COWBOYS, FATHERS, AND EVERYONE ELSE:

EXAMINING RACE IN *THE WALKING DEAD*

THROUGH THE MYTHS OF WHITE MASCULINITY

by

LEVI PRESSNELL

BETH S. BENNETT, COMMITTEE CHAIR
GREG AUSTIN
ANDREW BILLINGS
JASON EDWARD BLACK
JEFF WEDDLE

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an analysis of three different series within *The Walking Dead* franchise: the comics, the AMC television series, and Telltale's video games. The critical and commercial popularity of all three make them particularly worthy of study, and the franchise's focus on characters invites a rhetorical study based on mythic figures across these three different media forms. While critical comparisons have been made either between the comics and the television series or between the comics and Telltale's video game series, a comprehensive look at the series across all three media has so far escaped critical attention.

The study explores characters in *The Walking Dead* media primarily through two dominant myths of White masculinity: the cowboy with his rugged individualism and the good patriarch with his familial care. These mythic figures shift across different media, often revealing opposing perspectives that cannot find representation within the myths themselves. Critical analysis reveals the emergence of a general trend among the three series, one of increasing critique and eventual rejection of these myths of White masculinity. Alongside this trend in character development, analysis of the three media forms suggests that increased interactivity, as seen in the video game franchise, encourages consumers to respond more directly to the myths on display. This factor was especially evident in confronting the racism that was directed at the protagonist of the first game, Lee Everett. Suggestions for future studies include how to adapt other pop culture franchises across different media, the expansion of interactivity with television viewing and second-screen services, and the continued evolution of zombie media.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Leisa and daughter Leanna. I love you both dearly.

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CHAPTER 1

ZOMBIES IN POPULAR CULTURE

A young Black man hides inside a house for fear of his life. Hearing gunshots outside, he investigates cautiously, carrying his own rifle for protection. As he nears a window, a sniper immediately shoots him in the forehead. His body is callously removed from the house and discarded with other shooting victims. In 2016, we might consider a scene such as this evidence of police brutality and the zeal to shoot first and investigate later. However, this is no description of any contemporary event but rather of the ending to George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). This horror film has been tremendously influential regarding the modern concept of the zombie.[1]

In his "Philosophy of the Living Dead: At the Origin of the Zombie-Image," James McFarland says "The zombie-image, familiar from cinema, television, video games, and comic books, has many sources [...] Yet though all of these deserve to be understood as generative sources, this does not change the fact that the zombie-image has a single, unique origin: George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead" (22).* In his "A Modern Meditation on Death," Christopher Moreman agrees: "Romero is now recognized to have re-defined the zombie and to have thus created a new sub-genre of horror fiction—that of the zombie apocalypse" (151).

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[1] Certainly earlier horror works covered zombies prior to Romero. Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), for example, stars Bela Lugosi as a Haitian voodoo master who tries to convert a young woman into his zombie slave, but this cinematic depiction involves the drugged near-dead rather than Romero's walking corpses. While *White Zombie* proves to be a more historically traditional approach to "zombiism," Romero's portrayal of the reanimated dead seems to be the currently idea of a "zombie" in popular culture.

Moreman calls it the "film that started the modern zombie craze" (152), and so *Night of the*

Living Dead has sparked a wave of imitators and successors into contemporary times.

Since the introduction of these monstrous "ghouls" in Romero's film, modern movie

zombies have played on people's fears in such a way as to reveal the tensions of the times.[2] An

intriguing cinematic figure, the zombie functions almost perfectly to represent rhetorically "the

Other,"[3] that is, an adversary meant to contrast with the heroes or audience of a work. In his

"Interracial Tensions in *Night of the Living Dead*," Robert Lightning describes how this process

of "Othering" relates to the film:

> [T]he cinematic depiction of the Other (as the possible site of stereotypical and/or
> oppressive images) by focusing […] on the cinematic construction of white images in an
> attempt to uncover the onscreen 'invisibility' of dominant culture, its ability to present its
> norms as normal and thus becoming the background against which the Other is contrasted
> and judged (22).

In the zombie's case, this process is accomplished by being at once both human and inhuman.

The creature is generated from people and still recognizably humanoid but warped and twisted

into a primitive, animalistic state by being beyond rationality and thought. As Gerry Caravan

explains in his "We *Are* the Walking Dead," "[Z]ombies are always other people, which is to say

they are Other people, which is to say they are people who are not quite people at all" (432). The

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[2] For the most part, I am rather unconcerned with the terminology involved in the zombie monsters discussed in this study. *Night of the Living Dead* calls the creatures "ghouls," while *The Walking Dead* franchise is mostly consistent with referring to them as "walkers" or at least anything but "zombies." For the purpose of this analysis, I count any of these reanimated corpse monsters as zombies, regardless of how characters within the work may describe them.

[3] Edward Said in his *Orientalism* is generally credited with forming this concept. As he mentions near the beginning of his book, people in the Western world "have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). As Said later says, "[W]ith regard to the Orient, there was a frank acknowledgement that it was a world elsewhere, apart from the ordinary attachments, sentiments, and values of *our* world in the West" (190). Said generalizes this concept to all cultures, however. Near the end of his book, Said concludes, "The development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity […] whether Orient or Occident, France or Britain […] involves establishing opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from 'us'" (332).

zombie exists as a dark reflection of life, one that consumes and resembles it but cannot rise to its former level. Zombie life is, in Caravan's words, "that anti-life which is always inimically and hopelessly Other, which must always be kept quarantined, if not actively eradicated and destroyed" ("Dead" 433).

Because of this "Otherness," the modern zombie has proven discursively flexible in many contexts. As Jennifer Rutherford in her book *Zombies* observes, "Zombies are a dead menace when it comes to breaking down all kinds of barriers. On the screen they've shown a complete disregard for generic boundaries" (2). In their "Between the Living and the Undead," Robert Wonser and David Boyns argue similarly: "The popularity of zombies in mainstream culture, and specifically in film, is reflective of their utility as symbolic and critical representations of the societies from which they emerge and as metaphorical illustrations of the culture's zeitgeist" (629). Whether in issues of race, relationships, or religion, zombies serve as a monstrous mirror to discuss society's fears. With the flexibility of the modern zombie monster, contemporary zombie media may be used to reflect certain attitudes or to make rhetorical arguments within and about popular culture.

This study has aimed to examine how zombie themes (and corroborating examples) are exploited across three different media forms of one of the most prominent contemporary zombie franchises: *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*). While critics often examine zombie media to discuss what the *zombies* mean, this study has taken a different critical look at the franchise, focusing less on the zombie images and more on the world created in these series, to investigate how race is constructed, discussed, and treated directly by the living characters. Based on my investigation of *TWD* media, the world of zombies—the so-called "zombie apocalypse"—harnesses two rhetorical myths, which represent the dominance of White masculinity: the "American cowboy" and the "good father." These two rhetorical figures claim societal authority and in fostering

survival interact with cultural diversity and the zombie threat in different ways. The three media

forms also depict these myths differently, whether reinforcing, critiquing, or offering alternatives

to these myths. By examining these rhetorical differences, from the comics, to the television

series, to the Telltale video game series, we can see not only how different authors but also how

different media have used the popular backdrop of the zombie apocalypse to treat the issue of

race and cultural diversity.

Zombie Themes in Popular Culture

Exploiting the survival threat of a zombie attack to examine race relations critically is not

a new concept. Beginning with *Night of the Living Dead*, zombie films in U.S. media have often

been viewed as cinematic vehicles to depict American race relations. Given the protagonist's

race and his ultimate fate, *Night of the Living Dead* has generally been interpreted accordingly:

"Ben, the film's black protagonist, survives a night of hell only to be shot and tossed on a bonfire

by an all-white civil guard" (Rutherford 10). In her essay "History Is What Bites," Jessica Hurley

also connects the film's ending to race:

> The trope of the black hero as indistinguishable from the zombie goes all the way back to
> *Night of the Living Dead*, where Ben, played by Duane Jones, survives the eponymous
> night only to be shot as a zombie by a white posse in the morning […] Duane Jones, as
> Ben, is shot because he is too similar to the always-somehow-black form of the zombie.
> (322, 323)

Based on this prototype, Hurley claims that zombies often represent "a racially marked

embodiment of pastness […] zombies can, like ghosts, represent the ongoing presence of

traumatic racial histories in our present" (Hurley 312, 314). Gerry Caravan also views zombies

as having an inherently racial dimension: "the myth of a zombie […] through the construction of

a racial binary in which the (white) citizen-subject is opposed against nonwhite life, bare life,

zombie life" ("Dead" 433). Even the term itself—"zombie"—contributes to this analysis,

because its derivation from Haitian "voodoo" culture marks it as Black(ish).

