or loved ones in the Chechen War. Thus, this label stresses the emotional component of female terrorism in Chechnya and adds the stigma that Chechen female terrorists are crazed, desperate widows.

COMPETING ARGUMENTS

Since the rise of female terrorism in Chechnya, scores of scholars and journalists have attempted to explain what has led Chechen females to become involved with terrorist organizations. The theories of female involvement vary in the degree of activity and passivity throughout the women’s recruitment process, and thus vary in the reasoning as to why women participate in attacks.

The “Avenger Theory,” devised by the Russian media, branches off the “Black Widow” stigma and implies that women are crazed with revenge and are thus lured into terrorist organizations. As stated, the notion that Chechen terrorists are drowned in their revenge and grief became prominent after the Moscow Theatre Crisis. Hostages recounted the women repeating similar stories: “My whole family was killed. I have buried all my children. I live in the forest. I have nowhere to go and nothing to live for.”

Thus, it is believed and relayed by the media that emotions and vengeance are the paramount reasons behind females turning to terrorism. The “Avenger Theory” is used to take away the decision-making power of the female and delegitimize the Chechen terrorist organizations. According to the theory, women are easily influenced by terrorists groups, whose “recruiters lurk within an atmosphere of emotional fervor, and take advantage of personal loss.” Therefore, this theory identifies the Chechen women’s grief as the catalyst for their involvement in terrorism.

The “Avenger Theory” has prompted many refutations, which are most clearly summarized by scholars Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova. Speckhard and Akhmedova created a comprehensive list of all the Chechen terrorist attacks between 2000 and 2005. After conducting numerous interviews with the family members of 26 of the 43 female terrorists, the scholars affirmed that revenge and trauma were factors inciting female membership to terrorist organizations, but with certain reservations. First, these emotions are not elements specific to females, as “the motivational mechanism for seeking out a terror group generated at first by deep personal traumatization did not differ by gender in any way. Both genders in [the sample had suffered violent losses of family members].”

Second, the stress on emotions undermines the agency of the women. According to their studies, there was “strong willingness to martyr oneself on behalf of one’s country and independence from Russia” with motives of enacting social justice and expressing their political grievances. The scholars additionally stress the idea that trauma is not enough of a reason for the amount of female participation in Chechen terrorist attacks—the Chechen organizations have capitalized on the stigmas that have been created from the “Avenger Theory” to create psychological fear.

There are numerous other theories worth mentioning before introducing the paper’s argument. Alisa Stack’s study for the National Defense Unit focuses on the organizational level of terrorism. She emphasizes the idea that women are used as a last resort, as many men have been taken hostage and are always the first to be interrogated.

Another argument popular among Russian journalists and politicians is the “Zombie Theory,” which asserts that women are drugged to perform these attacks against their own wills.

“Trauma and independence created fertile ground for terrorism, and more importantly, there was an organization that quickly understood why and how exploiting females in their terrorist plans was beneficial.”
This article focuses on uncovering the reasons as to why the Chechen case is an outlier concerning gender norms and terrorism. Many of the competing arguments explain why females join or are forced into performing terrorist acts. However, most do not acknowledge what makes the Chechen case so different from other terrorist organizations. Many other regions have had political turmoil and women who want to enact their own vision of social justice. It is the organization and its strategies that make the real difference. Speckhard and Akhmedova prove through their interviews that the “Avenger Theory” does have some credibility; however, as stated, grief is not the raison d'être for female terrorism in Chechnya. A “perfect storm” has occurred. On an individual level, the personal proximity of females to the gruesome Chechen War has created a battle-scarred generation of women. Also, Chechen women have more liberties than many of their Arab sisters living in regions where terrorism is present. This factors into terrorism because their independence has allowed them to react to their grievances with options. While most Chechen women opened businesses and turned new leaves, others used their emancipation to seek terrorist organizations. However, it is important to note that while these factors have influenced how females turn to terrorism in Chechnya, my argument stresses the decisions made by the Chechen leadership as the most important aspect of Chechnya’s heightened instances of female terrorism.

Additionally, it is important to focus on the importance of the organizational and strategic levels and analyze the dynamics of the Chechen terrorist organization. As Speckhard and Akhmedova have stated, trauma alone is not enough for female participation in terrorism. Thus, this is where the “perfect storm” comes into play and where mere thoughts are actualized. The strategies of Chechen organizations are the main reasons why females are employed in such acts. The organization has used women from the beginning of its insurgency because, like Speckhard and Akhmedova have stated, the prominence of Black Widows in Russia has become a self-fulfilled prophecy due to the public’s captivation of the “crazed widow” terrorists of Chechnya. Thus, the notion of the “Black Widow”—which is bolstered by the “Avenger Theory”—has become a double-edged sword for the Russians. The term was meant to delegitimize the Chechen terrorists as cowards who hide behind women, but at the same time, the idea of a Black Widow gave the terrorist organization a reason to continue using female terrorists. Shamil Basayev, who led the Chechen insurgency until his death in 2005, understood the captivation and fear that came along with the usage of the term “Black Widows.” He additionally understood very early on the degree of costly signaling imposed by a female suicide bomber, and how employing females as suicide bombers had many benefits which translated to economic success. Thus, the individual situation of the women has created an environment for female terrorism; however, the organizational and strategic level is where the real difference is made and explains why females have a much higher presence in Chechen terrorist attacks.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

A spatiotemporal case study based on empirical and theoretical evidence will be used to reach a proper conclusion to this research question. The first analysis will be of the Chechen case and subsequently compare the Chechen case to female terrorism within Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is an organization with many different cells. Al-Qaeda will be studied within Iraq, where terrorist activity has been rampant for the past ten years.

The Chechen case study will span over five years, from 2000 to 2005. Not only were these the five years with the most instances of terrorism, but they are also the range of dates with the most precise data, offered by Speckhard and Akhmedova, about Chechen suicide attacks. Female trauma and women’s liberties within the region as well as the strategies of the Chechen organization will be analyzed.

*While Al-Qaeda in Iraq has remained wary about using female terrorists, Chechen terrorists are able to carry out attacks without extensive worry about ideological backlash from Al-Qaeda Central.*
The Chechen case will be compared to Al-Qaeda in Iraq because Al-Qaeda falls within the gender norm and is representative of a region that has considerable terrorist activity. The Iraq analysis will focus on the years between 2003 and 2008, as terrorism was most prominent during this time period. This information is the best platform for critical assessment of its strategies, which will give clues as to why or why not Al-Qaeda in Iraq chose to use female terrorists. Additionally, the cultural differences concerning gender and the role of women may indicate why females turn or do not turn to terrorism.

ROUTES OF VIOLENCE
To understand the plight of Chechen female suicide bombers, one must first understand the Chechen War and the proximity of Chechen women to the horrific violence between Chechnya and Russia. In the past 20 years, Russia and Chechnya have undergone two gruesome wars and a bloody insurgency that had tremendous impacts on the Chechen population. Animosity between Russia and Chechnya dates back to the time of the tsars. However, the first modern war began in 1994 as a result of attempts by the Chechens to create a sovereign state after the dissimilation of the Soviet Union. Laura Sjoberg explains, “The Chechen conflicts are connected to the broader problems of post-communist transformation in the former USSR and as such hold substantial symbolic value for Russia’s state legitimacy.” Thus, the stakes of the first Chechen Wars were substantial vis-à-vis Russia, as it tested the Federation’s ability to hold together a functioning state. Guerilla warfare lasted for almost two years. “Peace” arrived in 1996, but the ceasefire did not last long, and in 1999, fighting resumed. The second Chechen war had its roots in the radicalization of a small group of Chechen Islamists, led by Dokka Umarov, who invaded Dagestan with the goal of creating an Islamic State. After a full-scaled Russian intervention and a horrific death toll, the Federation claimed complete control over the region in May 2000. Although the “battle phase” had ended, violence associated with terrorism and counterterrorism continued until 2009, with the heaviest fighting until 2003. It is estimated that in the past 20 years, over 20% of the Chechen population has been killed.

CHECHEN WOMEN’S PROXIMITY TO VIOLENCE
The Chechen Wars have taken an extremely large toll on all of the population. Significantly, women suffered the brunt of this violence, which provides one explanation as to why Chechen women participate in terrorism within the region. Most women were not fighting on the front lines in a conventional sense, but due to the nature of guerilla warfare, the collateral damage that affected noncombatants, and the complete absence of human rights, there was no way to hide from the battlefield. While certain wars have designated combat zones, this was not the case for Chechnya. The roads of Grozny soon turned into the pits of hell. Paul Murphy explains, “She’s been bombed, shelled, strafed, mined, shot, robbed, left homeless, imprisoned, tortured, kidnapped, raped, victimized, and had her husbands, sons, and daughters taken from her.” Russian violence towards noncombatants was ruthless. In addition to extreme brutality, most Chechen women experienced excruciating loss. Of the 26 families of female suicide bombers interviewed by Speckhard and Akhmedova, 24 claimed data from 26 female terrorists that performed terrorist acts between 2000-2005.

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<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education Completed</th>
<th>Economic Status</th>
<th>Previous Religiosity</th>
<th>Relation to Wahhabism</th>
<th>Trauma*</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>13 – single</td>
<td>17 – high school</td>
<td>2 – poor</td>
<td>22 – secular Muslims</td>
<td>19 – connected after traumas</td>
<td>12 – more than one family member killed</td>
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<td>3 – married</td>
<td>1 – college</td>
<td>14 – middle</td>
<td>4 – traditionally religious</td>
<td>7 – connected through family</td>
<td>4 – father or mother was killed</td>
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<td>4 – divorced</td>
<td>5 – university</td>
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<td>6 – brother killed</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 – widowed</td>
<td>3 – in college</td>
<td>1 – high</td>
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<td>1 – husband killed</td>
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<td>1 – remarried</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3 – family members arrested or disappeared after arrest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Trauma: 2 – general societal traumas |
that the female suicide bomber had suffered a personal loss. Half had lost more than one family member. Therefore, understanding the proximity of Chechen females to the wars is the first factor in understanding female suicide bombers in Chechnya on an individual level.

In addition to the trauma experienced by Chechens, women in the region are relatively independent and have become more so since the wars. This proves to be a factor when considering the participation of female suicide bombers because it allows for a degree of agency within the woman as she deals with avenues to express the trauma she has undergone. Speckhard explains, “While family structure is still traditional, it is common for Chechen women to attend university.” The female suicide bombers reflect this fact, as 65% of the studied bombers had finished high school and the other 35% were either currently in college or had finished their studies. Further information about the autonomy of the Chechen females can be seen in the table on the previous page. The literacy rate of Chechen women in particular is unknown, but the literacy rate of Chechnya is around 93%. In addition to their relatively high educational and literacy status, a large number of women in Chechnya have become the bread-winners of their households, as many male family figures have either been murdered or gone missing. Since the Chechen Wars, it is very common for females to be part of the entrepreneurial class. Nonprofits such as the International Medical Corps have supported a number of businesses started by women since the end of the turmoil. Thus, the fact that women in Chechnya have certain degrees of freedom should be taken into account when analyzing female suicide bombers because it demonstrates the options that women have had in the post-War Chechnya. The majority of women have turned new leaves and have used their independence in beneficial ways. However, independence has also provided women with the option to turn to other, more malicious means to achieve what they believe to be social justice or revenge.

Devastation and independence are two factors that explain the individual level for Chechen female suicide bombers. However, the decisions made on the organizational level appear to be the most important aspects of the employment of female suicide bombers. Marc Sagemen, in his study “Joining the Jihad” explains that recruitment of suicide bombers is a top-down process. The organization decides which bombers allow for the costliest signaling. Nabi Abdullaev furthers this claim when describing the Chechen organization by stating that “it is the existence of the [Chechen] organization, rather than the existence of grievances, that determines the occurrence, scope, and pattern of suicide attacks.” The factors on the individual level prove that there are many women who are willing to sacrifice themselves for Chechen autonomy or social justice causes, and they have the independence to make these decisions. Thus, while there is a high degree of autonomy in the Chechen women’s decision to turn to terrorism, the organization actualizes this potential.

The Chechen terrorists, from the start of their insurgency, have employed females for a number of reasons. First, the Chechen terrorists have used the term “Black Widow” to their advantage and have understood the fear created from the media hype. As Margaret Thatcher stated, “The hijacker and the terrorist thrive on publicity; without it, their activities and their influence are sharply curtailed.” Thus, the media is a very important factor, as terrorist organizations want to attract the most attention as possible. The idea and stigma of Black Widows has become an international phenomenon since the Moscow Theatre Crisis, inviting high levels of fear among Russians. Abdullaev explains, “The media is sucked in by the drama of self-sacrifice for a cause, with the centrality of women having a force-multiplying effect on the viewer’s consciousness” and therefore, for the Chechen terrorist organization, “the ominous title of ‘Black Widows’ by the Russian media has proved to be paying off.” Thus, the idea of the Black Widow has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the media hype has created incentive for the Chechen organization to further employ female suicide bombers.

Second, and most importantly, Chechen terrorist leader Shamil Basayev realized the effectiveness associated with female suicide bombers. These benefits include low degrees of suspicion and high degrees of precision. In addition, the more effective a suicide attack is, the more money a terrorist organization will receive from outside donors, including Al-Qaeda and other extremist Islamist organizations. Thus, this has created additional motivation for the usage of female suicide bombers. The Russians’ brutality and crackdown on Chechen terrorists forced Basayev and terrorist organizations to find cunning ways to employ terror because “Chechen men between the ages of 16 and 60 have been the targets of detention and interrogation.” As scholar Lindsey O’Rourke has stated, females can hide suicide packs and thus pass through security more easily. Thus, the Chechen terrorists have understood from the beginning of their insurgency that employing females in their terrorist attacks has numerous benefits. The case
study above proves that there are a number of factors that have created a “perfect storm” for the implementation of female suicide bombers in Chechnya. Trauma and independence created fertile ground for terrorism, and more importantly, there was an organization that quickly understood why exploiting females in their plans was beneficial.

**WHY IS THE CHECHEN CASE AN OUTLIER?**

If female terrorism is so effective why is it still relatively uncommon? What is it about the Chechen case that has rendered it an outlier? Female terrorism is on the rise, and this insinuates that terrorist organizations are starting to realize the effectiveness of a female suicide bomber. However, the proportion is still much lower than that in Chechnya. There is a fundamental difference in either the lifestyles of females or the way that terrorist organizations run their operations. A study of female terrorism in Iraq between 2003 to the present will aid us in this endeavor. This timeframe demonstrates that lack of female autonomy and differing opinions among Al-Qaeda leaders have led to wariness in allowing women to engage in terrorist attacks.

**THE RISE OF AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ**

Before delving into female terrorism within Iraq, it is first important to gain an understanding of the political landscape of the nation. Iraq has been subject to invasion and political instability since the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the 20th century. Recent turmoil ironically came in the form of the American led “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” The Baathist regime soon fell, and its leader, Saddam Hussein, was captured in December of 2003. Although Americans thought they had captured the enemy, a more lethal foe began to rise—Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Bruce Riedel explains:

> Al Qaeda also moved swiftly to develop a capability in Iraq, where it had little or no presence before 9/11...On February 11, 2003, bin Laden sent a letter to the Iraqi people, broadcast via satellite network al Jazeera, warning them to prepare for the ‘Crusaders war to occupy one of Islam’s former capitals, loot Muslim riches and install a stooge regime to follow its masters in Washington and Tel Aviv.’