Despite this strong connection between zombies and race, simply making these connections does not provide societal solutions. In fact, Hurley argues that the historical development of zombies reflects some of the same problems found in U.S. race relations as the monster becomes separated from its racialized roots. As she elaborates, the "development of the zombie mirrors the process of burying racial histories as it evolves from an Afro-Caribbean Haitian figure to a white one over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (313). Instead of becoming a vehicle for critique and self-reflection on race (as for viewers of Romero's *Night*), the zombie may ignore racial problems by providing a new, explicitly non-human "Other." This evolution helps remove the impetus for change as it "reflects an increasing desire to solve racial tension in the United States by imagining the end of race in a 'postracial' society" (Hurley 313). Instead of easing racial tensions, Hurley argues, the use of zombies is more about burying those tensions through demarcating a new non-living "Other," this time contrasted with all of humanity. Although the Haitian term persists, Hurley says that the zombie has been transformed into a new, less troubling symbol:

> the zombie's Haitian origins and founding connection to slavery are simultaneously acknowledged and consigned to an irrelevant past in a critical narrative that writes the blackness of the zombie as distant both temporally—*back then*—and geographically—*over there*—from contemporary American culture. (312)

Hurley's interpretation, then, would mean that zombie media may be less aware of race, or at least less able to discuss it, than we might hope.

While connecting Romero's "ghouls" with race is easy, as Hurley shows (323), zombies in more contemporary works may not always be the harbingers of racialized violence. Zombies in popular culture have provided a vehicle for discussing other important societal issues, including social relationships, religion, and public health. Jennifer Rutherford takes up this first interpretation as she argues in her book *Zombies* that the titular creatures can represent the

fragility of relationships and emotional bonds: "In a zombie fiction everyone is ultimately alone or at least bound for loneliness as one after another of the social bonds that bind them to others are lost to the zombie embrace" (5). This isolation even works on both sides of the human-zombie divide. Although some subversions can be found, zombies for the most part do not form relational attachments; their "zombie-ness" comes with an end to relationships and a kind of purgatorial alone-ness. Even the survivors in more fatalistic zombie scenarios may have to confront loneliness, as everyone around them succumbs to the plague.

One of the best recent movies that focuses heavily on this theme of social isolation is the 2015 film *Maggie*. Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Abigail Breslin, this movie follows aging father Wade and daughter Maggie as they cope with her infection and eventual (un)death. The "necroambulist virus" of this film is slow-acting, taking weeks to infect a victim completely, but society has adapted coping strategies to deal with the infected, including sending advanced cases to "quarantine."[4] The film focuses on Wade's struggle to let go of Maggie, who is his only daughter from a deceased wife. Despite the fact that Wade remarried, Maggie clearly signifies the death of his first relationship, and Wade consistently refuses to deal with her condition as it steadily worsens. Side characters further reinforce this use of the zombie as a condition of isolation and relational devastation. Wade's continued inaction and Maggie's dangerous condition eventually drive his new wife Caroline and their children away for their own safety. Neighbor Bonnie's situation mirrors Wade's own after her four-year-old daughter Julia is infected. Tragically, Bonnie's husband Nathan falls prey to their daughter because they cannot bear to institute the prescribed safety measures. Maggie's ex-boyfriend Trent was infected slightly before she was, and Trent's father sends him to quarantine despite his strident pleas. By

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[4] Although "quarantine" is not explicitly shown, conversations between Maggie and her friend Trent strongly suggest it to be a place where the infected are simply corralled until their eventual death by lethal injection.

the end of the movie, Wade is left alone with his dying daughter and an inability to cope with the loss her death will bring him.

Another theme that can be raised in zombie fiction quite easily is religion. Due to their undead status, zombies almost necessarily impinge on beliefs about the afterlife by making it part of physical reality; zombies cleanly answer the question of existence after death. Additionally, critic Kipp Davis sees echoes of ancient religion in contemporary zombie media, marking thematic comparisons between *The Walking Dead* television series and the eschatology, or beliefs about the end of the world, of the Jewish Essenes of the 1st century (149). Davis says that zombies as a whole are about this topic:

> The twenty-first-century American obsession with the living dead in many ways appears to reflect an apocalyptic worldview […] The dominance of this theme in modern media and its persistent popularity suggests that our fascination with zombies and the end of the world resonates with something within our own worldview. (148, 149)

The specific apocalypticism of the Essenes was "not only grounded in a sense of purpose and divinely mandated direction for history but also couched within a cosmologically dualistic narrative that assigns historical events to the ongoing conflict between forces of good and evil" (Davis 149). Essentially, the Essenes saw a continued clash between good and evil in history, a theme that lends itself well to the duality between human and zombie in zombie media, and believed in a divine purpose for all things, even disasters.

The "end of the world" that accompanies the zombie plague also shares a number of similarities with eschatological religious beliefs found in American Judeo-Christian culture. We can see a thread of moral duality in *The Walking Dead*, and zombie media in general, as audiences divide characters into heroes and villains and condemn or justify their behaviors in the face of apocalypse. Additionally, Davis traces how the Essenes and zombie survivors alike share a concern for purity, an emphasis on transience for survival, and sharp in- and out-group

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distinctions (159). The primary difference between these two apocalyptic viewpoints is the desirability of the coming destruction: zombies are horrifying, while the deliverance of God and His angels is welcome.

Zombie-like narratives even appear within the Christian Bible, both literally and figuratively. In Matthew 27.52-53, people rise from their graves after the Crucifixion and appear within the city of Jerusalem. Additionally, we find the resurrection narrative of Lazarus in John 11, as well as Jesus Himself in all of the gospels. More figuratively, a passage in Ephesians 2 seems to describe the previous state of the Ephesian Christians as rather zombie-like:

> And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world […] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. (Eph. 2.1-2, 3)

Though their previous state was dead, they were still capable of action and motion and focused on fulfilling only their desires: it would be hard for any ancient description to sound more like the hungering undead. Given the Christian background of many Americans, it should be no surprise that the concept of zombies would prove relevant in a more spiritual manner.

Zombies can also draw strong connections with other religions. Christopher Moreman in his "A Modern Meditation on Death" urges us to consider *Night of the Living Dead* within the religious counter-culture of the 1960s:

> [M]ovement away from traditional religious authority can be seen to have resulted in a growing concern for meaning, especially in the face of human mortality. Further, as many searched for new answers to life's meaning, alternative religions and philosophical systems became popular, Buddhism especially. A Buddhist perspective on *Night of the Living Dead* will […] be shown to hit nearer the mark in identifying the underlying meaning of the film. (157).

Moreman identifies several overlaps between *Night* and Buddhism, including its view of a cycle in life and death, an illusory sense of self-permanence, and the path to destruction in unfulfilled cravings (163). The film, then, works as a Buddhist allegory for Moreman: "If we yearn after

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the illusion of a permanent self, then we are already zombies, walking corpses clinging to an unsatisfactory false life" (163).

Apart from religion, zombie narratives can also reflect popular concerns about health and bioterrorism. The infection process of the typical "zombie plague" bears many similarities to rabies and other transmissible diseases. Melissa Naisrudden and her co-authors have noted that these stories speak to concerns about viral infections as well as serve as a tool for helping spread awareness of such diseases: "The reimagining of zombiism as a virulent, incurable disease makes it an effective analogy for understanding of and interest in other infectious diseases" (810). Beyond such obvious comparisons, Naisrudden and her colleagues believe that zombie media also hold an opportunity for health education and reflection:

> Zombies can be used as a powerful tool for increasing awareness of issues of public health significance. […] We propose continuing these efforts, building on the popularity of zombies to increase public health awareness in the general public, and explore additional issues that may have not been considered in the past, such as infection control, mental health issues, ethics of disease, and bioterrorism potential. (Naisrudden et al. 813)

Topics such as how to control the spread of a zombie plague or euthanasia of zombie infectees might be wholly fictional, but they are certainly applicable to contemporary viral scares. The 2013 film *World War Z*, based only loosely on the book of the same name, features an Israel that has closed its borders and initiated municipal lockdowns to keep zombies at bay, and its strategy is relatively successful compared to other nations. Protagonist Gerry Lane, portrayed by Brad Pitt, is pressed into service with the United Nations after his family is threatened with being sent to a potentially unsafe refugee camp rather than remaining at the naval carrier group where they first sought refuge. The climax of the film sees Lane fighting the zombie infection with other diseases, with the world eventually developing a "vaccine" of sorts that will prevent people from attracting zombies' attention and enabling them to halt the spread of this deadly plague. The movie consistently frames the zombie plague as a health issue and

highlights the difficulties of quarantine, especially during a refugee crisis.

These examples highlight just how rhetorically flexible stories about the zombie can be. As such a rich symbol, the zombie is obviously worthy of critical attention. However, the zombie apocalypse as a setting also provides a context for discussing these same issues more directly. Robert Lightning's essay "Interracial Tensions in *Night of the Living Dead*" gives a potential template for how race and relational interactions can be examined in a zombie work; Lightning examines not only protagonist Ben's skin color, connecting "black energy […] with life" (22), but also the "historically valid interracial social dynamics" (22) in light of Ben's verbal and physical interactions with Barbra, *Night*'s female lead. Lightning observes that Ben's race makes him a disruptive figure to White hegemony (27), and behind his interactions with Barbra lies "the oppressive history of the sexual segregation of black men and white women in America" (28). These two rhetorical strategies—the representation of Blackness and the interracial relationships between characters—should likewise be applicable in zombie media today.

Contemporary zombie media, such as *The Walking Dead* series, display similar tensions while often discussing race more openly. Unlike *Night of the Living Dead*, where race is present but has an implicit influence, *The Walking Dead* comics, television series, and video games all treat race directly. The current study focuses not on the monstrous zombie itself but rather, in keeping with Lightning's approach, on how *The Walking Dead* media deal with race in representing different characters as well as their relational dynamics. Race is critiqued primarily through two American mythical constructs associated with hegemonic White masculinity: the rugged individualism of the cowboy and the powerful protection of the patriarch. The second chapter of this study explores these myths in more detail and also describes a method of critical multimodal discourse suited for analyzing these media franchises.

The Walking Dead media lead popular culture by being some of the most long-running and well-received zombie artifacts in contemporary times, but even such popular artifacts cannot be universally consumed. The next section provides an overview of the different adaptations of *The Walking Dead* examined in this study, sketching out their basic features and storylines as a foundation. Additionally, this section introduces how their specific rhetorical features tie into the larger analysis of American myths as a justification for the rest of the study.

The Walking Dead – Transmedia Juggernaut

In 2016, zombie media have seen a resurgence, spearheaded by the popular *Walking Dead* stories. While the zombie is one of the most rhetorically flexible monsters in American pop culture, *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*) has brought it to new heights. In "The Positive Psychology of Zombies," Ryan Niemiec notes how *TWD* has attracted an audience beyond genre fans to achieve a more mainstream appeal:

> "I don't like zombie films. I can't stand to watch horror films. I want nothing to do with the topic of zombies."
> These are common sentiments expressed by me and a wide range of people I've spoken with…and then came *The Walking Dead*, the most popular TV series on cable. Now in its seventh season, this series features its antiheroes in a postapocalyptic nightmare in which other survivors and the sects they've created are more dangerous than the slow-moving but ferocious zombies. *The Walking Dead* offers a profound commentary on the topics of death, dying, meaning, existence, resilience, teamwork, and leadership. It offers substance, artistry, and complex characters, along with gore and suspense. Viewers can use a positive psychology lens and learn from the characters what bad and good leadership look like, how to collaborate or sabotage a team, how to be virtuous and strength based, and how to be resilient when there is absolutely no other choice. (1)

Writer Robert Kirkman's comic book series, begun in 2003 and continuing to the present, has had remarkable longevity on its own and spawned a host of adaptations. AMC's *The Walking Dead* television series (2010–today) is the most obvious of these derivative works. As James McFarland puts it, "[S]easons of the AMC television series *The Walking Dead* have attracted audiences of such sizes as to upend long-held assumptions about broadcast and cable

television distribution" (41), and so the television series could probably be considered to have surpassed its textual forerunner—it even has its own spinoff television series in *Fear the Walking Dead*.

Other media artifacts also draw from the comics. Telltale Games's *The Walking Dead: The Game* won a great deal of acclaim from video game press and was followed by two sequels with a third planned for late 2016.[5] Other video game adaptations include Terminal Reality's *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct* and the mobile game *The Walking Dead: Road to Survival*, which even adapted versions of Telltale's characters. Multiple board games based on both the comics and television series also exist. Additionally, Kirkman and co-author Jay Bonansinga have published novels continuing the stories begun in the comics, with Bonansinga continuing to write several on his own after Kirkman stopped contributing.

By this point, *The Walking Dead* is nearly as much a brand as any one media artifact. By spawning such a host of adaptations, it has become an important part of popular culture and a valuable site for examining cultural trends in the new millennium. Although a number of pop culture themes identified above could be employed, it seems reasonable to return to the genre's roots and examine how race and diversity are constructed in the 21st century's zombie apocalypse. Compared with 1969, race relations in the 2016 United States seem better, though there are certainly continuing issues with violence and inequality. However, race remains a dominant feature of *TWD*'s characters and often is directly engaged in the different media series. Within this study, race has been deconstructed in *TWD* comics, television series, and Telltale's video games through iconic American myths to see how diversity is handled, constructed, and

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[5] This game has been variously and inconsistently named. *The Walking Dead: The Game* was how it was generally released, but as a sequel series was announced as "Season 2" it has been retroactively named *Season 1*. While I have preserved the bibliographic citation as its first name, I refer to it as *Season 1* throughout the text in a hopeful attempt at avoiding confusion with other games as well as the television show through the use of italics.

even challenged. While all three media exhibit great diversity, each medium has been investigated for its own unique portrayals; each of the three ultimately deals with race and the iconic myths of the cowboy and patriarch in a way consistent with its own particular features.

TWD *Comics – A Diverse Cast and Developing Relationships*

The Walking Dead comic series focuses on former sheriff Rick Grimes, his family, and the group of survivors they gradually collect. After waking up in an abandoned hospital, Rick travels to Atlanta to find his wife Lori and son Carl, who arrived at the city with his friend and former partner Shane. Believing Rick to be dead, Shane and Lori began a relationship, but Rick's return causes Lori to choose her husband over her new partner. Other survivors at the Atlanta camp include Asian-American Glenn, mother Carol and her daughter Sophia, sisters Amy and Andrea, nuclear family Allen and Donna, along with their sons Billy and Ben, the widower Dale, who owns an RV, and Jim, whose family was killed by the walking dead. A zombie attack kills Amy and Jim, which sparks a fight between Rick and Shane over how to protect the camp as well as the two men's relationship with Lori. After Carl kills Shane to protect his father, the group moves on, gaining Tyreese, his daughter Julie, and her boyfriend Chris (Issue 7), meeting the Greene family in Issue 10, and eventually finding refuge at a nearby prison and clashing with a group of left-behind prisoners beginning with Issue 13. The last important early addition to the cast is the lone survivor and former lawyer Michonne, who finds the prison in Issue 19. At that point, Rick's group begins to clash with the nearby town of Woodbury, led by the psychopathic Governor, eventually resulting in the destruction of both communities and many deaths on both sides. Rick and the surviving members of his group eventually find their way to the town of Alexandria, and the series since has focused on their time as part of that community.

From the beginning, Kirkman's cast is ethnically diverse, and it has generally grown more so over the years. Despite this evidence of positive racial inclusion, there are still moments

of racialized tension between different characters. While the bigger concern is dealing first with zombies, known as walkers in franchise, and later with other people who also threaten the main group's survival, the comic series occasionally invites readers directly to reflect on race and its tensions. Michonne suggests that Tyreese would feel more comfortable with someone like her, instead of being in a relationship with Carol. During the Governor's capture and rape of Michonne, he consistently demeans her in a way that is hard not to read as dehumanizing her ethnicity. The Greenes' farmhand Otis labels Axel and Dexter as a couple of n*ggers, when describing how they turned against the other survivors. Even the brutal fight between Rick and Tyreese is hard not to read as a racialized conflict, given Rick's status as a former law enforcement officer and Tyreese's as a former football player. Later, when choosing a victim to beat to death, Negan says that he does not want to choose Glenn because that would be racist. Additionally, when Rick's group at Alexandria welcomes a new group of survivors, they point out Yumiko's Asian heritage. Although these moments may not seem particularly common, spread as they are over several issues, they nevertheless urge the reader to think about race and how these boundaries might persist even in times of extreme social upheaval and the common threat of zombies.

The comic series' depiction of interpersonal relationships is worth investigating for at least two reasons. First, the series offers grounds for a comparison of interracial relationships with their intraracial counterparts. Though perhaps unintentional, an undercurrent in *TWD* suggests that interracial relationships are doomed, and the characters who participate in them often have deep character flaws. For example, Carol, who ended her relationship with Tyreese after he hooked up with Michonne, dies while having a conversation with and then embracing a captured zombie (Issue 41). Although there is not an explicit connection made between mental instability and this relationship, the association is troubling. Second, the comic series shows that

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even intraracial relationships often prove weak in the zombie apocalypse. In particular, long-time survivor Michonne seems to be a magnet for doom. Although she only develops romantic relationships with Black partners, they eventually meet untimely ends at the hands of various villains.