Iraq soon became a hub for international terrorism as jihadists from around the world came to fight under Al-Qaeda. The political landscape for the past ten years has been extremely unstable, as its citizens have been plagued by both a discriminating Shia leader, Nouri Al-Maliki, and the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN IRAQ**

Like Chechen females, Iraqi females have undergone extensive trauma and the loss of loved ones. However, due to cultural differences and lack of rights, women do not appear to have as many choices as Chechen women do to either act on their grief or to turn their lives around. For one, the education and literacy rates are much lower among women in Iraq. UNESCO reports, “Significant gender disparities are also a matter of concern with illiteracy rates reaching higher than 47 percent among women in some areas.” Like Chechen women, Iraqi women have undergone extensive trauma in the past fifteen years inflicted at the hands of American soldiers, Iraqi sectarian powers, and terrorists. However, when one loses a husband, “it is considered dishonorable for a widow to remain alone, and families are expected to provide for her and her children.”

Women whose families cannot provide for them are left with few options, as the Iraqi system is extremely patriarchal. The International Red Cross Fund reported, “Without a male relative, a woman lacks economic, physical, and social protection and support” and “social barriers and discrimination limit women’s access to work.” Thus, while many Chechen women became even more independent after the war and became the breadwinners of the households, the Iraq War has only further tied Iraqi women to male relatives.

On an individual level, the trauma factor is present. However, there is a clear lack of freedom among Iraqi women. This factors into Iraq’s minimal female terrorist presence because Iraqi women, unlike Chechen women, may not have the resources or connections to seek out terrorist organizations. Thus, there appears to be a link between female emancipation within Iraq and female participation in terrorist attacks in Iraq.

**FEMALE TERRORISM AND AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ**

As demonstrated in the Chechen case, the dynamics of the terrorist organization appear to have more weight when understanding the makeup of those involved in suicide attacks rather than the individuals that decide to join. Therefore, it is necessary to study the organizational structure and beliefs of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, a direct branch of Al-Qaeda. As stated, since the Iraq war, there has been a large influx of jihadists fighting under Al-Qaeda leadership. Because Al-Qaeda is a primarily religious organization, the group has certain ideological views that affect its strategies. One of these views is that women should not be per-
Fe39, states, "The use of Fe30 in these attacks. However, since 2003, the late leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Al-Zarqawi, has utilized females in his terrorist attacks. Al-Zarqawi's decision created much negative backlash among the Al-Qaeda community, as the idea of female suicide bombers was, and remains, a very controversial topic among Al-Qaeda leaders. Numerous fatwas and counter fatwas have been issued over the topic. Mia Bloom, in her work Female Suicide Bombers, A Global Trend, states, "The use of women remains a point of contestation among different streams of Salafism in Al-Qaeda Central ... As long as the majority of suicide bombers in Iraq come from the Gulf, the numbers of women will remain low since neither the Saudis nor other more conservative Wahhabis will permit women to go on jihad." This strengthens the notion that the number of females participating in terrorist attacks depends on the organization, and furthermore, who is leading the organization at the time. Thus, it appears that on an individual level, Iraqi women do not have the freedom to network and independently seek out terrorist organizations, and on an organizational and strategic level, the use of female terrorists is limited as Al-Qaeda leaders still find it to be a very controversial topic.

CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

Chechen female participation in terrorism, when compared to other regions in the world, is an anomaly for individual and organizational reasons. Upon further analysis, much of the reason the region is an outlier is due to the "Black Widow" stigma created by the media, which has generated a lot of hype and encouraged the terrorist leadership to further employ women in battle. The Chechen terrorist group has realized that using females in attacks brings attention, fear, and efficient results. The personal level appears to be important in the Chechen case, as women have had the liberty to seek out and fight for terrorist groups. Per Speckhard and Akhmadova, it can be concluded that most women that do participate in Chechen terrorist cases are self-recruited, which helps understand their purpose for terrorist involvement. While the "Avenger Theory" is correct in a sense, it is not specific to women, and it does not speak to the larger political purpose that many of the Chechen women have when carrying out these attacks.

When comparing the organizational and strategic level of Chechnya and Iraq, there are clear differences wedged between the two organizations. The Chechen struggle, although financially linked to Al-Qaeda, has remained quite autonomous in its decision-making strategies, and the targets of their attacks have been Russian. Thus, while Al-Qaeda in Iraq has remained wary about using female terrorists, Chechen terrorists are able to carry out attacks without extensive worry about ideological backlash from Al-Qaeda Central. These differences demonstrate organizations' powerful effects on the degree of female terrorism within a terrorist group.

Looking forward, it appears that for at least a while, Chechnya will remain an outlier. As demonstrated in the Sochi Olympics, female terrorism in the Northern Caucasus is still present and the hype of the Black Widow remains influential. Chechnya is growing and healing from the extensive damage from the Wars. However, terrorists have diffused into neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia. Thus, it appears that female terrorism will still be used as a strategy for the Chechen organization. Concerning Iraq and many other parts of the Middle East, it appears that the percentage of females employed as terrorists will remain low for as long as female terrorism is controversial. As Mia Bloom has stated, many jihadists fighting for Al-Qaeda come from all over the world, and thus, there is no dearth of male recruits. However, the landscape of terrorism is changing in Al-Qaeda. For example, Al-Qaeda in Iraq recently broke away from Al-Qaeda central and has created a new organization, the Islamic State. Led by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, it will be interesting to see if ideological concerns surrounding female terrorism will become less controversial now that the organization is independent from the Al-Qaeda Central leadership.
ENDNOTES

2. University of Chicago.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. By recent political violence, I refer to the effects of the Chechen War in Chechnya and in Iraq.
10. Speckhard and Akhmedova (71).
11. Speckhard and Akhmedova (70).
12. Speckhard and Akhmedova (72).
14. Speckhard and Akhmedova (70).
15. University of Chicago.
16. Ibid.
17. Sjoberg and Gentry (90).
18. Gilligan (1-20).
19. Sjoberg and Gentry (90).
20. Murphy (28).
21. Speckhard and Akhmedova (72).
22. Speckhard and Akhmedova (66).
24. Murphy (228).
25. Sagemen (123).
29. Murphy (210).
34. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. It is important to note that although Chechen terrorists have been trained by Al-Qaeda members and do adhere to Wahhabi ideology, the group is not a part of Al-Qaeda central. The leaders of the Chechen organization, although Islamic, are not directly tied to Al-Qaeda central and thus have been able to act with more autonomy than other Islamists groups.
39. Ibid.

REFERENCES


Murphy, Paul. Allah’s Angels. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute, 2010.


FOR A SLAVE LIVING UNDER THE SYSTEM OF CHATTEL SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, AVENUES OF SELF-EXPRESSION WERE EXTREMELY LIMITED. ONE OF THE FEW WAYS SLAVES COULD EXERT CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN LIVES WAS THROUGH SINGING AND DANCING. THESE ARTS GAVE SLAVES A CHANCE TO RELIEVE STRESS AND ESTABLISH A CULTURE THROUGH THE CREATION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, SONGS, AND DANCES. ALL OF THESE CONTAINED HINTS AT THE TRUE NATURE OF SLAVES’ FEELINGS TOWARDS THE SYSTEM THAT OPPRESSED THEM, FEELINGS THAT THEY HAD TO FREQUENTLY REPRESS. HOWEVER, DESPITE SLAVES’ EFFORTS TO MAKE THIS CULTURE ENTIRELY THEIR OWN, MASTERS TRIED TO FIND WAYS TO USE IT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE INSTEAD OF TO THE SLAVES’ BENEFIT. THE RESULTING COVERT POWER STRUGGLE SOMETIMES ENDED IN FAVOR OF THE MASTERS, TAKING THE FORM OF REGULATIONS ON SLAVES’ DANCES, REQUIREMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF SONGS AND DANCES FOR THE MASTERS’ ENTERTAINMENT, AND EVEN ABUSE OF SLAVES BY USING THEIR OWN ARTS. ULTIMATELY, HOWEVER, SLAVES EMERGED VICTORIOUS BECAUSE OF THE HIDDEN MESSAGES IN THEIR SONGS AND DANCES. THOUGH THIS METHOD OF COPING COULD NOT ERASE ALL THE MASTERS DID, IT WAS AT LEAST ONE GLIMMER OF HOPE.
Nineteenth-century chattel slavery was designed to dehumanize those who were enslaved. Masters denied African slaves and their descendants their native languages, religions, and cultures, forcing the English language, Christianity, and American culture upon them. The stories of the unthinkable horrors of slavery are kept in the words of runaway slaves who published accounts of their lives in slavery, in interviews with former slaves conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and between the lines of planters’ personal diaries. Also contained within these important primary sources are the stories of slave resistance, albeit more apparent in the slave narratives than in planters’ journals.

Slaves had very few avenues to assert their autonomy and humanity on plantations, but whenever they found a way to do so, they did. Most often, slaves tried to preserve as much of their heritage from African tribes as they could. For example, in South Carolina, when many different tribes came together on plantations, they held onto the grammatical structures of several of their tribes, adapted English vocabulary, and created a new language called “Gullah.”

A more widespread example of slaves holding onto African traditions was the appearance of songs and dances in a variety of times and places on plantations. All three primary sources above contain a plethora of instances in which slaves sang, danced, or did both. While it would initially seem that slaves used their dancing and singing to assert their own type of power during celebrations and ceremonies, masters often tried to exploit slaves’ dances and songs, thus asserting even more authority over slaves. Despite masters’ efforts, slaves still derived great benefit from singing and dancing, in that it gave them a way to release stress and frustration about being enslaved.

There were few avenues for slaves to assert their sense of self and semblance of power on a plantation. One of the most important ones was through music and dance, which gave slaves the opportunity to create their own pieces of culture to replace those that masters had taken away from them. Slaves made music in a variety of different ways and created different types of music for different purposes. The interviewees of the WPA Narratives give great insights into how creative slaves had to be when it came to making their instruments. For example, to make flutes, “dey’d take a de buffalo horn and scrape it out.” In addition to making their own instruments, slaves also had access to fiddles, banjos, and in two independent cases a guitar and a piano. These instruments were important for creating melodies in slave music.

However, what made music “strictly southern,” as Frederick Douglass put it, was the existence of drums or a “Juba beater.” On some plantations, they would “take pieces a sheep’s rib or cow’s jaw or a piece iron, with a old kettle or a hollow gourd and some horsehairs to make de drums.”

When even these supplies were not available, “everybody sang and one or two would beat on tin pans or beat bones together” in order to make music. Drums were a distinctly African musical instrument, which separated music slaves made from music their masters probably made and as a result gave slaves a distinct sense of a culture that was their own. The use of drums coupled with a long-standing tradition of African ceremonial dances helped to give rise to the importance of dance in slave culture.

A variety of instruments and sounds led to the creation of different types of songs. Even without instruments, slaves sang in the fields while they worked in order to pass the time and keep pace with each other. Several former slaves remembered specific examples of work songs. One of them had the lyrics “I’s wukkin; on de building,’ and hits a sho’ foundation, and when I git done, I’s goin’ home to Heb’en.” Not only did this song serve as one to sing during long days in the fields, but it also crossed over into another genre of slave music – religious worship. These songs could generally be sung anywhere, not just at religious services. Like the work song mentioned above, the central theme of many of these songs was salvation. WPA interviewee Ellen King sang a version of the song “Down by the Riverside” during her interview, and it appeared as follows:

Down by the riverside
Jesus will talk and walk,
Ain’t going to study the world no more,
Ain’t going to study the world no more,
For down by the river side,
Jesus will talk and walk.

The song focuses on following Jesus’s teachings and example so that one does not have to continue to live in His earthly kingdom anymore. The lines “ain’t going to study the world no more” indicate that the singer is looking forward to going to heaven and leaving this world behind. Similarly, the song “Come Change My Name,” sung by Estella Jones in her WPA interview, focuses on receiving grace from God. The singer in this song calls upon the “bright angel” and on “sweet Jesus” to “come change my name from Nature to Grace.” Like the line “ain’t going to study the world no more,” the idea that a person is chang-
ing from “Nature” (or this earth) to “Grace” (heaven) invokes the idea of salvation. This focus on the idea of salvation clearly shows how slaves used both religion and their music as ways to cope with and find escape from the harshness of their lives.

While religious songs and dance songs were kept relatively separate from one another, as many viewed dancing as sinful, there was potential for overlaps in the sound of these songs. In one instance, Sarah Douglas remarked that she recalled hearing some people singing the song “Fly away, fly away,” “an hit sounded jes like a dance chune.” The similarity of sound was due to the fact that the instruments used to create the music in the first place, especially the drum, were similar. Despite the resemblance in sound, dance songs were extremely different in content than religious songs because they focused more on the realities of slave life rather than the hope of salvation or escape from this world. One such song focused on the reality of illness in slaves’ lives and had the lyrics “Mamma’s got de whoopin’ cough, Daddy’s got de measles, Dat’s whar de money goes, Pop goes de weasel.” By directly talking about a problem plaguing their lives, slaves were trying to take ownership of the situation. Despite the upbeat and singsong tone that accompanies this song (as seen in the children’s nursery rhyme “Pop Goes the Weasel”), these lyrics convey a sort of resignation to the fact that disease is part of life. There is no salvation narrative here in leaving the world behind, but the release valve for the emotions of fear and frustration comes from the fact that the listener is most likely dancing. Instead of a spiritual outlet for pain, dancing provides a physical outlet to cope.

The use of real life situations is evident in another dance song, which reads:

- Run nigger run, de patterrollers ketch you –
- Run nigger run, fer hits almos’ day,
- De nigger run, de nigger flew; de nigger los’
- His big old shoe.

This song’s end result is much more positive than the previous one, especially since it involves a slave who has left the plantation without the master’s permission. His fear that the “patterrollers” (paddy rollers, or patrol agents) will find him indicates that he does not have a pass to leave, but did so anyway. It seems that the slave makes it back to his plantation relatively unharmed, except for the fact that he lost one of his shoes, which is a small price to pay for avoiding getting whipped by the patrolmen. While this song does make reference to the restriction of slaves’ freedom of movement, it fights against this limitation since the slave ultimately avoids getting caught. In this case, both the song and the dance are outlets for coping with enslavement.

In addition to songs that were imbued with certain messages and goals, some dance songs could also be classified as “unmeaning songs, composed rather for its adaptation to a certain tune or measure than for the purpose of expressing any distinct idea.” These songs were purely meant for the purpose of dancing and having fun. There were obviously few opportunities for slaves to try to forget completely about their enslavement and enjoy the company of their family and community, and so “nonsensical” songs that were “full of melody” were welcome as another means of dealing with living and working on a plantation. An example of such a song is as follows:

- ‘Ebo Dick and Jurdan’s Jo,
- Them two niggers stole my yo’.
- Chorus. Hop Jim along,
- Walk Jim along,
- Talk Jim along,’ &c.

- ‘Old black Dan, as black as tar,
- He dam glad he was not dar.
- Hop Jim along,’ &c. [sic]

The repetition of the two lines in the same rhythm followed by the chorus would have made it easy for the person singing this song to improvise verses as they saw fit, according to perhaps what was happening on the plantation or in reference to stories that slaves told each other. In songs like this one, the dancing could continue even after the fiddle player had stopped playing because of the system of “patting.” Patting is “striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, then the left with the other—all the while keeping time with the feet, and singing.” The rhythm of these songs had to follow the rhythms of patting, which standardized the music, and thus made it easier to choreograph dances.

As with music, slaves came up with and appropriated different types and styles of dancing. There was a lot of overlap between the types of dances whites and blacks did, such as “square dances, [...] the Virginia Reel, and the
round dances like the Schottischa, Polka, waltzes, and all
textn. It is not at all surprising that the dance forms of
these two groups came together since each group could
observe the habits of the other. Theoretically, a slave serv-
ing at a white wedding could see the guests doing a par-
ticular kind of dance—say, the Virginia Reel—and then bring
it back to his or her own community. From there, dances
could evolve and change if slaves forgot the exact choreog-
raphy of dances or decided to change certain steps to re-
fect African dances or simply because they wanted to
change them. One important piece of the development of
slave dances was the avoidance of crossing one’s feet be-
cause “dancin’ ain’t sinful iffen de foots ain’t crossed.” This characteristic recalls the tension that existed between
dance and religion. It was probably an answer to those who
considered dancing to be contrary to religion, though it is
probable that this change was not enough for those who
were predisposed to thinking that dancing was a heathen
practice.

Another important element of slave dancing was the as-
pect of competition. “Cake walkin’” was one of the most
famous developments of slave dancing. It was generally
performed in couples and “de couple dat danced de best
got a prize” (the story goes that the first ever prize was
cake). It would appear that cakewalking was a form of
dance unique to southern plantations, showing the cre-
ativity of slaves to be resourceful in coming up with coping
mechanisms for enslavement. The cakewalk was not the
only competition during slave dances. Another competi-
tion involved gathering a few slaves together who “would
jump up and see how many time he could kick his feets
‘fore dey hit de groun.” This competition seemed less for-
mal than a cakewalk, but it still inspired its competitors to
try to outdo one another in dancing ability. In trying to
become the superior dancer, competitions such as the one
William Adams mentioned would have given a slave a per-
sonal goal to reach that was not related to the work that he
or she did on the plantation. It became something particu-
larly for slaves that no one else could touch. Winning a
competition surely gave the winner a sense of pride that
masters, through the institution of slavery, sought to deny.

As important as the creation of these two art forms was,
equally as important was when slaves sang and danced,
and for what purpose. The variety of times slaves would
use music and dance shows just how important these two
pieces of culture were to slaves since they seemed to try to
work them into their lives whenever they could. Marriage
ceremonies were an exciting part of slave life, despite the
fact that slaves were not legally allowed to be married. In
the WPA narratives, anyone who mentioned a wedding
was almost sure to mention that there was a “big dance” when there was a slave union. These happy times were
moments when the community could come together to
celebrate a bond between two people, and there was no
better way to bring people closer together than sharing the
art forms that connected the slave community.

Since religion was one of many coping mechanisms peo-
ple used to come to terms with human mortality, and since
religion was so important to slaves as evidenced by the
number of religious songs they sang, it is not at all surpris-
ing that music was an integral part of slave funerals across
many plantations. On one plantation, slaves would stay
with the recently deceased until he or she was buried and
“sung and prayed” to keep cats, which were considered
bad luck, away from the corpse. Beyond this mingling of
Christianity and African traditions, singing was also part
of the funeral service itself. Some of the songs were meant
to invoke the idea of salvation, like many other religious
songs. One such song called on angels to “bear me away
on your snowy wings, to my immortal home.” Paul Smith
remembered “when de preacher had done said a prayer, dey all sung: I’se Born to Die and Lay Dis Body Down,” and Alice Hucheson remembered a song that her commu-
nity used to sing while burying the deceased. The song
called attention to the fact that everyone will eventually die,
but instead of trying to predict who will be the next, we
should “prepare to meet our God” and ask God to give us
Grace to “make us fit at las’ to die.” The universality of
the experience of death is similar to the way other slave
Music was truly meant to connect all parts of the community and foster ties that all too often were rare for slaves, since they could be broken through either death or sale to another master. The most universal of all experiences on a southern plantation was the work that slaves were forced to do. As previously discussed, work songs were their own genre of music for slaves, as they were performed without musical accompaniment since the slaves were obviously occupied doing other tasks besides playing instruments. There were several purposes to these songs. One such purpose was to set a pace for their work and pass the time in the fields. Another was “a means of telling the overseer, in the distance, where they were and what they were about.” Judging by the volume of the song, the overseer could tell where the workers were in the field without necessarily having to measure their progress. Finally, work songs could help to motivate slaves to wake up in the morning and go to work. The following song conveys the universality of suffering and probably helped slaves remember that they were not alone:

It’s a cool and frosty mornin’
And de niggers goes to work,
With hoes upon dey shoulders,
Without a bit of shirt.

Several devices are used to remind individual slaves that the community understands what they are going through. The use of the plural shows that the listed hardships are problems that everyone has. Plus, the song directly states what exactly the hardships are that everyone is going through, namely the cool temperature, the earliness of the day, the hard labor they will have to do, and the lack of adequate clothing for the season. Since the singers are not hiding from the problems they face, and are on the contrary drawing attention to them, this song can be interpreted as the slave community critiquing the plantation system.

Since music and dancing were such key parts of helping slaves cope with their suffering, during their time off, such as after work was over, Saturday nights, Sundays, and holidays, music and dancing were nearly always present. The times of dances on the weekends varied from plantation to plantation. On some, they would be “after work” or “in the evening when de work was done.” On others it would be on a Sunday and “rarely on Saturday.” What was a fairly universal experience, however, was the corn shucking festival. Traditions varied, but most ex-slaves in the WPA Narratives remembered these festivals very fondly. Generally, “one negro would sit on the fence and lead the singing, the others shuck on each side,” singing songs like “Old Liza Jane” and “Susan Jane,” and this would continue until the entire task was finished. Sometimes, it would be a competition between two teams to see who could finish first. After the corn shucking itself was over, there would be a feast and dancing “until daybreak.”

Christmas was another important holiday for slaves. Solomon Northrup wrote:

It was Christmas morning – the happiest day in the whole year for the slave. That morning he need not hurry into the field, with his gourd and cotton-bag. Happiness sparkled in the eyes and overspread the countenance of all. The time of feasting and dancing had come. The cane and cotton fields were deserted. That day the clean dress was to be donned – the red ribbon displayed; there were to be re-unions, and joy and laughter, and hurrying to and fro. It was to be a day of liberty among the children of Slavery. Wherefore they were happy, and rejoiced.

This passage gets at the very essence of the Christmas holidays for slaves. Unlike the corn shucking festival, in which the festivities were explicitly linked to working for the master, this time was the slaves’ own time. There was always a huge dance following a Christmas meal, which
naturally brought together the entire slave community as one. These happy times, when slaves seemed temporarily free from the master’s influence and the overseer’s watch, were the ultimate way of relieving tensions from the year and reinforcing community bonds, which is exactly what songs and dances were meant to do. But, this cheerful season did have a darker side to it.

Slaves unquestionably had the upper hand in the creation of music and dances during festivities. However, masters often tried to take this part of slave culture away from slaves and use it to benefit themselves for either entertainment or for disciplinary purposes. During holidays, masters continued to remind slaves that just because they were not working did not mean that they had complete freedom to do as they pleased. Often, masters would go see slave dances on Christmas “an’ see de one what dances de bes’. Marster an Mistis laug fit to kil at de capers us cut.” This visit from the master and mistress seems like an invasion on the slaves’ privacy and privilege of freedom during the holiday season. The master’s mocking is especially poignant here since dancing was an event that was meant to bring the community together and allow slaves to release some of the tension felt towards masters. Laughter from the master probably only added to the resentment. Also, the fact that the master was the one judging which dancer was best in competitions took away some of the autonomy these competitions may have brought to slaves when master were not the ones judging.

Douglass wrote about a theory as to why masters felt it necessary to interfere at holidays as well as what the true purpose of giving slaves time off was. He believed that

To enslave men successfully and safely it is necessary to keep their minds occupied with thoughts and aspirations short of the liberty of which they are deprived. A certain degree of attainable good must be kept before them. These holidays served the purpose of keeping the minds of the slaves occupied with prospective pleasure within the limits of slavery.

Therefore, giving slaves time off was not to be regarded as the happy time that Northrup made it out to be; instead, it was just an illusion to keep slaves willing to work with the promise of having a holiday again soon. Holidays were not truly the slaves’ own time, as this time was a manipulation by the masters. By making appearances at slave dances during the holidays, the masters were on one level trying to assert their dominance over slaves during the holiday itself, and on another level, trying to reign in control of music and dance.

This behavior was not exclusive to just holidays. Masters and Mistresses alike would come to slave quarters any time there was a chance for slaves to have a taste of independence. Even though they could “have all de fun [they] wanted on Sa’day nights, […] sometimes our Mistess would come down early to watch us dance.” These times were nominally for the slaves, but in practice were not. Margaret Thornton, who was very young when she was enslaved, did not remember much except for the fact that “dey herded us together an’ make us sing a heap of songs an’ dance, den dey clap dere han’s an’ dey sez dat we is good.” The number of times that the master and mistress must have called the slaves together for a performance must have been great for her to recall this information so strongly. The masters were trying to take the art form that the slaves had created for themselves and turn it into entertainment for the masters. This phenomenon was a direct affront to the already limited autonomy of slaves.

Another way in which masters limited the ability of slaves to use their own culture was that before slaves could organize a dance, they would have to ask their masters for permission first. On some plantations, there was a separate “house” that slaves held their dances in, but on others, the dances seemed to take place near the slave quarters. The inability to come together in their own quarters was particularly dehumanizing because it meant that slaves did not even have control over what activities went on in their homes.
In addition to trying to control slaves’ singing and dancing, some masters also chose not to acknowledge that it even happened. Landon Carter was one such master, as evidenced by two pieces of information. First, there is “no single reference to it in all his diaries,” yet he appeared to have acknowledged of the types of instruments slaves used when making music. He wrote about the instruments when he was making fun of King George, and talked about the “Quaqua,” “Barafoo,” and “Banjers.” This obscure reference proves that Carter knew enough about slave music to write satirically about it. His lack of discussion about the music his own slaves made raises some question as to why he omitted this from his otherwise very detailed diaries. Carter most likely did not want to draw attention to this particular aspect of life on his plantation because it would force him to admit “how much [he] shared the domain he chronicled with the bearers of a culture alien to the literary ethos of the diary.” In other words, saying that slaves had music and culture meant that Carter’s slaves were more civilized and less in need of a benevolent patriarch than he would care to admit. Carter thrived on being in control of every single aspect of life on his plantation, and so the thought of the existence of something he could not control would have been unbearable to him. Instead of wresting control from the slaves like other masters did, Carter adopted the attitude of “if I act like it does not exist, then it does not exist.”

Although frustrating to slaves’ efforts to carve out a piece of culture for themselves, it is not particularly surprising that masters made their slaves sing and dance for the former’s entertainment or ignored them for the sake of pretending to have control. The extreme cruelty of the masters was more apparent when they took the culture that the slaves had worked so hard to create for themselves, turned it on its head, and used it for punishment against slaves. A mild case of this act was reported by Bernice Bowden, who said that her master “used to come to the quarters and make us chillum sing. He make us sing Dixie. Sometimes he make us sing half a day. Seems like Dixie his main song. I tell you I don’t like it now. But have mercy! He make us sing it.” The duration that Bowden was required to sing for shows that this was beyond just simple entertainment. Of course, Bowden may have been using hyperbole when she said “half a day,” but her reason to use this technique would have been to emphasize how much she had to do this. Since Dixie is such a strongly pro-south song, the repetition of it was intended to remind slaves who had the power.

A step up in the severity of this style of punishment would be when a master forced a boy who did not want to perform for his master to stand “barefooted on a hot piece of tin.” Margaret Thornton, the interviewee providing this story noted, “believe me he did dance.” The penalty for not wanting to dance was extremely severe and was torture for this young boy. Though Thornton does not tell her former master’s reaction to this punishment, one can imagine that he was amused by it since he got the “dance” he wanted and was reinforcing the view that he was the one in charge of the situation. Slaves singing and dancing (or refusing to) independently of the master was the greatest affront to a master’s authority. Whether or not this boy wanted to dance was irrelevant to the master; he wanted him to dance, so the boy was going to dance so as to show that the master’s will would not be thwarted in any case.

The worst offense of forcing slaves to dance to entertain the master as well as punish the slaves was committed by Edwin Epps, Solomon Northrup’s former master. The account that Northrup gives in his narrative is absolutely horrifying. Some nights, Epps would be in a “dancing mood” and would call all of his slaves into a large room. He then would cry out “Dance you d–d niggers, dance,” [sic] and all would have to dance “no matter how worn out and tired [they] were.” If anyone “dared to rest a moment, or even stop to catch his breath,” Epps would whip him. Even when Epps had stopped dancing, he still forced the slaves to continue well into the night and early hours of the morning. Not only was Epps whipping his slaves, but he was also depriving them of sleep. They had been awake all day working strenuously, then had to push themselves to continue to dance lest they be whipped by Epps, and then were expected to continue to work for the entirety of the next day. Obviously there was nothing that the slaves could do to stop Epps from behaving in this depraved manner. Not even his wife was able to stop his, as Northrup sarcastically remarks, “uproarious pranks.” The slaves were clearly at the whim of their master. They had lost control over the culture that they sought to create for themselves as an outlet to vent frustration at their situation, but instead wanted to “cast [them]selves upon the earth and weep” because this culture had been turned against them. Abuse of this sort only augmented the already trial-filled life of a slave.

Though not as physically horrific as the treatment Epps inflicted on his slaves, this next case of whites taking advantage of slave dancing is still extremely cruel. Some slave traders realized that when slaves looked happier,
people were willing to pay higher prices. William Wells Brown wrote in his narrative that his job was to make slaves look happy by “[setting some] to dancing, some to jumping, some to singing, and some to playing cards [...] to make them appear cheerful and happy.” This practice was twisted in more ways than one. Brown himself was a slave, and therefore he had to prepare men and women in the same situation as he himself was in for sale, “often [...] when their cheeks were wet with tears.” Furthermore, these slaves on the auction block had to use the parts of their culture that were supposed to give them relief from the horrors of slavery in order to sell themselves into the horrors of slavery. They obviously had no choice in the matter, and as Brown noted, were deeply upset by this charade. So they resisted in the only way they could; through song. Brown said that he heard the slaves who had been sold into the deep south sing the following:

“See these poor souls from Africa
Transported to America;
We are stolen, and sold to Georgia --
Will you go along with me?
We are stolen, and sold to Georgia --
Come sound the jubilee!
See wives and husbands sold apart,
Their children’s screams will break my heart; --
There ‘s a better day a coming --
Will you go along with me?
There ‘s a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee!
O, gracious Lord! when shall it be,
That we poor souls shall all be free?
Lord, break them slavery powers --
Will you go along with me?
Lord, break them slavery powers,
Go sound the jubilee!
Dear Lord, dear Lord, when slavery ‘ll cease,
Then we poor souls will have our peace; --
There ‘s a better day a coming --
Will you go along with me?
There ‘s a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee!”

The lyrics of this song do not leave anything to the imagination whatsoever. They are full of the pain of being stripped of humanity and separated from loved ones, as well as full of hope for the day when slavery ends. The slaves owned their situation as best they could in the face of having even their songs and dances taken from them.

Although masters did try to appropriate slave songs and dances for their own uses, slaves still ended up with the upper hand, especially through their music, as seen in the case of the slaves sold south in Brown’s narrative. Slaves often found comfort and benefit in their ability to make music. Northrup was able to play the violin, and in his narrative, he states that he “scarcely can conceive how [he] could have endured the long years of bondage” without it. In addition to giving him emotional comfort, he also reaped material rewards from the various times he was paid to go play at other plantations. Even at that, the psychological benefits from being “relieved [...] of many days’ labor in the field, [...] and [...] away from the presence of a hard master” cannot possibly be quantified in any way. So despite the fact that Northrup’s talents could put him at the mercy of his master when he was in a “dancing mood,” they were also a form of escape integral to Northrup’s well-being. Douglass also figured out a way to derive benefit from his musical abilities. To relieve hunger pains, Douglass would often sing. One of his mistresses, upon realizing this, would give him food “when she heard [him] singing under her window.” In this way Douglass got twice the benefits of singing: he found a way to comfort himself when he was hungry, and he found a way to invoke pity in his mistress so he could get food and dispel the hunger in reality. Douglass used the value masters placed on being entertained to his own benefit, thus untwisting the twist masters had placed on slave culture.