Chapter 3 explores these two threads in more detail, focusing particularly on how non-White characters are represented in comparison to Sheriff Grimes, as the iconic cowboy, as well as how the theme of miscegenation is portrayed in the interracial relationships shown. Additionally, Chapter 3 investigates how race is constructed and treated in the comic series, providing a foundation for comparing the other media adaptations of *The Walking Dead* in this study. The comics have the most material, over the longest time period, and thus have developed some depth of treatment with the issue, but they may not always wield that heritage effectively.

TWD *on the Small Screen – Innovation and Adaptation*

Although the television show follows the comic series in many ways and so summaries of each might look similar, it often does its own thing and has a few characters unique to its adaptation. As does the comics, the series focuses on sheriff Rick Grimes, who awakens in the first episode ("Days Gone By") in an abandoned hospital and discovers that zombies have taken over the world. Rick heads to Atlanta to find his wife Lori and son Carl, who along with Rick's best friend Shane have joined a group of survivors outside the city. Glenn, a member of this group, finds Rick and brings him back to his allies, who in contrast to the comics include former football player T-Dog, minor city official Jacqui, and Morales, a Hispanic man known only by his last name. After escaping Atlanta, Rick reunites with his family, but the romance begun by Shane and Lori during Rick's absence foreshadows tension in the group's relationships. During the six-episode first season, Rick's driving goal seems to be to find answers about the plague in Atlanta's Center for Disease Control facility, but, after the group finds the place, which is blown

up in the season finale, the focus transitions to surviving the zombie apocalypse. The second season also sees the group meeting Hershel Greene and his family and friends, who become a core part of the survivor group, while later seasons bring conflict with other factions. Just as their comic counterparts did, Rick and the company of survivors join the Alexandria community during the fifth season.

The masculine myths of "cowboy" and "patriarch" come through even more prominently in the television series than they do in the comics. Rick is again the series' lead, the main protagonist from the very beginning, and displays a strong cowboy masculinity, but Shane's increased presence (and longer survival) offers another point of comparison with this myth. Brothers Merle and Daryl Dixon also offer a contrast to Rick, being essentially rugged cowboy figures themselves but without the law-abiding authority Rick possesses. These characters compete variously for the social authority to lead the group's attempts at survival; for example, Rick wants the group to continue searching for Sophia at the Greenes' farm, while Shane argues that staying where they are is dangerous and insists on leaving the lost girl to her fate.

Additionally, fatherhood is much more on display in the television series, as Hershel and the strong relationships he has with his daughters figure much more prominently than in the comics. At the same time, Rick has to balance his obligations to his son, Carl, and daughter, Judith, against his paternal role in protecting and caring for his extended "family" of survivors. The show's explicit invocation of this kind of masculinity forms one of the central character conflicts for its version of Glenn, whose attempts to live up to this masculinity drive a wedge between him and his then-girlfriend Maggie Greene before he ultimately rejects this approach.

In terms of race, the show intertwines such hegemonic masculine mythic figures and race relations almost from the very beginning. We see race brought out and disparaged in its second episode ("Guts") through the character of Merle Dixon, who along with his brother Daryl

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embodies the rugged individualism characteristic of cowboy figures. In his quest to find his family, Rick rides a horse into Atlanta but is surrounded by walkers and trapped in a tank ("Days Gone By"). Glenn helps Rick out of his predicament at the beginning of the second episode ("Guts"), bringing them to Glenn's group of survivors now also trapped in the city. While Glenn's companions admonish Rick for getting their building surrounded by zombies, the survivors hear gunshots, follow them upstairs, and find fellow survivor Merle Dixon shooting at zombies from the roof. The group members yell at Merle for making their problem worse, but he fires back, calling Morales a "taco bender" and T-Dog "Mr. Yo" and "a n*gger." After this outburst, Merle brawls with different people, eventually pushing T-Dog to the ground and beating him relentlessly. Rick, the heroic lawman, subdues Merle and handcuffs him to a pipe ("Guts"). As he does so, Rick argues that race no longer matters in the zombie apocalypse: "Things are different now. There are no *n*ggers* anymore. No dumb as shit inbred white-trash fools, either. Only dark meat and white meat. There's us—and the dead. We survive this by pulling together, not apart" ("Guts"). Merle here serves as an extreme example of what cowboy individualism does to a person: ultimately, other groups do not matter because the cowboy relies on himself.

Clearly, the lesson about racism does not sink in for Merle, and the group abandons him in Atlanta. When Rick returns to the main camp, he meets Merle's brother Daryl, who insists on launching a rescue mission. In the episode "Vatos," Daryl also displays some of the same racism as his brother. When the rescue party finds Merle's severed hand, Daryl points his crossbow at T-Dog's head, blaming him for his brother's fate instead of Rick. After standing down and in an effort to find something with which to grab his brother's severed hand, Daryl turns to T-Dog:

"You got a do-rag or something?" ("Vatos").[6] A bit later, Daryl remarks to Glenn, "You've got

some balls for a China-man." When Glenn corrects Daryl that his ancestry is Korean and not

Chinese, Daryl mutters an unconcerned, "Whatever" ("Vatos"). These exchanges set Daryl up to

be another racist character, although he does not use the same extreme slurs as Merle.[7]

Beyond these early examples of confronting race, comparison of the comic series with its

television adaptation suggests the following questions: does the adaptation or truncation of

certain plotlines from the comics make for better or worse portrayals when it comes to how race

and racialized relationships are portrayed? Do changed relationships in the television show

change how the characters relate to one another along lines that may be seen as racialized? To

highlight this comparison, an early example from the television series is the meeting between

Rick and Morgan and Duane. While the basics of the story are the same as in the comic series,

Morgan seems more hostile toward and suspicious of Rick and his potential zombiehood than

does his comic counterpart. In this conversation, Morgan is much more menacing and even lies

to Rick about owning Rick's neighbors' house, but this deception is absent from the comics.

Although television may have demanded more drama, the increased negative behavior seems to

suggest less trust and therefore, perhaps, a more racialized exchange.

Herein, Chapter 4 focuses on exploring how the two myths of cowboy and patriarch take

shape within the television series. In a difference from the comics, the television series first

glorifies the White cowboy and patriarch but ultimately argues that this White masculinity fails.

Alongside these explorations, the chapter examines differences in how race is constructed in the

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[6] To be fair to Daryl, T-Dog does in fact have one.

[7] Given Daryl's longevity on the show, perhaps this move was intentional to give him greater audience sympathy. If his character development was planned from the beginning, his refusal to use such slurs might have been intended to make his character changes more believable and reasonable. In any case, Daryl has become an important part of the group in terms of both survival skills and emotional support, and fans seem to consider him one of the most popular characters.

two different series, especially with the new and changed characters. Additionally, the show's positive portrayal of an interracial relationship between Rick and Michonne and its increased inclusion of non-White perspectives shows a better willingness to entertain alternative societal structures. Although some aspects of *The Walking Dead* remain largely unchanged between the print and television artifacts, the television show seems to recognize race as an obvious topic from the outset as it actively and forcefully discusses it from almost the very beginning.

TWD *in an Interactive Medium – Confronting Players with Race*

As do the comic and television series, *TWD: Season 1* (*S1*) video game features a diverse cast. In fact, the game's main characters might be even more diverse than the characters of their print and television counterparts, as even more surprisingly for a video game this diversity extends to the protagonists. Critics have often noted the lack of non-White protagonists in video games in general (see Williams et al.), though the cause can be debated. If players refuse to care about or empathize with diverse characters, is this the industry's fault? User *Howmanyprincesses* argued against this idea on her *Wordpress* blog, "[T]he games industry—and so many other mainstream entertainment industries like the movie and TV industry—seem intent on believing that most audiences (read: white, middle-class America) won't care about a main character that doesn't look or act exactly like them"—yet the popularity of *TWD* games shows that this belief cannot be true: each game in the series features a non-White protagonist as the player character.

In contrast to the comics and TV series, both of which focus on Rick Grimes, players assume the role of Lee Everett, a Black middle-aged male being transported to prison by an older White police officer. After the cruiser crashes due to a shambling zombie, Lee escapes into the suburbs and meets a young Black girl named Clementine (Clem), who becomes the deuteragonist

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of the game.[8] Clem requires Lee's protection because her parents took a trip to Savannah, and babysitter Sandy subsequently became a zombie. Lee and Clementine meet Hershel Greene's son Shawn, who takes them to his family's farm, where they meet another family of three: Kenny, Katjaa, and Kenny, Jr., who goes by "Duck." After Shawn dies in a zombie attack, Lee, Clem, and Kenny's family leave for Macon. The rest of episode involves the group finding other survivors, led by an older man named Larry and his daughter Lilly, who hole up first in the Everetts' pharmacy in Macon before fleeing to a nearby motel. As the game progresses, the group adds the couple Omid, a man of Middle Eastern descent, and Christa, a Black woman, who become important characters as well.

By making Lee the player character, in contrast to the comics' and television's focus on Rick Grimes, the game forces players to occupy a racialized space and occasionally puts race on display for the player. At one point, Lee and Kenny, a White Southern male, examine rather helplessly a locked door. Kenny asks Lee if he can pick the lock; in response to Lee's questioning (and pointed) gaze, he stammers out, "Well. You're… you know… urban?" Lee immediately blasts back: "Oh, you are NOT saying what I think you're saying." In Jason Custer's exploration of *TWD: S1* as a "racialized pedagogical zone," he describes how this conversation must affect players: "Moments like this strip the player of choice and force them to acknowledge […] that racism is, in fact, a part of this world and Lee's interactions in The Walking Dead."

Crucially, however, *TWD: S1* does not merely display race through its operation. Moments such as those above, where the player has no input into the situation, do not differ much from the interaction shown in reading a book or watching a television series. A more

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[8] And, eventually, the main character of the second.

unique strength of games is found in their interactivity, and *TWD: S1* invites the player to think about and make decisions on how race affects Lee's experience. In the first episode, survivor Larry tries to leave Lee behind, punching him in the face because of his distrust over Lee's homicide conviction, which he mentions near the end of the episode. However, their interactions are tinged with subtle racism. For example, Larry asks Lee about possible romantic interest in his daughter Lilly and may even address him as "boy" in that conversation.

Players later get the chance to think about what these interactions mean in their own estimation. Near the beginning of the second episode "Starved for Help," Mark, a White male who joins the group after having survived at a nearby Air Force base, asks Lee directly about why Larry hates him. As with many conversation choices, Lee can give one of four different answers:

- "He thinks I'm dangerous."
- "He's an old racist asshole."
- "He's just looking out for his daughter."
- "I have no idea."

Additionally, remaining silent is also an option. The important point here is that the player is not simply made aware of the possibility racism in this conversation: he or she is invited to decide whether Lee's treatment qualifies as racism and what an appropriate response to that would be. The game is not telling players that it *is* necessarily racism, unlike, say, Otis's obviously racist outburst in the comics, but it opens the question and invites discussion.

While the game tells the player that Mark will remember the selected comment (or noticed the silence), this decision about Larry's actions has a consequence that can further inform the player's understanding of the situation. Because some of the choices made in the game are never mentioned again, it would be easy for the game to remove the importance of this conversation by ignoring it later. A bit later in the episode, however, Mark sticks up for Lee to

Larry, but he does so by bringing up whatever the player has told him in the earlier conversation.

Tellingly, the charge of racism is the one Larry responds to the most strongly, angrily

challenging Lee and getting into his face.

The option to call out racism has not gone unnoticed by at least some players. Fairly early

in their "Let's Play" of this game, a group of gamers who call themselves Spoiler Warning

encountered this conversation and discussed how they had handled it in their individual

experiences ("We're Here to Eat You!"). Blogger, programmer, and video game critic Shamus

Young said of the choice, "I picked it only because I've never been able to do that in a video

game […] I just didn't want to go through the game not exploring that option" ("We're Here to

Eat You!"). In a thread at Telltale Games's official forum, user *thestalkinghead* started a

discussion topic asking if Larry was racist or Lee's comment was a lie. The thread was

eventually closed for leading "to nothing," with several users being increasingly firm that Larry

was not a racist, but others noticed that the game presented a possibility and asked for a personal

response ("Was Larry a Racist"). User *The_Cheshire_Cat* said, "It's up to the player to decide if

they feel Larry is being racist or not. But I don't think the option was placed there as a 'truth or

lie' option" ("Was Larry a Racist"). Custer summarizes what he sees as the point of such in-

game dialogue: "Lines like this confront the player with the role of race and racism in this world,

and force them to make a choice about how they perceive it simultaneously." This perception is

important in interpreting the game's events: if the player (and by extension Lee) sees Larry's

treatment as racially motivated, does it matter if Larry intended his mistreatment differently or

justifies it due to Lee's criminal history? This perception should help players sympathize with

Lee's position and, by extension, those affected by racism in the real world.

In a 2013 Game Developers Convention panel after the game's release, two of the game's

designers admitted that race was part of the story they wanted to tell, remarking on how Lee

would react to racism both subtle and overt (Vanaman and Rodkin). As Josh Augustine says in his coverage of the panel, "The Telltale duo explained one way that this affected gameplay: conversations with Larry (a hardly subtle racist) were designed to be extremely difficult to navigate, and nearly impossible to win, because that's how it would be for Lee." While the developers acknowledge that this is intended to be racism, the game does not push this conclusion on players. Players are instead invited to engage the question, much as they would begin a discussion in the real world, and this invitation hopefully encourages others to think about what racism means and how it can manifest itself.

Commendably, the developers of *TWD: S1* did not make the focus of their game Lee's race: he is more than his ethnicity. On the other hand, they understood that making him a Black character meant that race would be part of his identity and needed to be represented honestly (Vanaman and Rodkin). In treating the topic in this manner, they create an effective, sympathetic, and nuanced presentation of race in their game, one that becomes worthy of additional scholarly attention.

Telltale's other *TWD* releases also feature diverse casts and, for the next two games, Black protagonists. The downloadable content for *S1* (*400 Days*, named for the time period covered after the outbreak) has short "vignette" style stories (~1 hour each) with five different main characters who eventually banded together in a small camp. Although three of the characters are White, one is Asian-American and one Black. The framing story that surrounds them involves the player choosing photographs off a posterboard and then playing through that character's story. While not revealed until the end, the player is controlling a Black woman named Tavia during this framing story, who is trying to find survivors to join her nearby

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community. *TWD: Season 2* (*S2*) and its sequel *A New Frontier*[9] (*ANF*) follow Clementine, whom Lee found and protected in the first game. In *S2* the group of survivors is once again quite diverse; non-White characters of various races actually comprise the majority of Clementine's new group in the game. The third Telltale game,[10] *The Walking Dead: Michonne*, follows the comic series' Michonne and highlights events that happen during her absence at sea from the comics storyline. The game begins with her aboard a sailing vessel with captain Pete, a Black male, and a diverse crew: Oak, a British-American; Siddiq, who seems to be of Arab descent; and Berto, who is Hispanic. Lastly, *ANF* centers on the player-controlled Javier Garcia, a Hispanic man, and his extended family. In short, all of these games continue and even expand the franchise's tradition of racial diversity.

Looking at these video games, two final rhetorical strategies stand out in how they treat race. One is the use of strategic ambiguity: the games present situations to the player but do not offer explicit commentary about them. The player sees how Larry treats Lee, but the game does not directly label the old man a racist, effectively showing but not telling. While this strategy may cause some people to miss the point or downplay behavior, as seen at Telltale's forum, this may also make the message more acceptable by being less confrontational; it "allows difficult issues to be addressed […] by limiting disagreement" (Paul and Strbiak 150). Players who might have protested overt racism from a White male character, for whatever the reason, might not be as offended if the label is simply not appended. The second rhetorical strategy used in these games exploits the game-unique dimension of interactivity, requiring player input in discussing what happens to Lee. In this way, rather than simply portraying racialized situations, Telltale's

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[9] This game was known as "Season 3" before release, but most of Telltale's material since has used the "A New Frontier" subtitle instead.

[10] It was released in between *TWD: S2* and *ANF*.

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games invite players to reflect on and participate in its different situations, hopefully leading each of them to consider racial problems as they play. While the game may not *tell* players that Larry is "an old racist asshole," by providing it as a possibility it asks players to evaluate his treatment of Lee. Because video games require player input to continue, they can build their medium to respond to a player's choices in a way uncharacteristic of print or television.

These portrayals of diversity do not connect very well to the hegemonic White masculinity myths of cowboys and patriarchs, however. In Chapter 5, I argue that *TWD* games encourage these questions about race by rejecting the cowboy masculinity seen in the other media franchises and instead constructing Lee as a "good father." Their approach both uses *and* subverts the stereotypes we might expect to be invoked in portraying a Black protagonist, making players more aware of race and resisting the dominant White hegemony. The second game extends this argument even further by deconstructing White patriarchy, casting the myth as impotent and meaningless in the world of *TWD: S2*. *Michonne*, the final game considered in this study, continues criticizing some of these themes through the brother-sister duo of Randall and Norma, but the game is held back by its conflicting needs for canonicity and meaningful player choices.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, synthesizes how these rhetorical myths come together across different media to provide a fuller picture of what race means in 21st century apocalyptic artifacts and to make some suggestions for the genre. Additionally, I suggest what we can learn about the features of different media forms, as seen in the different adaptations under consideration. *The Walking Dead* in all of its incarnations has become a cultural juggernaut, so we should pay attention to the messages it supplies, in whatever forms they take—not simply because they are popular entertainment, but because of what they reveal about ourselves.