Beyond manipulating the system back in their favor, slaves also sang songs that contained messages that masters either did not see or simply ignored. For example, to call a religious meeting, “when de niggers go round singin’ ‘Steal Away to Jesus,’ dat mean dere gwine be a ‘ligous meetin’ dat night.” The reason for this secrecy is because “de masters ‘fore and after freedom didn’t like dem ‘ligous meeintgs.” Not only did slaves continue to have these meetings despite their masters’ objections, but they planned them right under their noses without the masters even knowing. Wilson did not make any reference to the fact that these slaves ever got caught having these meetings, or that masters ever made the connection between the meetings and the song, so it is a reasonable assumption that the slaves had the upper hand here.

Also, a rather well known use of song to convey a hidden message was slaves’ use of the genre of religious songs to talk about wanting to be free or about going to freedom. Douglass mentions in his narrative two songs that were
clearly about going to the North to escape from slavery, but that no one realized this was the meaning behind these songs. These songs contained references to being “bound for the land of Canaan” and the command to “run to Jesus, shun the danger” for “I don’t expect to stay much longer here.” On the surface, these are innocuous songs that show how slaves seem to have embraced Christianity and are understandably looking forward to going to heaven. As Douglass points out though, this was a veiled message targeted at the masters. Hiding their message behind religion allowed slaves to be able to vent their anger at their masters for keeping them enslaved and express their desire to be free without getting into trouble. It also prevented masters from fully appropriating it into entertainment for themselves, for even if the master forced the slave to sing the song, the slave would always know the true meaning of the song, and could derive great satisfaction from the fact that the master did not know the real value of the lyrics.

Religious songs were not the only songs used to convey sometimes thinly veiled dissatisfaction. One song that slaves sang during the holidays appeared to be giving some sort of thanks for the food that the master gave the slaves. However, as the song goes on, one realizes that the slave is actually pointing out the unfair treatment that they get from their master, and that they really should not be grateful at all. The constant repetition of “we [action], dey gib us [lesser good],” shows not only the frequency with which this occurs, but the frustration the slaves have with their situation. The slaves are not happy and grateful to the masters, like the masters believe they are. This song shows a clear failure of the patriarchal system to convince slaves that they are lucky to be in the place that they are in. What it does demonstrate is that slaves used music as an outlet to express their discontent and to recognize the fact that they were important to the functioning of the plantation. Another song which shows slaves’ awareness of this fact is a song that is disguised to be about making “hoecake.” The three verses of the song are structured in the same way: the first line describes the fact that someone wants to make a hoecake, the second line describes the hoecake, the third line describes the baker throwing the hoecake on some part of a slave’s body, and the fourth line says what happens after one performs the action of the third line. Take for example the third verse:

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De way you bake a hoecake,
De old Virginny way,
Wrap it round a nigger’s stomach,
And hold it dere all day.
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Obviously, no one is actually baking hoecake on a slave, but the line serves to show that he is an integral part of the process. If you want the hoecake to be made in “de old Virginny way,” which implies a tried and true method, one has to follow the instructions in the next two lines, or else it will not come out the right way. This metaphor is meant to show how important slaves and their labor are to plantations: without them, the plantation simply would not function. Masters wanted to believe that without their guidance, the plantation would fall apart and slaves would be unable to support themselves, but these songs are the slaves’ way of proclaiming the truth: without the slaves, there was no plantation, no wealth, and no South.

Finally, upon gaining freedom, many slaves throughout the South expressed their joy through the medium they themselves had helped to create: song. It was no longer possible for masters to claim that slaves had been happy under slavery since “dey was rejoicin’ and singin’” and “dey danced and had a big jamboree.” One of the songs slaves sang included the repetition of the line “T’ank ye Marser Jesus, t’ank ye” and “Jesus break slav’ry chain, Lord” multiple times, while describing the fact that the singer was no longer subject to repression from his master. The religious songs that once concealed slaves desires to be free now loudly proclaimed their joy that they were no longer the subjects of slavery.

“Like revolutionaries who killed a monarch or aristocrat and put his or her head on a pike to parade around the city, these slaves were parading a burning ‘King Cotton’ around the master’s former kingdom.”
Some slaves however, were not happy to be free, or at least said in later interviews that they were not so. One man said that “slaves like us, what was owned by quality-folks, was sati’fied an’ didn’ sing none of dem freedom songs,” implying that he was sorry to have to be freed from a master whom he considered good. Another woman, whose mother had been enslaved, called the book Uncle Tom’s Cabin a lie and said that slaves were sorry to be free. The reason for these radically different responses from those of other slaves could be because these people had internalized the racism that they experienced and truly believed their place was as a slave. They had a very romanticized view of the Old South, and they were not telling their interviewer the truth, since they thought he or she would not want to hear that they were glad to be free, or that they genuinely did like their master and were not mistreated. This last case is highly improbable, but not necessarily impossible, so it is worth noting.

These anomalies aside, slaves were on the whole overjoyed to be free. One very striking image of slaves reacting to freedom comes from the interview with Susan Bledsoe. She describes that she and other slaves “cut long poles and fastened balls of cotton on the ends and set fire to them. Then, we run around with them burning, a-singin’ and a-dancin.’” Burning cotton was not only literally destroying their master’s property, but it was also symbolic of killing “King Cotton.” Like revolutionaries who killed a monarch or aristocrat and put his or her head on a pike to parade around the city, these slaves were parading a burning “King Cotton” around the master’s former kingdom. The addition of the songs and dances solidify this scene as a firm act of slaves expressing their autonomy and agency through the burning of the cotton as well as through their expression of the culture they created.

Hence, the struggle between slaves and masters to claim ownership of music and dancing on plantations ends with the slaves asserting their autonomy and sense of community both before and following emancipation. Their ability to subvert their masters’ commands and wishes despite the day-to-day hardships they faced while enslaved is impressive and admirable. This is not to say that slaves’ resistance completely negated any abuse their masters doled out to them; that interpretation romanticizes the realities of the antebellum South and ignores the suffering of thousands of human beings. These songs and dances helped to make living in a slave society just a little bit more bearable by drawing together a community of people in a common situation. No amount of music or dance steps could ever change the fact that slaves were held in bondage against their will, could ever bring back a sold family member, or could reverse the mistreatment of a master or overseer. What it could do was give slaves a fleeting moment of sense of self, pride, and identity that was otherwise lacking in their lives.

ENDNOTES
1. Isaac (216).
4. William Adams, LOC-WPA; Betty Bromer, LOC-WPA; Harriett Jones, LOC-WPA; Ellen King, LOC-WPA; Ida Rigley, LOC-WPA; Leithan Sprinks, LOC-WPA.
5. Alice Baugh, LOC-WPA; Susan Bledsoe, LOC-WPA; Betty Bromer, LOC-WPA; Harriett Jones, LOC-WPA.
6. Harriet Jones, LOC-WPA.
7. Betty Bromer, LOC-WPA.
8. Douglass (181).
9. Ibid.
10. Wash Wilson Interview, LOC-WPA.
11. James Southall, LOC-WPA.
12. For more about the blending of African Culture with European Culture, see Joyner.
13. Alice Hugheson, LOC-WPA.
14. For more about Slave Religion, see Faust; Greenberg; Irons; Isaac; Joyner; Stevenson.
15. Ellen King, LOC-WPA.
16. Estella Jones, LOC-WPA.
17. See Bibb.
18. Sarah Douglass, LOC-WPA.
20. For more about illness and medicine for slaves, see Faust; Isaac; Rothman.
21. Mollie Williams, LOC-WPA.
22. Which, admittedly has much less emotionally heavy lyrics.
23. Mollie Williams, LOC-WPA.
26. Ibid.
27. For more about slave stories, see Joyner.
29. Ibid.
30. Tom Mills, LOC-WPA.
31. Wash Wilson, LOC-WPA.
32. Estella Jones, LOC-WPA.
33. Ibid.
34. Stearns et al. (11).
35. William Adams, LOC-WPA.
36. Paul Smith, LOC-WPA.
37. Harriet Jones, LOC-WPA, Tom Mills, LOC-WPA; Paul Smith, LOC-WPA.
38. Paul Smith, LOC-WPA.
39. Alice Hucheson, LOC-WPA.
40. Ibid.
41. Alice Hucheson, LOC-WPA.
42. For more on slave families and connections, see Dew; Joyner; Faust; McLaurin; Stevenson.
43. Paul Smith, LOC-WPA.
44. Douglass (61).
45. Whether or not this practice was applied on most plantations, and whether or not this practice was effective is not for this author to judge, but Frederick Douglass wrote about it as an application of work songs. I was not there, and he was, so I will take his word for it.
46. Harriett Jones, LOC-WPA.
47. James V. Deane, LOC-WPA.
48. James Southall, LOC-WPA.
49. La San Mire, LOC-WPA.
50. Rachel Adams, LOC-WPA.
51. Sara Colquitt, LOC-WPA.
52. Rachel Adams, LOC-WPA, James V. Deane, LOC-WPA.
53. This is not to say that shucking corn is not difficult, as this author struggles immensely with it. However, there is a difference between planting cotton or tobacco in a hot field while standing all day, and shucking corn while sitting and singing with other members of the community.
54. Northrup (282).
57. James Lucas, LOC-WPA.
58. Douglass (182).
59. Sara Colquitt, LOC-WPA.
60. Margaret Thornton, LOC-WPA.
61. Henry Walker, LOC-WPA.
62. Alice Hucheson, LOC-WPA.
63. James Southall, LOC-WPA.
64. Isaac (214-216).
65. Isaac (216).
66. Isaac (215).
67. As James Lucas said, “Marsters wid-out wives was de dabbil,” James Lucas, LOC-WPA.
68. Bernice Bowden, LOC-WPA.
69. Margaret Thornton, LOC-WPA.
70. Ibid.
71. Northrup (181).
72. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Northrup (181–182). It should also be noted that Epps’s wife was also entertained by his forcing the slaves to dance, so it would seem that she was not sincerely trying to make him stop what he was doing.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Brown (44)
80. Brown (51).
81. Northrup (217).
82. Ibid.
83. Douglass (84–85).
84. Wash Wilson, LOC-WPA.
85. Ibid.
86. Douglass (196–197).
87. Douglass (182).
88. Harriett Jones, LOC-WPA.
89. Ibid.
90. See Faust; Isaac.
91. William Adams, LOC-WPA.
92. Harriett Gream, LOC-WPA.
93. James Lucas, LOC-WPA.
94. Alice Baugh, LOC-WPA.
95. Susan Bledsoe, LOC-WPA.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF VARIOUS EMERGING PHOTOVOLTAIC TECHNOLOGIES, AS CLASSIFIED BY THE NATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY LABORATORY, HAS EXPERIENCED VERY DIFFERENT RATES OF PROGRESS OVER THE LAST FIVE TO TEN YEARS. IN PARTICULAR, TWO THIN-FILM TECHNOLOGIES, QUANTUM DOT SOLAR CELLS AND PEROVSKITE-BASED SOLAR CELLS, HAVE ACHIEVED DRASTICALLY DIFFERENT VALUES FOR POWER CONVERSION EFFICIENCY AS QUANTUM DOTS HAVE FAILED TO KEEP UP WITH PEROVSKITES. CLEARLY, THE MATERIALS ARE VERY DIFFERENT, BUT IN ORDER TO QUANTIFY THE DISCREPANCY IN EFFICIENCY, WE FOCUS ON MEASURING THE TAIL OF THE ABSORPTION PAST THE NOMINAL BAND EDGE AND THEREFORE THE URBACH ENERGY OF THE TWO MATERIALS. WE DISCUSS A THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN URBACH ENERGY AND OPEN CIRCUIT VOLTAGE BASED ON THE ORIGINAL CONSIDERATIONS BY SHOCKLEY AND QUEISER ON THE EFFICIENCY LIMITS OF SOLAR CELLS.
One of the main concerns of photovoltaic technology for the consumer is the cost, specifically the fabrication cost per unit of energy or power produced. One way to minimize the cost is to decrease the amount of material by using thin film solar cells. Thin films also have potential for nonconventional realizations of solar cells that require only simple mounting apparatuses, even as simple as a sticker. However, a key issue that arises with most thin films is a low power conversion efficiency compared to thick, crystalline cells. Both the path length of the light within the absorptive layer of the cell and the path length of electrons excited by the absorbed light decrease in a thin film, which creates a tension of optimization. The former feature makes it difficult for a thin film cell to absorb light, while the latter makes it easy for the electrons to get out as electric current. Thus, if the layer is made too thin, little light is collected, but if it is made too thick, the conversion efficiency again decreases.

This issue has stalled many thin film technologies, but emerging research is taking different approaches to attempt a solution. Two areas in particular, quantum dot solar cells and perovskite-based solar cells, have experienced similar popularity, but very different rates of progress toward increased power conversion efficiency.

Quantum dot photovoltaics first gained popularity in the early 2000s, when it was predicted that quantum confinement should lead to a quantized density of states in the zero-dimensional nanoparticles. Such a property, in contrast to the quasi-continuous nature of energy levels in a bulk semiconductor, should then allow the electron relaxation time to increase, potentially allowing for either multi-exciton generation or extraction of hot electrons. This, in addition to the tunability of absorption into the near infrared region should allow for an unprecedented increase in efficiency of photovoltaics, up to 66%. However, experiment has not nearly reflected this theoretical increase, as quantum dot solar cells have only reached a maximum efficiency of 8.55%.

Lead-halide perovskites, in contrast, have seen rapid progress, up to the current confirmed record of 17.9%. Perovskites have a highly ordered crystal lattice that allows for good optical and electrical properties, but they are not unique in this characteristic. Crystalline silicon, for example, is similarly ordered. The interest in perovskites, then, stems from their potential as a particularly thin, and therefore cheaper, crystalline material. Perovskites have been synthesized with a diffusion length of up to 1 micron, which is an order of magnitude higher than the absorption depth, which can be as small as 100 nm. Crystalline silicon, with its similar amount of order exhibits a longer diffusion length, but its optical properties are not as good, and its absorption depth nears 100 microns in the Vis-NIR range that is of interest for photovoltaic applications.

Here we will address a fundamental optical property, the Urbach energy, of the two materials (lead-halide perovskites and lead sulfide quantum dots) that can provide a more quantitative explanation for the discrepancy in the efficiencies seen in the two materials.

**THEORY**

The Urbach energy is connected to the theoretical limit of the efficiency of a single p-n junction solar cell, but goes past the treatment given by Shockley and Queisser in their famous detailed balance limit. This limit, initially derived for material with a band gap of 1.1 eV, gives a value given for efficiency, $\eta$, that depends on four terms:

$$\eta(\chi_g, \chi_c, f, t_s) = u_g(\chi_g)v(\chi_g, \chi_c, f)m(\chi_g, \chi_c, f)t_s$$

The first term, $u_g$, is defined as the ultimate efficiency, and represents the efficiency the cell would have if every photon with energy above the band gap of the material in question were to excite an electron that would then provide the exact energy of that photon to the cell. The third is an impedance matching factor that accounts for the balance between the highest possible values for voltage and current, which cannot occur simultaneously. The fourth is the probability that a photon with energy greater than $E_g$ will excite an electron and produce an electron hole pair; the value’s upper limit is 1.

The second term, $v$, is the ratio of the operational output voltage to that of the band gap, and it is of particular interest here. It accounts for recombination processes in the cell, making considerations for both radiative and nonradiative recombination.