CHAPTER 2

RHETORIC, MYTH, AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Myths have probably existed as long as humans could ponder the significance and meaning of things. As John Perlich and David Whitt say in *Myth in the Modern World: Essays on Intersections with Ideology and Culture*, "Because of their ubiquity and longevity, myths have been, and always will be, an inherent part of culture […] long before recorded history, and for millennia after, one constant in civilization's development has been its stories, its myths" (2-3). In contrast, Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* defined the term "myth" as "stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance […] Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of human life" (5). Myths cover essentially any topics, as they are the ways in which societies and cultures craft symbolic meaning. As Campbell elaborates in his television series *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*,[11] myths "come from realizations of some kind that have then to find expression in symbolic form" ("The Hero's Adventure").

Thanks at least partly to the work of Kenneth Burke, "myth" has become a common concept in rhetorical analyses. Burke's essay "On Ideology and Myth," in *On Symbols and Society*, connected one of the chief concerns of critical rhetoric with the concept of myth—in Burke's imagination, essentially the *imagery* used to explain concepts (303). Lawrence Coupe, in *Kenneth Burke on Myth*, argues that myth should be considered the focus of Burke's writing: "[I]t might be said that the unifying theme in all his work is the meaning of mythology […]

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[11] The book by Campbell and Moyers cited in this study (*The Power of Myth*) essentially drew its material from this television program.

Whenever he seeks to elucidate his intention, in whatever of the above capacities he is writing, he invariably refers to a myth" (3). In his analysis of Burke's "On Ideology and Myth," Coupe further explains that myths are effectively the stories used to justify social practices and behaviors (16). Additionally, Coupe claims that Burke seems generally to connect instances (or "images") of myth with supporting the ideas that form greater ideologies (14).

Scholars in more contemporary times have examined how rhetoric constructs myths in topics as diverse as Australian colonialism,[12] gambling,[13] and the roots of rhetorical theory.[14] Perhaps more relevant to zombie thematics, the rhetorical transformation of real-world figures into "monsters" has also become a common topic of analysis. Nick Sciullo argues that racial animus has cast NFL player Richard Sherman as a "Bogeyman" (201), and Pamela D. Schulz draws from Burke to construct child abusers as similarly "mythic monsters" (173). As Perlich and Whitt summarize, there is really no end to the topics that can be described by myth: "[T]hese stories are evident in other contexts such as sport, terrorist rhetoric and even exhibits. In this way the power of myth extends beyond ancient stories of gods and heroes to express the hopes, fears and reality of everyday life" (2).

Given my focus herein, examining the significance of *TWD*'s characters and how they relate to a greater ideology about White masculinity, the construct of myth provides a path to understand how these characters are constructed as symbolically important figures. With *TWD*'s diverse cast across its different media franchises, Whiteness myths reveal how these characters, both White and non-White, are portrayed rhetorically when compared to dominant societal

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[12] See Cindy Lane's *Myths and Memories* and Kylie Crane's *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives*.

[13] See Aaron Duncan's *Gambling with the Myth of the American Dream*.

[14] See Stephen Olbrys Gencarella's "Purifying Rhetoric: Empedocles and the Myth of Rhetorical Theory."

discourse. In this chapter, then, I first provide the theoretical justification for my analysis in two

mythic constructions of White masculinity. Then, in the second section, I discuss the

methodology used to analyze these constructions as grounded in both the critical and multimodal

strands of discourse analysis. The last section of this chapter outlines why this approach has been

applied in this study.

Mythic Masculinity: Cowboys and Fathers

Two myths of within the broader ideology of American masculinity are especially

important in this analysis of *TWD*: the rugged individualism of the American cowboy and the

controlling paternalism of familial patriarchy. Nick Trujillo addresses the first myth in

"Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound," an analysis of the Texas Rangers' pitcher Nolan Ryan:

"[M]asculinity is […] symbolized by the daring, romantic frontiersman of yesteryear and of the

present-day outdoorsman […] In this context, the *cowboy* stands very tall as an archetypal image

reproduced and exploited in literature, film, and advertising" (291). In "A Change of Scenery:

The Southern, the Western and the Evolution of the Frontier Myth in *Justified*," Aaron Duncan

reports, "The Frontier Myth is an enduring myth deeply connected to the American psyche" (63)

and that "the most iconic character of the Frontier Myth is the lawman" (64). In "Masculinity(s),

the Agrarian Frontier Myth, and Cooperative Ways of Organizing," Lynn M. Harter notes the

myth's relevance in more recent times: "In the case of contemporary farmers, particular

masculine subjectivities (i.e., rugged individualists) are constructed, in part, through the

historical, mythic narrative of the frontiersman" (93). In an interview with National Public

Radio's Linda Wertheimer, museum curator Byron Price describes the cowboy's appeal

accordingly:

> I think cowboys represent masculinity, bravery, courageousness, selflessness, rugged
> individualism. And it's those characteristics, I think, that draw people to the cowboy

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ideal, the cowboy image. Its appeal is especially strong during periods of national crisis and trauma […] because cowboys appeal to strength, stability and core values.

The cowboy myth extends even into visual (and therefore multimodal) rhetoric, as seen in Karen S. Hoffman's analysis of George W. Bush's presidency (322).

The key factor in this myth is the cowboy's embrace of "rugged individualism," a reliance on self and a rejection of others' help. In "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth," Janice Hocker Rushing identifies this trait as the mythic core of the cowboy: "To cope with the harshness and savagery of the frontier environment, he must above all be a rugged individualist" (16). Hoffman likewise speaks of "the cowboy's individualist, anti-rule qualities" (340), and Harter affirms that individualism is the chief component of the cowboy myth: "The masculine subjectivity embodied by the frontiersman is one characterized primarily by isolation and independence" (93).

This independence would seem to make the cowboy myth especially resonant in zombie media: when society collapses and the world turns dangerous, rugged individualists should have an advantage. This advantage also extends to the cowboy's power, for he brings "gunmanship," as Rushing observes (20). In an interview about President George W. Bush, the British Broadcasting Corporation's Kathryn Westcott quotes Princeton University's Lee Clark Mitchell where he describes the mythic cowboy as "strong, morally upright, independent and God-fearing" (para. 11). In "Cowboys and Zombies," Dan Hassler-Forest agrees that the cowboy figure is inarguably masculine and violent:

> The narrative throughout the series [*TWD* comics] thus focuses instead on the countryside, where it follows the model of the archetypal American western, which traditionally stages the establishment of thriving settlements on the frontier between civilization and savagery […] although it is presented as the restoration of a completely natural balance, power is exercised through violence, with the male heroes' guns and horses presenting an obvious superfluity of phallic imagery. (345)

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Because of the focus on Rick Grimes as the main character, as well as a lot of attention given to other individualist survivors, the comics and television series both seem to prioritize the cowboy as the ultimate survivor, and as characteristic of the cowboy myth, these characters are accompanied by the violence needed to maintain their survival.

What makes this myth complicated in *TWD* artifacts is that, typically, the cowboy myth is not racially inclusive. Despite the contributions of African-American cowboys to the old West,[15] the myth in popular culture has often remained as white as a sun-bleached skull. Anthony James, in "Political Parties: College Social Fraternities, Manhood, and the Defense of Southern Traditionalism, 1945-1960," notes how the cowboy myth was one that was consciously adopted by White men to signify masculinity: "The cowboy provided a familiar motif for educated and refined white men to express a rugged and violent masculinity" (66). Trujillo argues for the myth's racialization as well: "As reconstructed in media representations of the western genre, the cowboy is a *white* male with working class values" (291). In "Cowboys, Postmodern Heroes, and Anti-Heroes: The Many Faces of the Alterized White Man," Hyon Murphree also supports this analysis: "cowboys represent a qualified white body relativized with class connotations" (51).

In 2017, such a myth might seem problematic and unacceptably exclusive. In *Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narratives*, Matthew Carter remarks on how the mythic cowboy protagonist of the Western genre has been critiqued in more recent times:

> The Western had been found guilty by many of perpetuating the myth of the West; that is to say, the preconceived and erroneous notion that the settling of the frontier was the sole preserve of Anglo-American men, where racial and gendered 'others' served only to secure white male identity. The genre's heroic protagonist—the gunfighter—was now no

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[15] For a few relevant works, see Tricia Martineau Wagner's *Black Cowboys of the Old West*, Sara R. Massey's *Black Cowboys of Texas*, and Bruce Glasrud and Michael Searles's *Black Cowboys in the American West*.

longer viewed as the champion of civilisation, but as a dangerous relic, his individualism and masculinity now vilified rather than celebrated. (2)

Despite this argument, the American cowboy myth in popular culture has nevertheless survived. As Carter continues,

> Actually frontier mythology has never really 'left' the United States, although the terms by which it is rendered or assessed may have changed. Neither has the myth been absent from its popular culture […] That frontier mythology looms large in contemporary US popular culture is surely a truism" (2-3).

TWD media have drawn on this prominent myth, but, when situating the heroic cowboy as a central focus, these artifacts have also adopted the myth's tendency to disregard those who do not happen to fit its racial implications: that is, minimizing non-White characters and their actions.

The second key myth in this study is that of the patriarch or father figure. Trujillo discusses this aspect of masculinity as well: "[M]asculinity is also hegemonic as patriarchy […] Traditionally, such patriarchal representations include males as 'breadwinners,' 'family protectors,' and 'strong father figures'" (291). In "Good and Bad Fathers as Moral Rhetoric in *Wall Street*," John W. Jordan explores this myth in American cinema, noting that fathers culturally possess a "dominant status within families" and that patriarchy is continually passed down through "representations of father-son dynamics" (182). Jordan's narrative summary of Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* shows how these dynamics function in the film:

> *Wall Street* entered this scene as a moral parable about generational conflict, masculinity, and fathers. The film tells the story of Bud Fox, a young stockbroker who initially rejects the teachings of his good and true father, Carl Fox. The son is seduced and betrayed by the corrupt father figure of Gordon Gekko, and ultimately is redeemed by accepting Carl's ideology. (180)

From this film, Jordan identifies what he calls a "trinity of patriarchy," in three opposing tensions: "closeness and distance, giving and taking, and the father-son conflicts" (185). The

patriarchal figures of Carl and Gordon sit on opposite sides of these representations and can therefore illuminate how to analyze other father figures in popular culture.

The patriarchal myth also figures prominently in zombie media. In "Family Splatters: Rescuing Heteronormativity from the Zombie Apocalypse," Kathryn A. Cady and Thomas Oates discuss fatherhood within the zombie genre. They acknowledge that some works have suggested new familial paradigms, but others, they claim, simply "stress the reconstitution of the heteronormative family" (309). As Sarah Trimble argues in ""(White) Rage: Affect, Neoliberalism, and the Family in *28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*," the zombie apocalypse could be viewed as a patriarchal fantasy come true: a "lone man protecting his (makeshift) family from being overrun by dangerous, unhuman hordes […] opens up the possibility of re-founding civilization according to reanimated paternalist ideas" (295). In "A Zombie Apocalypse: Opening Representational Spaces for Alternative Constructions of Gender and Sexuality," Jessica Murray agrees, arguing that zombie texts often "reinscribe and reify traditional patriarchal and heteronormative binaries" (3). In her literary analysis of two South African novels, *Deadlands* and *Death of a Saint*, Murray elaborates:

> The persistence of existing gender hierarchies still renders the women vulnerable to gang rape, ensures that a gay high school student is taunted because of his sexuality, limits women's choices in terms of maternity and leaves them in a no-win situation when it comes to their appearance […] the most insidious threat is patriarchal constructions rather than the zombies that linger at the margins of the survivors' world (15).

TWD media rely on this patriarchal myth nearly as much as the cowboy. While Rick Grimes is not necessarily a *good* father, he tries to protect his family and successfully preserves his son's life over the course of the series. Many other characters include fatherhood as part of their background, and their successes and failures in that role seem tied to their place within the survivor communities. Fatherhood is, however, usually subordinated to the cowboy myth, assigning the two myths relative status within the ideology of masculinity. Importantly, Telltale's

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video game franchise makes the most use of this patriarchal myth, examining and deconstructing it over the course of both *TWD: S1* and *S2*.

Discourse Analysis as Critical Method

Discourse analysis is a broad communication method focused on describing and analyzing the communicative features of "text" or "discourse." In "Discourse Analysis: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Interpreting Text Data," Kamini Jaipal-Jamani defines discourse analysis as "a methodological strategy that can be used to interpret data in situations where the researcher wants to illuminate meanings in text" (2). "Text" or "discourse" in this method is a flexible term to encompass a variety of communication channels; it can include "written texts, spoken words, pictures, symbols, artifacts, and so forth" (Phillips and Hardy 4). This flexibility, then, is especially important when studying objects with multiple communicative channels, and multimodal discourse analysis forms a distinct strand within the larger field. Other methods of critical analysis may provide vocabulary suited to examining a particular mode of communication but neglect others. It would be difficult, for example, to discuss images and verbal text with the same vocabulary, but discourse analysis often provides tools to integrate them into a functional method of investigation.

This flexibility in terms, however, can also create confusion. In *Doing Discourse Analysis*, Linda Wood and Rolf Kroger note some of the linguistic problems: "We use the term discourse to cover all spoken and written forms of language use (talk and text) as social practice. This usage works for most purposes, but does require further comment, because readers will undoubtedly run into variations" (19). They proceed to list at least eight different distinctions[16]

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[16] Briefly, 1) no distinction between "discourse" and "text"; 2) "discourse" as oral and "text" as written; 3) and 4) a distinction between "discourse" and "text" as language as abstract symbols and language as it is used—sometimes with "discourse" as the abstract realization and sometimes with "text"; 5) "discourse" as a system of possibilities

in how "discourse" or "text" has been defined and discussed among other authors (Wood and

Kroger 19-20), concluding with their own approach:

> Our own general practice is to use the term discourse for both the activities of speaking (conversation or talk) and writing (text) and their material embodiment, addressing any variations if required for clarity. As a theoretical matter, we can see some merit in a broader sense of discourse that includes potentially all movement, not only speaking, writing, and those movements traditionally included under nonverbal behavior, in order to avoid prejudging their implications as and for social action. As a practical matter, discourse as we consider it here will be largely verbal (along with those features with which it is inextricably intertwined, e.g., pauses and intonation). (20)

In short, when doing discourse analysis, it is important to pay attention to the author's use of the

terms.

In this study, to avoid privileging certain communicative modes and reduce confusion

with philosophical ideas about the social impact of discourse, the term "discourse" refers

generally to the raw material of the cultural artifacts under consideration—that is, the

communicative components of *TWD* media (comics, television, and video games) used in this

study. Discourse in this sense covers communicative elements including but not limited to verbal

features, images, and procedural elements. Discussion about the meanings behind these elements

uses other terms to keep this distinction relatively clear.

Discourse analysis, however, is broader than looking at only the building blocks of

messages: "It is a way of methodically examining the details of an oral or written statement

longer than a single sentence, considering the creator of the utterance, the recipient, and its

linguistic and social contexts" ("Discourse Analysis"). Discourse in this broader sense is

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and the specifics of how it is used; 6) "discourse" as a concept (noncount noun) v. "text" as discrete entities or systems (a countable noun); 7) "discourse" as "structured systems of terms, figures of speech, and metaphors"; and 8) "discourse" or "text" as extralinguistic—that is, including any semiotic or communicative form within the term. This last approach is most applicable for this study, given its concern with multimodal artifacts.

important because of its effects on people and construction of their experiences. Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy in *Discourse Analysis* center discourse as the foundation of human experience: "Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves" (2). While not making quite so bold a claim, James Gee in *How to Do Discourse Analysis* observes the potential benefit of doing this kind of study:

> To do discourse analysis, we have to see what is old and taken for granted as if it were brand new. We need to come to see all the assumptions and information speakers leave unsaid and assume listeners know and will add in to make the communications clear […] By making what is natural to us—what we usually take for granted—new and strange, we can begin consciously to think about all the knowledge, assumptions, and inferences we bring to any communication. And sometimes we will even see aspects of our taken-for-granted cultural knowledge and assumptions—or those of others—that we want to question because we conclude they are doing harm to ourselves or others in terms of things like equity, fairness, and humane treatment of people. (14)

Discourse analysis can also take different forms depending on its philosophies and goals. Phillips and Hardy discuss different approaches based on two axes: constructivist-critical and context-text (20). In this formulation, constructivist approaches focus more on describing or explaining discourse, while critical approaches concern themselves with the power and implications of discourse, usually with an eye toward changing reality for the better. Contextual studies are more about the uses of a given discourse or of the societal factors or themes shaping it, while textual studies focus more on the particulars of a given discourse under investigation. To use the language introduced by Phillips and Hardy, this study falls on the critical axis, given the potential impact of the popular culture discourse under consideration, as well as on the textual axis given its direct focus on *TWD* media. To explain further how this study falls on these axes, I discuss critical discourse analysis (CDA) for its motivations and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), which is a branch of textual analysis, for its techniques.