To find the maximum value for the open circuit voltage that a solar cell can attain, and therefore the ratio of that open circuit voltage to that of the band gap, Shockley and Queisser first consider the steady-state condition that will occur when the cell is surrounded by a blackbody of temperature $T_{\text{co}}$. In this state, the rate of radiative recombination is given by a value $F_{\text{co}}$. This is determined by the number...
ber of photons incident upon the cell with energy greater than $E_g$, which is derived from the blackbody spectrum at $T_e$. When solar radiation hits the cell, the original state is disrupted and the new steady-state is given by

$$0 = F_s - F_c(V) + R(0) + R(V) - \frac{I}{q} \quad (1)$$

where $F_s$ is the rate of electron-hole pairs generated due to solar radiation (and is determined by the blackbody curve of a body at 6000 K), $F_c(V)$ is the new rate of radiative recombination, $R(0)$ is the rate of radiative recombination, $R(V)$ is nonradiative generation, and $I$ is the external current. In the ideal situation, nonradiative processes will obey the ideal rectifier equation, and

$$R(V) = R(0) \exp \left( \frac{V}{V_c} \right) \quad (2)$$

The $F_c(V)$ term is determined by the new concentration of electrons and holes after the Fermi-level split into quasi-levels due to the incident radiation, and is therefore defined as

$$F_{c0} = F_{c0} \exp \left( \frac{V}{V_c} \right) \quad (3)$$

Equation (1) can also be written as

$$0 = F_s - F_{c0} + [F_{c0} - F_c(V) + R(0) + R(V)] - \frac{I}{q} \quad (4)$$

where the term in the brackets represents the net rate of generation of electron-hole pairs when a cell is surrounded by a blackbody at temperature $T_e$, since $F_s - F_{c0}$ will be zero at that point. Using this term, the fraction of recombination that will be radiative can be written as

$$f_c = \frac{F_{c0} - F_c(V)}{F_{c0} - F_{c}(V) + R(0) - R(V)} \quad (5)$$

The steady-state can now be expressed as

$$0 = q(F_s - F_{c0}) + q(F_{c0} - F_c(V)) = I \quad (6)$$

Setting $I$ equal to zero in order to find the maximum value for $V$, and using the definition in (3)

$$F_s - F_{c0} = \frac{F_{c0}}{f_c} \left( e^{V/V_c} - 1 \right) \quad (7)$$

Solving for $V$,

$$V = V_c \ln \left( \frac{f_c F_s}{F_{c0}} - f_c + 1 \right) \quad (8)$$

Since $F_s$, based on the blackbody curve at 6000 K, is much greater than all other terms, as long as $f_c$, which is assumed to be 1 in the final calculation, is not too small.\(^3\)

The absorption coefficient for solar energy striking the surface of the cell is also assumed to be 1. In other words, the assumption is made that photons with energy higher than $E_g$ are absorbed and excite an electron with a probability of 1, while photons with energy below $E_g$ are absorbed and excite an electron with a probability of 0. However, this assumption does not hold for the low values of $f_c$ that the detailed balance limit does not consider. In such a case there will be an exponential tail present in the absorption spectrum of the material being studied. Highly ordered crystalline materials exhibit very sharp absorption edges, but for both amorphous materials and films of quantum dots the disorder leads to a broad absorption tail below $E_g$.

The breadth of this absorption tail is often well described by a value $E_u$, the Urbach energy, and an exponential such that

$$\alpha(E) = \alpha_0 \exp \left( \frac{E - E_o}{E_u} \right) \quad (9)$$

The open circuit voltage of the cell, when the absorption tail is considered, can now be represented as\(^6\)

$$V_{oc} = \frac{kT}{e} \left( \ln \left( \int_0^{\infty} \alpha(E) \Phi_f(E, T) \, dE \right) + 1 \right) \quad (10)$$

Here, $\alpha(E)$ is defined as the exponential absorption edge below $E_g$ and $\Phi_f$ above $E_g$. When $V_{oc}$ is calculated for different values of $T$ and $E_u$, this inverse relationship becomes clear.

As is evident from the calculations, $E_u$, when greater than $k_b T$ at different values of $T$, leads to a significant decrease in $V_{oc}$ compared to the given value of $E_g$, which was taken to be 1.3 eV for the purpose of the calculations. Also noteworthy is the trend toward zero of the difference $E_g - V_{oc}$ as both $T$ and $E_u$ go toward zero as well, which is in agreement with the predictions of Shockley and Queisser.

Literature data, gathered by De Wolf et al., show a nearly linear relationship between Urbach energy and losses in $V_{oc}$. These are shown in Figure 2 along with the calculated value from Eq.10. Except for one point, the calculated $V_{oc}$ is larger than the experiment which is fine since the calculation does not introduce additional efficiency losses. The same positive relationship can be seen between $E_u$ and losses in $V_{oc}$ in both calculation and experiment.\(^7\)
This relationship indicates that the value for the Urbach energy should give a prediction as to the upper limit that the open circuit voltage of solar cell can attain based on its material characteristics, taking into consideration more than simply the band gap of those materials.

METHODS
To confirm the value of this prediction, we compare Eu for quantum dots and perovskites, specifically lead sulfide dots with absorption peak near 950 nm and lead-halide perovskites with absorption edge near 800 nm, in order to better understand the power conversion efficiencies that have already been attained with such materials.

The synthesis used for the lead sulfide quantum dots is based on a modified version of the Hines and Scholes method. Briefly, 0.09 g PbO, 0.27 mL oleic acid, and 3.8 mL octadecene (ODE) were mixed under a Schlenck line in a three-neck flask. The mixture was degassed at 95-105°C for 10 minutes and then heated to 150°C under Ar-gon for another 50 minutes. 42 µL of bis(trimethylsilyl)sulfide (TMS) was dissolved in 3 mL ODE in a glovebox and then injected into the heated solution. The mixture turned to a dark brown within a second of injection. The temperature dropped to around 115°C at which it was allowed to react for 20-30 seconds. The flask was cooled back to room temperature using air flow. The quantum dots were precipitated with ethanol and/or acetone, and dissolved in a 9:1 hexane/octane solution.

The lead sulfide substrates were prepared by cross-linking with ethanedithiol (EDT). A glass slide was cleaned using acetone and ethanol. The glass was then covered with 3-(mercaptopropyl) trimethoxysilane (MPTS) to bind the quantum dots to the glass. The methoxy groups bind to the glass and the thiol groups are available to bind to the Pb. The cleaned PbS QDs were dropped onto the glass slide, which formed a thin film on the surface. The film was covered with EDT in ethanol for a few seconds before washing with ethanol. The films were dried and the process was repeated until a dark, smooth layer was formed. These films were measured with the Cary UV-Vis or PDS before any degradation from air could take place.

The method for the synthesis of lead iodide perovskites was based on that used by Im, et al. The methylammonium iodide precursor was prepared by reacting methylamine (2.0 M in methanol) and hydriodic acid (57% in water) for 4 hours at 0°C. The methylamine solution in methanol was prepared by bubbling methylamine gas through 223 mL of methanol while swirling the flask. This resulted in a 1-2 M solution. The HI was added slowly drop-wise to the methylamine which had been cooled to 0°C. The solution changed color from clear to yellow upon addition of HI, and the solution was a reddish hue by the end of the 4 hour reaction. The precipitate was collected using a rotary evaporator overnight at 80°C. The precipitate was redissolved in 3.5 mL ethanol at 70°C and recrystallized to remove impurities. The crystals were washed with diethyl ether and filtrated. Because the crystals still had a yellow tinge, they were recrystallized until a white powder was obtained. The powder was dried overnight in a vacuum oven at 100°C. In a glovebox, approximately 0.5 g of lead iodide and 1.3 g of methylammonium iodide were dissolved into 2.3 mL γ-buteralactone, heated to 80°C, and reacted for 2 hours. The perovskites were then spin coated onto glass coated with polyethleneamine and rinsed with water at 6000 RPM, and baked at 100°C for 15 minutes. The perovskites were never exposed to air throughout the synthesis and measurements.

To measure the absorption spectrum of the materials, and therefore the Urbach energy, photothermal deflection (mirage) spectroscopy (PDS) was used. The measurements were done using a 100 W tungsten lamp as a white light source, a monochromator based on a 1200 groove/mm diffraction grating blazed at 1000 nm and 1 mm slits, and a 635 nm red laser. The resolution of the monochromator was calculated to be approximately 0.7 mV (where the slit width was taken to be 1 mm and the focal length was taken to be 10 cm), which is well within the resolution needed to measure the steepest absorption tail expected, around 10-20 mV. The white light is modulated at a frequency of 20 Hz, and after passing through the monochromator, is focused to a 5 mm by 0.5 mm area on a 5 mm wide sample, which is immersed in filtered hexane and sealed in an air-tight quartz cuvette. The red laser skims the surface of the sample perpendicular to the diffracted monochromatic light. Therefore, when the sample absorbs a certain wavelength of light, it heats the hexane, changing the index of refraction and bending the red laser beam. The change in position of the red laser beam is the direct measurement, from which the absorption spectrum is obtained after normalization with the spectrum of the lamp measured using an opaque graphite sample. Filters are used to block the second order diffraction and extend the measurement into the near infrared region. The absorption spectrum can be plotted on a logarithmic scale, with the steepest slope corresponding to the minimum value of $E_u$. 

$E_u$
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The absorption spectrum was measured for PbS quantum dots using PDS, and is shown in Figure 3. There are two distinct linear areas when plotted on a logarithmic scale, corresponding to two different tails. The minimum slope is 98 meV, measured through an order of magnitude, which is therefore the minimum Urbach Energy measured for these dots.

This value for the Urbach energy, at room temperature, can be calculated to correspond to losses in $V_{OC}$ from $E_g$ in the range of 0.8 V – 1.0 V at room temperature, 270 K (see Figure 1). This is further supported by experimental values; the maximum reported value of $V_{OC}$ for a PbS quantum dot solar cell, to our knowledge, is 0.692 ± 0.007 V, attained from dots of 2.9 nm with a band gap of 1.4 eV – a loss of 0.7 V. A range of dots of different sizes and band gaps were fabricated and measured by Yoon, et al., as seen in Figure 4.\textsuperscript{11}

A linear fit to these points gives the relation

$$V_{OC} = 0.519(E_g) - 0.0221$$

which indicates that the maximum open circuit voltage achieved from a photovoltaic device fabricated from PbS quantum dots has only slightly exceeded approximately 50\% of the measured value of $E_g$, which, in order to absorb in the desired region of the near infrared, is generally near 1.3 V, as is the band gap in the dots that we fabricated as well.

This relationship holds true not only for high voltage cells, but also for high efficiency cells, which is logical since $\eta$ depends on $V_{OC}$. The highest reported efficiency for a PbS solar cell to date is 8.55\%, which was achieved with dots of $E_g$ 1.3 V. The maximum open circuit voltage attained for these cells was 0.6 V, using dots capped by 1,2 and 1,3-benzenedithiol ligands. Again, we see a loss of about 0.7 V from the band gap voltage for a lead sulfide quantum dot solar cell.\textsuperscript{2}

The width of the Urbach tail is indicative of the level of disorder in a material, which for quantum dots, with a high surface area to volume ratio, is fundamentally connected to the nature of the surface of the dots. Imperfections in stoichiometry and passivation at the surface, as well as the type of ligands that cap the dots are often the most significant sources of disorder. It is therefore possible to increase the sharpness of the tail by optimizing the types of ligands used. For example, different ligands can either passivate the surface more or less efficiently, affecting the amount of trap states on the surface. Furthermore, Urbach energy generally increases with increasing ligand length, possibly due to decreased coupling between dots.\textsuperscript{12} The effect of different ligands on the Urbach energy in CdSe dots has been explored using PDS, and was found to be significant, with CdSe dots capped by HDA exhibiting a minimum $E_u$ of 25 meV, while the same dots capped with S\textsuperscript{2} had an increased minimum Urbach energy of 80 meV.\textsuperscript{13} Clearly, then, there is some potential in this area for improvement in the absorption tail of quantum dots, but attempts at optimizing ligand use has not lead to the increases in efficiency that were originally predicted, indicating that the Urbach energy for PbS QDs is still too high to attain the necessary values for $V_{OC}$.

Perovskites, with their crystalline structure, are inherently more ordered than quantum dots, leading to a much lower value for the Urbach energy, and therefore higher values for the open circuit voltage. For example, the highest value for open circuit voltage attained up to this point is 1.40 V, which was achieved using a wide band gap bromine based lead perovskite with a band gap energy of 2.30 V. To make a more direct comparison to measurements made here, the highest value achieved for CH\textsubscript{3}NH\textsubscript{3}PbI\textsubscript{3}, which have the same band gap as pure iodide perovskites, but a higher reported value for $V_{OC}$, at 1.13 V.\textsuperscript{15}

The absorption spectrum measured for CH\textsubscript{3}NH\textsubscript{3}PbI\textsubscript{3}, using PDS is shown in Figure 5. The exponential curve is fitted to a region that stretches through two orders of magnitude, giving a value of 45 meV for $E_u$. This is somewhat higher than the lowest reported value of 15 meV, but it is substantially lower than the measured value of 98 meV for the PbS QDs. When compared with the highest reported value for $V_{OC}$ above, it agrees well with the calculation, which predicts that an Urbach energy of 45 meV should give a loss of just over 0.5 V from the 1.57 V band gap.

Considering the brief period of time that perovskite research has had to mature, it is likely that 1.05 V is not the maximum value that a solar cell fabricated from CH\textsubscript{3}NH PbI\textsubscript{3} can attain for $V_{OC}$. A larger $V_{OC}$ is also predicted by the lower 15 meV reported value for $E_u$. Some reasons for the discrepancy between reported data and measured data in-

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include high noise levels—ideally we would measure the absorption tail through another order of magnitude to get a more accurate number—as well as difficulties forming a film thick enough to see a high signal in PDS measurements.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The values measured using photothermal deflection spectroscopy for the minimum Urbach energy of lead sulfide quantum dots and lead iodide perovskites are 98 meV and 45 meV, measured over a maximum of two orders of magnitude. These values lead to a good agreement between the calculated open circuit voltage and the reported values attained by solar cells fabricated with these materials. Although a little bit more work needs to be done to obtain a more precise determination of the Urbach tail with these materials with absorption data extending over more orders of magnitude, the initial results are very promising in showing that the consideration of the Urbach tail is a very valuable input to choose the best materials for solar cells.

ENDNOTES

4. Stranks et al., 2013.
9. Lu et al., 2009.
10. Im et al., 2012.
11. Yoon et al., 2013.
12. Erslev et al., 2012.
15. Lee et al., 2012.

REFERENCES


**Figure 1:** Voltage drop from band gap energy vs. Urbach energy

**Figure 2:** Voltage drop from band gap energy vs. Urbach energy

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<th>Material</th>
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**Table 1**
Table 2:

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Figure 3: Absorption vs. Energy

Figure 4: Open Circuit Voltage vs. Energy

Figure 5: Absorption vs. Energy
FROM MAMMY TO MOMMY

Michelle Obama and the Reclamation of Black Motherhood

ON NOVEMBER 21ST, 2013, POLITICO MAGAZINE PUBLISHED MICHELLE COTTLE’S PIECE TITLED “LEANING OUT: HOW MICHELLE OBAMA BECAME A FEMINIST NIGHTMARE.” COTTLE PINPOINTS SEVERAL EXPLANATIONS FOR OBAMA’S DEGENERATION INTO SUCH A “NIGHTMARE,” INCLUDING THE FIRST LADY PROCLAIMING TO BE A “MOM-IN-CHIEF” AND FOCUSING ON HEALTHY EATING. MELISSA HARRIS-PERRY, CORRESPONDENT FOR MSNBC, RETALIATED QUICKLY AND CRITICIZED COTTLE FOR HER REMARKS, INSISTING THAT SHE SHOULD BETTER STUDY HER BLACK FEMINIST HISTORY. THIS ARTICLE ARGUES THAT COTTLE IS OBLIVIOUS TO OBAMA’S STANDPOINT AS A BLACK WOMAN, AND THAT BY EMBRACING MOTHERHOOD, OBAMA IS DOING WHAT MANY BLACK WOMEN HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FROM DOING THROUGHOUT HISTORY. THIS ARTICLE DRAWS FROM BOTH HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF BLACK WOMEN DURING SLAVERY AND MODERN CONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK FEMININITY TO ADDRESS COTTLE’S CLAIMS.
Instead of being a unifying experience for women to celebrate, motherhood has actually divided women throughout history. Societal norms and conventions have constructed various versions of motherhood that have evolved with different trajectories. However, many white feminists still view motherhood through a universal lens that omits the collective and unique histories of mothers of color. Michelle Cottle’s article, “Leaning Out: How Michelle Obama Became a Feminist Nightmare,” demonstrates this basic lack of understanding of the differences between black and white motherhoods. Cottle pinpoints Obama’s self-appointed title as “mom-in-chief” as problematic and simply exacerbates the distance between black and white feminists and their struggles to understand each other’s standpoints. Melissa Harris-Perry responded scathingly to Cottle’s argument and denounced her for her narrow characterization of black motherhood. The tension between Melissa Harris-Perry’s and Michelle Cottle’s views of Michelle Obama echoes years of distance between white and black feminisms, as white women vie to free themselves from the very domestic sphere that black women struggle to enter.

White women have a tumultuous relationship with the role of motherhood, due to white males historically manipulating white women’s reproductive capabilities to ensure racial purity. Coerced into certain parameters of what the patriarchy wanted motherhood to be, white mothers had very little agency when it came to how they used their own bodies. Because white women perpetuated whiteness through their lineage, the patriarchal white supremacy institutionalized tactics to control their behavior and “instead of protecting white women according to the Southern code of chivalry, they undermined white women’s cultural value and social power and isolated them within their own racial group.” One such tactic was the 1924 Preservation of Racial Integrity Act in Virginia, which “codified the one-drop rule by restricting white status to persons having no ‘discernable trace’ of non-white (Negro, Indian, or Asian) blood, which prevented near-whites from claiming the benefits of whiteness. As in most anti-miscegenation regulations, however, white women’s relationships with black men were the real focus of the Act.” Subjugated and confined, some white women obviously felt natural tendencies of aggression towards the system. Cer-
tained laws emerged that were meant to assuage the fear of deviant women who adhered to the feminist prototype of the New Woman, as scientist Francis Galton called for laws that “particularly chastised the white, upper-middle-class, educated New Woman who seemed most in danger of de-valuing or foregoing motherhood.” There was even a proposed amendment to the aforementioned Preservation of Racial Integrity Act that would have addressed white men’s roles in miscegenation, but it was never passed, again proving the misogynistic edge of the legal system. The so-called New Woman was inherently white, implying that only they were capable of challenging conventions and endangering the purity of the race by rejecting motherhood. With such a history of coercion into the domestic sphere and subsequent rebellion, white feminists still feel remnants of this oppression even today through their wariness of privileging motherhood over a career.

As white women fought the restrictive institutional practices of the 18th, 19th, and even 20th centuries, black women were fighting just to be seen. Doubly oppressed, black women faced sexism from their black male counterparts and indifference from white males who perceived black women as bodies that could only produce undesirable black children. While laws were almost obsessively focused on monitoring white female activity, “the legal system became less interested in black women or mulattas, since they could still transmit only black blood, as far as the law was concerned. White supremacists ignored black mothers because they figured very little in the calculus of white blood domination.” Of course, most white women were not too eager to offer support to black women, either. They were constantly grappling with their own reputations, and “perhaps it was the strain of that balancing act that kept so many white women from empathizing with their black sisters, who were effaced almost entirely by their underserved licentious reputation among whites and had no legal standing to make rape charges against the white men who had historically committed the most interracial rapes.” White men exerted control over both black and white women to affirm their own masculinity and racial status, since dismissing women’s agency in their own sexual bodies helped to solidify white men’s power. White women’s obedience and fidelity bought them the protection they allegedly needed against black men. Black women had no bargaining power at all, since even their protests did little to contradict the widespread belief in their need and desire for white men’s sexual advances.

White women were monitored closely by the patriarchy, but they at least had protection – black women were left voiceless and bereft of agency. Despite both being victims of patriarchal rule and manipulation, white and black women had very little solidarity. Such societal invisibility and lack of solidarity with their white counterparts was and still is a major historical barrier preventing black women from embracing their roles as mothers.

There is a fundamental difference, derived from class distinctions, between black and white motherhoods that originated during slavery and still persists today. Writing for Clutch Magazine, Tami Winfrey Harris cites author Deesha Philyaw, who “writes that historically, black women have rarely had the privilege to choose motherhood over career. Black women have always worked outside of the home—have almost always had to—even when society forbade ‘good’ white women from leaving their pedestals. We have ploughed the fields and raised other folks babies, as well as our own.” Harris, through Philyaw, argues that while white women were fighting for the right to pursue a career instead of motherhood, black women wanted the opposite. She illustrates the tension between Cottle’s white feminist standpoint that views motherhood as a remnant of patriarchal oppression and black feminism’s desire to claim motherhood in its purest sense. As Harris mentions, economic class plays a major role here. This economic barrier prevented black women from truly embracing their identities as mothers. Additionally, slave masters “figured that slave mothers were less likely to escape than slave men because of their attachment to their children...And they were mostly right. Few women escaped with their dependent children.” Black mothers were simply unable to relinquish their position for freedom due to their children, depriving them of their autonomy and establishing a nega-
Obama actively subverts the historical traditions of black women having to compromise their motherhood due to white patriarchal supremacy and provides black women with a new model to follow.

The ironic objectification and sexualization of black women by the white patriarchy, in spite of their inferior status in society, further obstructed the path to black motherhood. White men focused heavily on maintaining the purity and chastity of white women, but they had few issues with perpetuating stereotypes of black female's hypersexuality and “exotic” bodies, even as they ignored their status as human beings. In fact, scientists were particularly fascinated with African bodies and the “protuberance of the buttocks...and the remarkable development of the labia minora, which were sufficiently well marked to distinguish these parts from those of any ordinary varieties of the human species. The racial difference of the African body...was located in its literal excess, a specifically sexual excess that placed her body outside the boundaries of the ‘normal’ female.” Because of the emphasis placed on their genitals and excess, black women had to fend off rumors of licentiousness and sexual promiscuity, which conflicted directly with the virtue of motherhood. The very physicality of African women’s bodies “became increasingly associated with sexual availability...those associations helped to establish a hierarchy between the races.” With a history of these stereotypes, black women struggled to enter the domestic sphere as simply mothers while fighting the promiscuous Jezebel label.

The historical context of the suppression of white women’s agency in terms of their reproductive capabilities and confinement to the domestic sphere provides readers with a better understanding of Cottle’s limited standpoint in her analysis of Michelle Obama’s motherhood. To Cottle, Obama’s celebration of motherhood comes off as resignation and compliance instead of as a move of activism. Cottle uses language of confinement, which was once used against white women, to describe Obama’s role in the White House, declaring, “The 2012 election did not set her free. Even now, with her husband waddling toward lame duck territory, she is not going to let loose suddenly with some straight talk about abortion rights or Obamacare or the Common Core curriculum debate. Turns out, she was serious about that whole ‘mom-in-chief’ business.” Cottle’s very word choice, insisting that the First Lady is still confined and unable to let loose, emanates contempt for Obama’s opting for motherhood. She even references how feminists hoped that the reelection would liberate her. As a white feminist, Cottle has an inculcated aversion to domesticity that she equates with patriarchal complacency, a remnant of the historical context of white male subjugation. Cottle even takes to objectifying and criticizing Obama for flourishing her body, as she states snidely, “FLOTUS has managed to remain above the fray—with her toned arms and her veggie garden and her radiant mom-in-chiefness.” Another feminist cited in the article comments on Obama’s arms, complaining, “I for one have seen enough of her upper appendages and her designer clothes.” Maybe for Cottle, a “mom-in-chief” who displays her body is a feminist nightmare, but she lacks the historical authority to speak for the experience of Obama and black women as a whole. Applying her white history to Obama’s black present, Cottle fails to notice the nuanced distinctions within her monolithic definition of motherhood.

Melissa Harris-Perry retorts derisively to the idea that Obama is playing it safe. In reality, Obama dismantles the historical obstacles (invisibility, economic dependence, and objectification) that have obstructed the path to black motherhood for years. Michelle Cottle insists that Obama sticks to mild and almost irrelevant tasks: she cites one feminist who asks coolly, “how can you hate a vegetable garden?” This construction of a demure and safe First Lady recalls black female voicelessness throughout history. Black women have a history of being ignored for their
deeds, and Cottle offers a similar argument surrounding Obama’s ostensibly innocuous campaigns. Melissa Harris-Perry efficiently counters this argument by citing the impact of Obama’s childhood obesity campaign, along with the controversy surrounding her desire to help lower income students attend college. Harris-Perry declares the first lady is not playing it safe with this work. She has drawn plenty of right-wing criticism. No, Ms. Cottle, not everyone loves a vegetable garden... The president has been ridiculed as an elitist for suggesting that more people go to college. So if you think there’s no political risk, maybe you haven’t been paying attention. Also, you misunderstand the place Michelle Obama occupies as the first African-American first lady.\(^{16}\)

Harris-Perry’s most important argument comes from her assertion that Cottle merely fails to understand the place Obama occupies. Cottle, ignorant of the historical context of black women and their own version of motherhood, cannot speak accurately on that topic’s behalf. As Harris-Perry illustrates, Obama actually dismantles historical bondage that once deprived black women of their voices and exerts her own agency to make her country finally listen to a powerful, black, and female voice.

After explaining how influential and controversial Obama’s platforms are, Harris-Perry makes another major point — Obama’s declaration of motherhood rejects the role of the Mammy. Despite what Cottle thinks, what makes Obama so revolutionary is that, “instead of agreeing that the public sphere is more important than Sasha and Malia, she buried Mammy and embraced being a mom on her own terms.”\(^{17}\) Obama is able to do what black women have sought for centuries — just be a mom. A belittling title to white feminists, black motherhood carries connotations of autonomy and independence from white patriarchal stereotypes rather than the submission associated with white motherhood for some feminists. The Mammy stereotype implies economic dependence and inadequacy that force black mothers to work in order to support their children; but Obama, by placing her children first, reclaims wholly both that domestic space and economic agency. She, unlike many of the black slave mothers before her, leaves the plantation that is the modern day public arena for her children. Obama actively subverts the historical traditions of black women having to compromise their motherhood due to white patriarchal supremacy and provides black women with a new model to follow.

Obama even challenges the objectification of the black female body. Kat Stoeffel writes for *New York Magazine* about how

Harris-Perry saw Michelle as subverting expectations in more subtle ways. Take her anti-obesity and fitness campaigns. Where Cottle’s feminists see a policy issue domestic enough for the “lady of the manor” to dip her “fashionably shod feet” into, the MSNBC host sees a defiant response to the media that reduced her to a set of upper arms. “For me, the immediate rational, reasonable response to that is to stop performing your body, to cover it up,” Harris-Perry said. “Instead the First Lady did this extraordinary thing where she’s like, *Oh you want to scrutinize? Here I am.* She went more sleeveless.\(^{18}\)

Stoeffel brings up an interesting point about how Obama once again actually defies expectations rather than simply playing it safe as Cottle suggests. Instead of succumbing to the white male gaze, Obama finds empowerment through her body, and she does not care how tired white feminists are of seeing her arms. While this opinion of Harris-Perry comes from a source outside of her direct letter to Cottle, her point still stands. Of course, as a white feminist, Cottle’s perspective of Obama is influenced by the experience of white females and patriarchal control of their sexuality, rather than a point of view supported by intersectionality and inclusion.

The lack of understanding on Cottle’s part illustrates the history of tension between black and white women in their respective quests for equality; white women assumed that their struggle against forced domesticity was and is universal, despite black women hoping to just occupy that sphere. Black women have had to overcome certain economic and social barriers to enter the domestic sphere, while white women broke free from restrictions that confined them to such a sphere. Cottle’s white, narrow-minded, and implied “universal” feminism is more damaging than Obama’s proud allegiance to her daughters. Melissa Harris-Perry offers her more appropriate standpoint and perspective to analyze the situation and determines that, in fact, Michelle Obama’s title of “mom-in-chief” redefines and reclaims black motherhood after a history of oppression. Feminism fails to be feminism when it discounts the histories and differences of all types of women — there is no set of feminist rules up to which Cottle can hold Obama, making her groundless hyperbole the real feminist nightmare.
ENDNOTES

1. Kitch 150.
3. Kitch 152, emphasis added.
5. Kitch 151.
7. Kitch 84, emphasis added.
8. Harris.
12. Cottle.
13. Ibid., emphasis added.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Stoeffel, emphasis added.

REFERENCES


The events of September 11, 2001, not only permanently disfigured the face of New York City and greatly changed the lives of thousands of Americans, but also created a cultural shockwave in America that is still felt today. American society was transformed almost immediately after the attacks; this response to terror can be seen in much of the visual culture that followed. When viewed in a post-9/11 context, the television show *Lost* (2004-2010) simultaneously reproduces, comments on, and reshapes the American response to 9/11 in the imagery employed, the topics discussed, and the characters depicted in its episodes. By subtly playing with the themes of tragedy, loss, and terror, *Lost* draws upon America’s cultural memory of the events of 9/11 and subversively provides a critique of our responses to terror.

The pilot episode of *Lost* aired on September 22, 2004, and the significance of that date—with its visual and numerical similarities to the date of September 11—was hardly lost on viewers. The show follows the survivors of the crash of Oceanic flight 815. The cause of the crash is a mystery. As the first season progresses it becomes clear that no one beyond the bounds of the island upon which the plane crashes has any idea of what happened to the survivors. The first episode, which details the events immediately following the crash, uses imagery that draws heavily upon representations of 9/11 and acts profoundly as a reproduction of this culture of fear and trauma. As Marita Sturken explains in her book *Tourists of History*, “reenactment of dramatic events is a staple of popular culture in the form of television programs, documentaries, and feature films.”

In paralleling the events of 9/11, *Lost* is not alone, joined by a slew of other war-on-terror television dramas such as *24* and *Sleeper Cell* but also feature films like *Traitor* and *The Kingdom*. *Lost* is unique in that its imagery is much more subtle. The first scene of the pilot episode depicts Jack Shephard (Matthew Fox), a surgeon and the main character of the series, sprawled on the ground in the middle of the jungle. He is wearing a tattered business suit and looks remarkably like a corpse. The positioning of his body and his costuming is meant to align him with those many victims of 9/11, the men and women working in the offices in the towers who died inside or even those who flung themselves from the buildings. This parallel is somewhat obscured by the surrounding jungle; the viewer, removed from the exact setting of 9/11, is initially able to dismiss the similarities between these two images.

This, however, becomes impossible, as it is made clear that Jack is anything but dead; he stands, brushes himself off, and immediately begins to sprint to the beach where it seems as if nothing is amiss. The scene is almost idyllic—beautiful palm trees and bright white sand with the clear water ahead—but as Jack scans the coast, the faint sounds of a woman screaming can be heard. He begins to run in the direction of the sound, and as he nears the shouting, pieces of the plane come into view; twisted metal, incinerated luggage and mangled limbs cover the surface of the beach. After briefly observing the scene, Jack immediately takes on the role of protector and hero. Rushing from person to person—at one point, as an act of chivalry, assisting a young pregnant woman who is having contractions from the trauma of the crash—Jack suddenly embodies the ultimate hero, one who becomes a leader in the moment of chaos; here, rather than resembling those men and women who lost their lives in the World Trade Center, he becomes those firefighters, policemen, and everyday brave figures who helped hundreds of men and women escape the towers on 9/11. By saving lives and delivering orders amongst piles of twisted steel, Jack becomes a conflation of both victim and hero, thus morphing into a symbol for a majority of American affected by the attacks.

While Jack Shephard stands in for all American people in those first scenes of *Lost*, the most obvious 9/11 image employed in these first few moments is that of the plane, Oceanic flight 815. Although few images of the hijacked planes exist, this first image on *Lost* of the plane cut in half and partly in flames, dozens of frightened and injured people running about, is clearly reminiscent of the events of 9/11. This initial view of the plane is accompanied by a visual and aural hush, as the background noise dulls and the camera seems to steady for the first time since the frenzied start of the show. This pause suspends both the viewers and the characters in time, allowing for a brief moment of...
stasis and reflection in the chaos and emphasizes the terror and horror of the image. The familiarity of the scene also becomes apparent in these few frozen seconds. Such depictions of a mangled plane almost necessarily evoke memories of the events of 9/11 and their immediate aftermath. The viewer, bombarded with imagery of destruction and simultaneously reliving the trauma of those horrific terrorist attacks in only the first fifteen minutes of the pilot, is invited to view nearly every event that follows the initial crash through a post-9/11 lens. As the show progresses, it is natural to assume that these contexts of terror would gradually begin to drop out of the viewers’ perception as they distance themselves from this emblematic and emotional 9/11 image of a crashed plane, but since much of the narrative of *Lost* is framed around flashbacks into the pasts of the survivors of Oceanic flight 815, it is almost impossible to forget these images. Many times these flashbacks bring the characters back to the first moments of the crash, and the result is a narrative structure that continually progresses and regresses with the moment of trauma being repeated countless number of times. As Sturken explains, “In psychoanalysis, compulsive repetition occurs when subjects are traumatized to the extent that they repeat their moment of trauma over and over again and are unable to either narrativize it or move beyond it to make it a memory”. Both the characters on *Lost* and the viewers are not only traumatized by the crash of Oceanic flight 815, but also by the repetition caused by this narrative structure. This clearly parallels the repetition of 9/11 images in American media following the attacks. The result, for both American society and the community of *Lost*, is a group of people that are unable to move beyond their trauma, whether this be by choice or not.

While the now-marooned survivors attempt to cope with the loss and trauma of the crash, they slowly begin to form a community amongst themselves. Asians, African Americans, Arabs, and other ethnicities, as well as diverse religions and backgrounds, are all represented in this cast of characters. Promotional cast photographs for these earlier seasons depict a mini-community that is, although small in numbers, quite diverse. The diversity of this group is meant to stand in as a small-scale representation of American society. They manage to function even in the face of both their extreme trauma and their differences. This concept of community and unity amongst all peoples is consistent with much of the political rhetoric following 9/11. George W. Bush’s speech to the American public on the evening of September 11, 2001, is emblematic of this concept of the diverse community and world-wide unity. As he states,

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism ... This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace.3

Not only does he promise that all Americans will unite—no matter their race, religion, or origins—but he also reassures the American people that the entire world is part of their unified community. The American public and all worldwide lovers of freedom will come together to fight evil in the hopes of achieving “justice and peace.” This concept of all races throwing aside their differences to work toward the common good is one which was seen nearly everywhere following the events of 9/11; it also carries with it the implication that all Americans, not simply those immediately connected to 9/11, were affected by the attacks. The cast of *Lost* is this idealistic post-race unified community on a smaller scale; although the survivors have their differences, they are bound together by their common tragedy and provide a unified front, physically standing in a line as equals in their promotional photos to combat whatever dangers may come their way.

While the diverse survivors of the crash are initially able to create a community that unifies them, as time goes on this harmony slowly begins to erode. The first of these breaks occurs after the survivors spend the first few days waiting for assistance to arrive. As more and more time passes with no sign of rescue, it becomes evident that they may be lost for a while. With a new goal of long-term survival, they begin to search for more permanent places to set up shel-
A shared trauma cannot hold them together for long, and even this relatively innocuous task of establishing a settlement creates a virulent faction within the survivors; half of them, led by Jack, head deeper into the jungle to seek shelter in caves, while the other half remains on the beach. A rivalry forms between these two sub-groups from the originally harmonious mini-community of crash survivors. As stand-ins for all of American society, this division between the survivors illustrates a parallel to many of the policy debates that ensued almost immediately following the events of 9/11. One such debate was centered upon the issue of whether or not the American government should invade Afghanistan. Both officials and citizens debated whether or not war would be beneficial, heated discussions often resulting in anger and resentment. Hostility also appears in the now-broken groups of survivors on Lost. The destruction of a unified community in a dangerous and foreign land poses many issues for the survivors, not the least of which being the mysterious and almost-mythical beasts lurking in the jungle of the island, creatures that include a massive polar bear and a Smoke Monster. The survivors soon realize that, separated into two distinct groups, they hold almost no chance of survival; they may have been united by their trauma and divided by their opinions, but now they must reunite to survive. In this the writers of Lost provide their critique; in the mini-community, viewers are invited to see a parallel to the greater American society. The realization that the community on Lost cannot survive as separate factions forces the viewer to consider that the same may be true for American society. If the experiences of the survivors on Lost are any indication, then it is clear that the anger and debates in American society will only serve to further endanger a country that is already living in a world of loss, terror, and trauma.

While the survivors on Lost eventually do find a way to move beyond their differences and work together, they have a clear limit as to with whom they can and cannot ally themselves. Even in the face of their reunification, they continue to draw clear lines between themselves and other people on the island. As they explore deeper into the jungle, they come across a group of people that had not been on the Oceanic flight. These people are part of a group that has lived on the island for decades in a compound-like community, living off the grid and completing scientific experiments. The survivors name these strangers The Others. While this name is simply meant to provide a clear and succinct distinction between the survivors and the settlers, the wording of the phrase is reminiscent of and almost implies a racial difference. This division between the familiar and the other is a mirror of the typical post-9/11 American response toward Arabs or Muslims in which, simply due to skin color or religion, they are deemed as other and are subjected to intense racism and racial profiling. As Cynthia Young explains in her essay Black Ops, 4

The widening of the “we” of US citizenship to embrace those who were formerly marginalized, be they African Americans, Asian Americans, or Latinos, allows war on terror dramas to mark a new boundary between citizenship and “alienness” that includes some but still excludes Arab Americans and Muslims. Just in the way that American citizens created a new dynamic of “we” versus “alien,” so do the survivors on the island. The differences between the survivors and the Others are not based fundamentally on skin color or religion—there is even a prominent Arab character accepted in the survivors’ group as a part of the “we”—but rather on ideological differences. However, the immediate marginalization of these settlers on the island is a definite parallel to the American response toward Arabs and Muslims following the events of 9/11; taking no chance to examine their point of view or to create an ally with the settlers, the survivors take their perceived alienness as a reason to give them the name of Other and to treat them as such by attacking them and, as is more often the case, fearing them.

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In the face of this clear division between the “we” of the survivors and the “alien” of the Others, the character of Sayid Jarrah (Naveen Andrews) and his past come as a surprise. Sayid is an Arab man who, prior to crashing on the island, was a member of the Iraqi Republican Guard and served for many years as an interrogator and a torturer. Sayid is often depicted in such a way that showcases his brute strength, symbolizing both classical masculinity and violence. However, despite Sayid’s violent and dark past, the survivors—many of them with difficult pasts as well—still accept him wholeheartedly and consider him to be a member of their community. This somewhat contradicts Evelyn Alsultany’s argument in her book *Arabs in the Media*, in which she claims in post-9/11 American society there is a shift in the representation of Arabs in which, there is indeed a process of rehabilitation taking place, but it is one in which images of acceptable Arab and Muslim Americans are produced through the figure of the Arab American patriot or victim of post-9/11 hate crimes.5

The character of Sayid seems to contradict this, being neither victim nor patriot. Sayid is, on paper, an entirely unlikable character; he shows little emotion, his violent past is abhorrent, and both his race and his former occupation draw upon the raw trauma and fear surrounding the terrorist figure that still festers in American cultural memory. In spite of all of this, Sayid is a character with whom the viewer is meant to—and does—sympathize. Sayid also raises issues with Alsultany’s concept of the “simplified complex representation” of Arab males in the media. She explains that this is a new trend in television and film dramas in which whenever a negative or stereotypically violent Arab man is portrayed, he is “balanced” with the figure of an Arab patriot who is ally to the United States government. This device, she claims, is meant to combat potential critiques of racism toward Arab Americans; in including a “good” Arab, they mean to counteract the blatant stereotyping of the “bad” Arab. Sayid certainly does not fall into this category of the simplified complex representation; Sayid, a man who is still considered to be a protagonist, is at once both good and bad, both torturer and redeemer. Rather than having two Arab figures acting as either extreme, *Lost* depicts one Arab figure who encapsulates both ends of the spectrum. Viewers, in finding themselves sympathizing with a character who in any other circumstance would be considered reprehensible and potentially even labeled a terrorist, are invited to reconsider the typical American response to 9/11 that was characterized by fear, paranoia, and hatred of all Arabs and Muslims. While Sayid himself has the capacity to be a terrorist like the hijackers on September 11, knowing his life and his story makes him more human; this raises the question of why our society has chosen to vilify an entire ethnicity and an entire religion following 9/11 and whether or not—even in the case of the terrorists themselves—this perceived evil is the reality.

Much of the first season of the series is focused on the main characters’ acceptance of their new situation. As the survivors struggle to come to terms with their new lives of fear and paranoia, many people on the island turn to different and often opposing methods of coping. Jack Shephard, de facto leader of the survivors and a proclaimed “man of science,” attempts to rationalize every strange and foreign danger that comes their way. He tries to analyze the actions of the treacherous Smoke Monster that plagues the survivors’ camp, and in leading the group he seeks the most efficient and structured methods of completing tasks. Acting as his foil is John Locke (Terry O’Quinn), an elderly man whose Enlightenment namesake would have appreciated his belief in faith. Prior to living on the island, an accident bound him to a wheelchair, unable to walk. This disability was the greatest curse of his prior life. However, upon landing on the island, Locke awakes amidst the chaos of the crash and, as he lies incapacitated on the sand, notices that his toes can move for the first time in years. He walks. The look of wonder on his face is a clear indication of his new-found faith. Now a firm believer in destiny and fate, Locke repeatedly tells Jack in their arguments that most things in life are “a leap of faith.”6 While both men seem to firmly believe in their own methods of coping and of searching for answers, neither manage to accomplish much; the island is still shrouded in mystery and although the survivors establish themselves there, it is in-
elicably against their presence. At every turn, it thwarts their attempts at reaching a new level of normalcy. The island is their primary obstacle in healing following the trauma of the crash. However, as Sturken explains in Tourists of History, “American mythology clings tenaciously to the belief that one can always, heal, move on, and place the past in its proper context, and do so quickly.” Even a man like John Locke, who is physically healed by his appearance on the island and whose narrative most supports the idea that trauma and loss can provide a way to become a better individual, is unable to solve the questions that the island presents. This farcical belief that healing after a trauma can be done quickly—a concept that arose in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 in the frenzied attempts to clean and rebuild the urban wound of Ground Zero—is negated by the survivors’ trials on the island. They, unable to find answers for the many mysteries of their trauma and of the island itself, are caught in an emotional purgatory. Similarly, life is clearly continuing beyond the bounds of the island. As Shannon (Maggie Grace), a minor character in the first season, argues with her brother in the pilot episode, she shouts, “The plane had a black box, idiot. They know exactly where we are. They’re coming.” This suggests that the survivors are aware that life is continuing outside of the realm of their static life on the island, and yet they are never helped. They are literally left behind, and this seems to parallel the unhealed pain and fear following 9/11 in that both American society and the survivors on the island are trapped in their trauma, left unassisted while being caught in an inescapable cycle of paranoia and fear.

Many mysteries unfold in the subsequent seasons of Lost, but as the series approaches its end few of the questions that arise are answered. The most decisive answer that the survivors get, however, is to the question of why the plane crashed and how they ended up on the island. The answer confounds them: it is their fault. Prior to the fifth season, Lost introduces many pseudo-scientific themes and it turns out that the island and its inhabitants are able to time travel. In a strange twist of events, the survivors of flight 815 are sent back to the 1970s and they detonate a hydrogen bomb, sucking themselves into a time warp and setting off a surge of electromagnetic strength that, ultimately, is the cause of their crash in 2004. Prior to this revelation, however, the survivors had been blissfully unaware of their own role in their crash, much in the way that American society seems to have forgotten the preceding events leading up to the attacks of 9/11, instead choosing to view that day as a strange, unprovoked anomaly. Sturken explains this well when she states that our society re-lies heavily upon, “the image of the United States as a country of pure intentions to which terrible things can happen, but which itself never provokes or initiates attack.” Just as the crash of Oceanic flight 815 was the result of a long standing, albeit warped, past involving the survivors themselves, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were also the explosive result of decades of political tension between America and various Arab states. However, while the survivors on Lost are ultimately forced to confront their role in the events that led to that fateful plane crash, American citizens have yet to truly accept the fact that America, through a series of ill-advised political endeavors, helped to breed a climate in which the events of 9/11 could occur. In forcing the survivors to examine their past actions, Lost in turn forces the viewers to dig deeper into America’s role in the lead-up to September 11, 2001.

In a post-9/11 society that constantly reproduces and repurposes the culture of fear, paranoia, trauma, and terror that arose from the terrorist attacks, Lost serves not only as a reproduction of the American response to 9/11, but also as an example of the ways in which America fell short in addressing the changes that occurred in society. Through the imagery employed, the topics discussed, and the general themes of the show, Lost is able to hold a mirror to the face of post-9/11 American society and provide a critique of how, if at all possible, Americans can change the reflection they see staring back at them.

ENDNOTES
2. Sturken, 27.
4. Young, 45.
5. Alsultany, 14.
7. Sturken, 14.
8. Lost, 1.1, “Pilot: Part 1”.

REFERENCES


IN 2014, A MERGER PROPOSAL WAS SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BY COMCAST CORPORATION AND TIME WARNER CABLE. THE PROPOSED MERGER HAS INCITED POPULAR OPPOSITION DUE TO CONCERNS THAT IT WOULD LEAD TO THE APPLICANTS’ MONOPOLISTIC CONTROL OVER THE INTERNET DISTRIBUTION MARKET. CONSEQUENTLY, APPEALS HAVE BEEN MADE IN FAVOR OF ENFORCEMENT OF ANTITRUST LAWS IN THIS CASE. WHILE IT MAY BE SYMPTOMATIC OF A NEED FOR THE LAWS TO CHANGE, THERE IS CURRENTLY NO LEGAL FOUNDATION FOR THE OPPOSITION, AND IT WOULD BE FULLY LEGAL FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE TO SUPPORT THE MERGER. IN ANY CASE, EITHER VERDICT WILL LEAD TO A PROFOUND LEGAL PRECEDENT.
INTRODUCTION

In February of 2014, Comcast Corporation publicly announced its intention to acquire Time Warner Cable, Inc. As per antitrust statutes, this proposed transaction is currently under review by the U.S. Department of Justice, which is responsible for the regulation of mergers that substantially limit competition in a given market. The Department of Justice considers two primary aspects concerning horizontal mergers — the lessening of competition and the over-consolidation of market share that confers a monopoly.

In the case of the merger submitted by the Applicants (Comcast Corporation and Time Warner Cable, Inc.), the Department of Justice considers the change in competition caused when two companies in the same market merge and the increased market share they will control as both a Multichannel Video Programming Distributor (MVPD) and an Internet Service Provider (ISP). These concerns are mostly addressed in Comcast’s merger proposal fact sheet that contains several claims that this paper will analyze.

Notably, there has been a substantial public outcry against the proposed merger of the Applicants. Opponents of the merger claim that the Applicants are attempting to consolidate an ISP market share well beyond reason, potentially conferring monopolistic powers. Moreover, they believe that the current anti-competitive and anti-consumer tactics of both companies obligate the Department of Justice to deny this merger in order to prevent any further marginalization of consumer interests.

HISTORY OF HORIZONTAL MERGER REGULATION

1890-2009

The history of positive antitrust law in the United States began with the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. Considered to be the founding document of antitrust statutes in the U.S., the Act regulates the sort of anti-competitive business tactics that engendered the Gilded Age. The Clayton Antitrust Act and Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914 followed the Sherman Antitrust Act, addressing and amending gaps in antitrust statutes—such as price fixing—as well as formally establishing a body to preside over alleged anti-competitive behavior of corporations.

The Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission issued the first Horizontal Merger Guidelines in 1992 according to sections of the three aforementioned Acts. These Guidelines were revised in 1997 to “reflect the ongoing accumulation of experience at the Agencies.”

2010-Present

The new Horizontal Merger Guidelines, issued August 19, 2010 by the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission, constitute the current guidelines for horizontal mergers. These Guidelines are based upon the statutes in Section 7 of the Clayton Antitrust Act, Sections 1 and 2 of the Sherman Antitrust Act, and Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act. Most pertinent is Section 7 of the Clayton Antitrust Act, “[prohibiting] mergers if in any line of commerce or in any activity affecting commerce in any section of the country, the effect of such acquisition may be substantially to lessen competition or to tend to create a monopoly.” For the purpose of this article, the Guidelines namely state what market share concentration and market definition are, address how they relate to the prevention of anti-competitive horizontal
mergers, and establish standards for the extent to which a merger may legally reduce competition.

**ANALYSIS**

In the case of a merger review, the Department of Justice must decide whether or not the merger is pursuant to its horizontal merger guidelines. That fact depends on whether the lessening of competition or conference of a monopoly is a reasonable outcome of the proposed merger.11,12

The Applicants would argue the following in support of the merger:

- As the Applicants do not compete in any markets directly, their merger does not represent a direct reduction of actualized competition in any way.13

- After the divestiture of the Applicants proposed in the merger fact sheet, the merger will result in a net 8 million MVPD (Multichannel Video Programming Distributor) subscriber gain. This divestiture sufficiently addresses the increased market share, as they remain below the 30 percent threshold instituted by the MVPD market definition.14,15

- Any complaint as to the anti-consumer nature of the Applicants’ service is unfounded, as the Applicants compete in a market where other options are available to consumers; in such a market, the interests of the Applicants, should they wish to remain competitive, must be aligned with pro-consumer policies.16

- The exclusive access that the Applicants maintain with certain parts of the ISP and MVPD markets are a result of the Applicants’ maintenance of a natural monopoly that is not per se illegal because no entity can provide the same service with better efficiency in the same circumstances. The market can be best served by only the Applicants in some cases.17

The Applicants respond to concerns regarding over-consolidation of market share and problems they believe are readily pertinent in the merger review process. They point to divestment statistics that keep their market share below the Department of Justice’s indicated threshold for the MVPD market and maintain that the proposed merger puts the Applicants in a better position to provide improved service to its customers in establishing economies of scale, as ISP and MVPD markets can vastly increase operating efficiencies given a higher subscriber base.18

Opponents of the merger would focus their arguments on the following:

- After the proposed merger, the Applicants will control “approximately... 35.5% of the fixed ISP market.” This data also accounts for Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) providers on the market, a service that is significantly slower to the point where it should be considered an entirely different product from cable and fiber offerings.19 Although the ISP market is not explicitly defined per the Department of Justice’s own classifications and there is therefore no fixed amount of market share under which the Applicants must remain, the Department of Justice has a duty to reject the merger on this ground alone: 35.5% of a market (without account for deflation) has the potential to give the Applicants monopolistic power over the ISP market. The opponents would therefore argue that the Applicants have an obligation to divest in order to quell monopolistic concerns.20

- While the poor service which engenders the Applicants’ conduct in MVPD and ISP markets is not per se illegal, the exclusive nature with which they possess both cable and Internet resources as a “natural monopoly” (that is, a market which functions most efficiently with one provider) creates a dangerous precedent because control over Internet service providing is not actually a natural monopoly. Therefore, the Applicants’ control of the market, considering products and service that are not exceptional in nature and their use of tactics that amount to an attempt to competitively exclude, constitute an illegal monopoly.21

The opponents’ arguments focus on the Applicants’ control of the ISP market, calling the Department of Justice to investigate what constitutes unfair market share in the ISP market. The opponents believe such an investigation would conclude that the Applicants control too large a share of the market. The ISP distribution statistics from 2013, which are deflated as a result of the inclusion of mobile and DSL providers, reveal that the Applicants controlled a total of 33.7% of the diluted market. Although this statistic may be clouded by the inclusion of information not pertinent to the actualized market, the opponents of the merger claim that its diluted numbers alone and growth over the past year are sufficient reason to worry.22,23 They also point to the fact that the Applicants failed to discuss their ISP market share in their merger fact sheet despite the reality that, should the merger be approved, the Applicants would become the single largest ISP in the United States.
The key issue that arises in the analysis of the merger is the extent to which the Department of Justice is allowed to protect consumer interests. The opponents focus on the potential for those interests to be harmed by further consolidation of a market that they already identify as anti-consumer; however, the Applicants claim that they are acting in good faith and are not violating the standards set forth by the current Horizontal Merger Guidelines, and, as the Department of Justice has not brought suit against the Applicants for violation of consumer interests in any way, it is assumed that it does not believe that this market is anti-consumer. While the Department of Justice seeks to protect consumer interest, the concentration of market share in the IDP market that is yet to be defined is hard to address until a proper investigation is held. Before that definition is reached, the Department of Justice has no obligation to block the merger on grounds of consolidation so long as they are not grossly negligent.24

The opponents of the merger would refute the claim that the market should first be defined before attempting regulation by analogizing the case to United States v. Microsoft Corp., in which the D.C. Circuit Court ruled against Microsoft’s assertion that the industry required “direct proof of market power.”25 The opponents would argue that, similarly, the Department of Justice doesn’t need direct proof of market power; precedent dictates that they can rely on “circumstantial evidence” alone.26

The Applicants’ defense of this claim would focus on the wording of the case ruling, specifically in the Circuit Court’s reference to the software market in question, as “uniquely dynamic.”27 The Applicants would emphasize that the ISP market is a service market and is neither particularly unique nor dynamic. Furthermore, while the concerns of exclusionary behavior on the part of the Applicants to protect a hegemony over the ISP market should, in the opinion of the merger’s opponents, force the hand of the Department of Justice in taking an active role to address the purportedly anti-competitive tactics, that obligation does not extend into the process of a merger review when it falls outside of its jurisdiction.

Essentially, the problems that the opponents point out all fall outside of the realm of regulation imposable by the Department of Justice. While they correctly identify that, at some ends, the ISP market lacks competition because of a concentration of resources on the part of the Applicants, that fact alone is insufficient reason for blocking the merger. The Applicants claim that this concentration is the result of significant capital expenditure as well as of the nature of the ISP market functioning most efficiently when served by one provider in certain cases, but the opponents point out that the Applicants have lobbied to prevent local municipal broadband and fiber networks as the reason for this continued exclusive access in certain markets rather than an existing infrastructure or ideal efficiency.28

According to the opponents, the Applicants’ efforts in denying local ISP initiatives constitute competitive exclusion. The actual issue, however, isn’t so black and white.29 While local initiatives can serve to increase access and quality of service for individuals as well as stimulate competition, there are several reasons, by which the Applicants swear in their defense of lobbying initiatives working to legislate against local broadband and fiber networks, why these efforts should not be considered natural competition that is being excluded.10 Local municipal networks use taxpayer money and, while they have been successful (even highly successful in some cases, regarding ISP service decades beyond the FCC’s proposed standard), they have the realized potential to fail and absorb taxpayer money unnecessarily.11 Even in a best-case scenario, successful local broadband initiatives had the tendency to reduce overall competition, since the service for the local initiative far exceeded that of competitors. This shows that, in certain situations, one provider alone can offer the best service.32

In addition to potential concerns for failure, there is the argument against government involvement in private af-

“Opponents of the merger claim that the Applicants are attempting to consolidate an ISP market share well beyond reason, potentially conferring monopolistic powers.”
fairs. Indeed, although the Internet is viewed by many as a public utility that should not be controlled with such ease by private interests, Internet access is not classified as such. As a result, its access is not free from private interests, in part because it was those private interests that made widespread access to the Internet possible in the first place. While President Barack Obama has urged the Federal Communications Commission to reclassify broadband service as a “public utility,” no decision has been made. As one telecommunication group has claimed, that “reclassification... will guarantee harm to consumers.” Another has claimed much the opposite, that the impact of such a move is unclear.\textsuperscript{33}

Despite the consumer interest that the Department of Justice must support, opponents of the merger suggest that the Department of Justice should over-regulate in the case of this merger to protect consumers from companies like the Applicants, whose consolidation of resources in order to produce an economy of scale has made access widespread in the first place.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, the opponents urge the Department of Justice to address claims that are outside of its jurisdiction. However, the Department of Justice cannot reclassify broadband service nor regulate municipal broadband, as those duties fall on the Federal Communications Commission and Congress, respectively. Even if it did fall under their jurisdiction, over-regulation of a private sector of business can preemptively have disastrous effects on a market, even if well-intentioned.\textsuperscript{35}

**PERSONAL STATEMENT AND CONCLUSION**

Opponents of the merger point out flaws in a market that has been long overdue proper market identification by the Department of Justice in order to clarify the extent at which market share consolidation becomes dangerous. However, they offer little in terms of actionable regulation. The proposal of the Applicants, notwithstanding a sudden market classification indicating a threshold below 35.5% share count, is within the legal parameters set forth by the Horizontal Merger Guidelines. All claims of the opponents are unanimously issues yet to be addressed by their respective bodies and remain irrelevant to this merger. Businesses must have clearly defined rules within which they can operate in order to function efficiently, and jeopardizing that relationship for no clear benefit is shortsighted at best.

Furthermore, while complete abstinence from public initiatives for broadband may not be the ideal solution for a growing populace where broadband access is becoming ever more important, this merger is not the means by which that solution should be predicated. Instead, the Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission should undergo an investigation as to how viable these local initiatives and, pending the result of that investigation, should determine the accuracy of claims of the Applicants’ exclusionary business tactics in seeking to support legislation against those initiatives.\textsuperscript{36} It is also worth noting that extensive and reactionary government involvement in areas such as ISP markets should be advised against because of the dangerous precedent and incentives that could be established as a result. As it stands, the Applicants are within their rights to merge. Policymakers, including administrative and executive agencies, must be careful in considering business incentives in major decisions of policy. In the same way that it is important for corporations not to possess a monopoly over the Internet, it is essential that the government does not intervene in a major, potentially financially crippling way that interferes with private interests without mandates to change.
However, it is important to note that while the Applicants are within their rights to merge, this right is extended by the current state of broadband service, a state that necessarily needs to be investigated by the proper agencies, if not reclassified and adjusted. Just because no government mandate for change has occurred doesn’t mean it shouldn’t; the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission have themselves admitted that current regulation is the result of an “ongoing accumulation of experience,” correctly asserting that regulation is both an iterative process and a reflection of what was thought to be correct at its time of issuing rather than concrete fact.\textsuperscript{37} While the Applicants fall within their legal rights to merge, the opponents correctly point out that the U.S. ISP market has been falling behind other countries, perhaps as a result of exclusivity that has not been infringed upon by the government and corporate scale used to exploit rather than compete.\textsuperscript{38} Indeed, despite having the second highest number of Internet users as of February 2014 (a total of 194.7 million users), the United States doesn’t even make the top ten list in terms of average Internet speed.\textsuperscript{39,40} The Federal Communications Commission continues to define an initiative in its “[Goal] for a High Performance America” as “4 Mbps downstream and 1 Mbps upstream,” allowing U.S. ISP providers to advertise speeds on the absolute lowest quality of service from previous years as proper broadband.\textsuperscript{41,42} Upon analysis, it becomes clearer and clearer that the weakly worded guideline presented by the Federal Communications Commission does not hold the ISP market to proper standards in the coming years, and instead allows it to stagnate. Especially if mergers like the one proposed by the Applicants are approved, providing those corporations with the advantage of economies of scale and network effects as a result, companies like those of the Applicants are indeed poised to provide immense “pro-consumer” benefits as touted in their fact sheet.\textsuperscript{43}

However, companies like the Applicants have failed to produce the results that they claim make the proposed merger necessary. They attempt to squeeze out every dollar and maintain the status quo within the market instead of actively competing to provide better service. Action must be taken on the part of the Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission in the form of stricter broadband guidelines to ensure that agreements, such as the one proposed by the Applicants, promote both business interests and innovative interests in the future, rather than ones that may aim only to retain an illegitimate hegemony over a market. A bigger Comcast isn’t a bad thing \textit{per se}; it just happens to be in the current state of broadband.

\section*{ENDNOTES}
\begin{enumerate}
\item U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.
\item Ibid.
\item Comcast and Time Warner Cable (13).
\item Peritz.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Due to time constraints and lack of immediate pertinence, this article will not address the Robinson-Patman Act of 1936 or the Celler-Kefauver Act of 1950.
\item U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item It is worth noting that the United States legal system uses a four-part test to determine the legality when a monopoly is concerned, but this article will not address that process due to time constraints and the lack of established net of the Applicants as controlling a monopoly in any market.
\item Comcast and Time Warner Cable (13).
\item Ibid.
\item U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.
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\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
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\item Blum-Smith, et al.
\item Statista, “U.S. Internet Service Provider Market Share Q4 2013.”
\item Zachem.
\item Ibid.
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\item Blum-Smith, et al.
\item Weisman (273).
\item Ibid.
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\item Ibid.
\item Blum-Smith, et al.
\item Engebreston.
\item Blum-Smith, et al.
\item Engebreston.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Wyatt.
\item Weinstein (273).
\item While network effects in market economies may be important to the analysis of the benefits of the proposed merger, due to time constraints, this article does not address those aspects of the merger.
\item Although worth noting, due to time constraints this article does not address the issue of a business’ use of lobbying a form of free speech.
\item U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.
\item Blum-Smith, et al.
\end{enumerate}
40. Statista, “Countries with the highest average Internet connection speed as of 2nd quarter 2014 (in Mbps).”

41. It is necessary to note that in the Internet Service market, different upload and download speeds have no inherent difference in cost and any difference is simply a directly imposed throttling: i.e. where four megabytes per second download speeds can be found, there is no technical limitation on providing the exact same speed for uploads.

43. Comcast and Time Warner Cable (13).

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In the Matter of Applications of Comcast Corp. and Time Warner Cable Inc. for Consent to Transfer Control of Licenses and Authorizations, MB Docket No.14-57. Letter regarding post-Divestiture data from Kathryn A. Zachem, Senior Vice President, Regulatory and State Legislative Affairs, Comcast Corporation et al. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, June 27, 2014, p.5. (“Zachem Broadband Divestiture Letter, June 27, 2014)


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