Critical Discourse Analysis

As Phillips and Hardy note, "Critical studies are relatively common in discourse analysis" (20), to the point that CDA is a widely recognized and discussed method. CDA differs from other types of discourse analysis chiefly in its motivating assumptions and its goals. CDA remains grounded within the realm of "discourse" but situates it more broadly within a social context of power and hegemony. As van Teun defines it in "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," CDA "presuppose[s] a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality, and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships" (249). Liu and Guo, in "A Review of Critical Discourse Analysis," define it similarly:

> Through the surface level of language form, CDA aims to reveal the influence of the ideology on discourse, the counteractive influence of discourse on the ideology, and how the two elements derive from and serve for social structure and power relations. In a word, it aims at revealing the relationship between language, ideology and power. (1076)

This definition highlights the potential for a "top-down," institutionally focused approach or a "bottom-up" approach that looks at how people craft and use their own discourse.

The concern for "discourse" may also be interpreted in many ways; different authors have defined their terms in different ways and focused on different conceptions of this idea. To highlight different traditions, Liu and Guo in reference four seminal authors in CDA tradition along with their separate approaches:

> For example, Fairclough takes sociology, social semiotics, and SFL [Systematic Functional Linguistics] as the theoretical and linguistic foundation of his studies; Ruth Wodak places discourses into the historical context (including society and politics), and develops CDA from the historical perspective as his [sic][17] historical-discourse analysis approach; van Dijk places particular emphasis on text linguistics and cognitive linguistics, and concentrates on analyzing discourses in a social cognitive approach; Paul Chilton's critical discourse analytical approach is rooted in developmental psychology and cognitive science. (1077)

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[17] This would appear to be just a translation mistake.

With this in mind, individual CDA approaches can differ from one another, much as discourse analysis approaches in general exhibit differences. This study primarily focuses on analyzing the discourses of *TWD* about race from a socio-critical position. The goal of this chosen approach is to examine potential problems within *TWD* media in how they represent diversity and possible improvements to the artifacts.

In "A Discourse on Discourse Analysis," Arthur Berger provides an effective summary of the utility of CDA that highlights why I have chosen this approach:

> Discourse analysis may be a "fuzzy" concept but practitioners of discourse analysis offer a language-focused critical approach to everything from conversations, written texts, advertisements, images, photographs and social media such as Facebook which require a number of different approaches including linguistics and semiotics. It can tell us interesting things about gender relations, ideologies, consumer lust, race relations and a host of other topics in the United States and in any other country where discourse analysts are doing their research. (602)

Given this study's examination of race as well as its look at a variety of cultural artifacts, a CDA-focused approach is ideal.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Another strand of discourse analysis that is important for the methodology of this study is MDA. For a simple definition of multimodal artifacts, we can turn to one provided by Shuxuan Wu: "multimodal text, as a unit of meaning, combines semiotic resources to produce meaning" (1415). According to Cameron and Panović, traditional discourse analysis has often privileged linguistic discourse,[18] but they posit other discursive features carry a great deal of meaning, including resources such as images, sound, and text (Cameron and Panović 32). These other channels of discourse are known as "modes," and the prevalence of such artifacts challenges us to study them. As Cameron and Panović observe, "Even a fairly ordinary Facebook page is likely

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[18] Pg. 97; for example, the previously established use of the basic term "text" in discourse analysis highlights how dominant this linguistic bias is.

to contain written language, graphics, still images like photographs and cartoons, and embedded

links to clips containing speech, moving images, and music" (97). MDA, then, is a

methodological approach designed to provide tools for examining these kinds of artifacts. Some

scholars have suggested that all verbal communication should be considered multimodal based

on associated nonverbal communication and spatial and temporal organization,[19] but for the

purposes of this study, MDA explains the non-linguistic features of pop culture artifacts,

including visuals, space, and sound.[20]

Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Given that CDA is more about the philosophical motivations for discourse analysis and

MDA is more about the actual methodology, there is no real conflict between these two strands;

they may be profitably joined. In *Critical Multimodal Studies of Popular Discourse*, Sumin Zhao

and Emilia Djonov tie both CDA's and MDA's basic assumptions together:

> Despite each having a different focus, both strands share two fundamental understandings about human communication. One is that human communication is always multimodal. Meaning-making involves selecting from different modes (e.g., written language, sound, gesture, visual design) and media (e.g., face-to-face, print, film) and combining these selections according to the logic of space (e.g., a sculpture), time (e.g., a sound composition), or both (e.g., a film) (Kress, 2010). The other fundamental understanding is that human communication is always social. It is defined by and construes, and over time can be transformed by and transform, its social context. Besides these shared understandings, both MDA and CDA thrive on disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological diversity, which provides a firm ground on which to explicitly unite their agendas. (2)

Based on this reasoning, in analyzing *TWD* franchise the current study employs as its critical

method the two threads of discourse analysis together under the label of "CMDA."

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[19] For examples of this argument, see Gee ("Unified Discourse" 56), Cameron and Panović (97), and Baldry and Thibault (20).

[20] As one example, the comics use a bold font for emphasis in character dialogue, which has been preserved in this study when quoting them.

CMDA is particularly suitable for this study for three major reasons. First, CMDA exhibits a critical focus that can help explain the discussion and portrayal of race within *TWD* media. Interactions between characters of different races occur from the beginning of all three media franchises and are discussed heavily throughout these different works. Second, the multimodal part of CMDA provides the vocabulary to deal with multimodal artifacts. If MDA is absent, important features of an artifact may be overlooked. While somewhat rare, taking a critical *multimodal* approach can therefore be important. As Zhao and Djonov observe, "Popular discourse […] offers a fertile ground on which to take this step and explore how different semiotic resources can be employed to perpetuate or challenge prevailing sociocultural beliefs, stereotypes, and norms" (2); in short, multimodal analysis provides a path to studying these different resources. Third, the *critical* part of CMDA has been rarely applied to pop culture artifacts on their own. Such work in the past has often been connected with some other context, such as education or political activism.[21] CDA, however, can be a valuable tool in explaining the messages of popular artifacts in an organized way. Zhao and Djonov argue this point extensively:

> As multimodal discourse analysts, we believe that popular discourse provides a unifying ground for efforts to engage in critical multimodal discourse analysis. […] For us, the theme of popular discourse encourages investigations of how our semiotic and sociocultural landscapes are reflected in and transformed by popular culture texts (e.g., hit TV shows, music videos, and women's magazines) and phenomena (e.g., fashion, jazz), by texts designed to popularize particular institutional discourses (e.g., science, business, and politics), and by ubiquitous semiotic practices and technologies (e.g., the use of office software and social media). (7-8)

This argument is not merely an academic one. In an analysis of Australia's *The Biggest Loser* television series, Monson, Donaghue, and Gill prove the effectiveness of a CMDA

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[21] For examples of educational research, see Pimentel; Jennifer Martin. For activism connecting CDA with Amerindian mascots, see Gerstl-Pepin and Liang; Bollinger; and Bruyneel.

approach for a pop culture discourse.[22] In their study, Monson et al. examine visual and

temporal-spatial features in combination with a critical look at the societal messages about

"success." As they summarize, "examination of editing choices, lighting and colour, clothing and

time spent on contestants allows us to see that the programme constructs varying degrees of

success between contestants and provides accounts for these differences in outcomes" (524). In

this study, I aim to provide a similarly multimodal look at the messages found within *TWD*

media, examining character relationships, dialogue, non-verbal behavior, cinematography, and

(in the video games) procedural elements that work to create a more complex picture than

language alone would shape.

Employing Discourse Analysis for Race in The Walking Dead

      Given its concerns over power, hegemony, and marginalized groups, studying race is one

common application of a CDA approach. *TWD* franchise often discusses race, so this study's

emphasis on these discussions therefore fits easily within this tradition of CDA and its

examination of race. Van Dijk, in "Discourse and the Denial of Racism," summarizes this

motivation well: "The guiding idea behind this research is that ethnic and racial prejudices are

prominently acquired and shared within the white dominant group through everyday

conversation and institutional talk and text."[23] Much of the CDA research focusing on race and

other marginalized groups has been performed within the field of education,[24] with additional

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[22] Technically, they refer to it as "multimodal critical discourse analysis," switching the first two terms and likely indicating a greater emphasis on the multimodal aspects. Given that *critical* describes the goals of this study, primacy needs to be given to the motivation behind the work.

[23] Pg. 87; see also van Dijk in *Elite Discourse* and *Racism and the Press*.

[24] See Schulz and Fane; Heuschkel; Matias, et al.; Padilla Vigil; and Tharp.

studies in academics,[25] politics,[26] and news coverage.[27] The prevalence of these studies suggests, however, that there simply has not been as much attention to how CDA can apply to cultural texts, especially outside the classroom. While CDA does generally assume some study of how people interact with or use communicative discourse, it seems a little strange that the pop culture that is so often a part of Van Dijk's "everyday conversation" would be so underserved in CDA.

Additionally, the central assumption of CDA that discourse is used to *construct* meaning is characteristic of the kind of critical analysis often applied to pop culture texts. As Gee puts it in *How to Do Discourse Analysis*, "we use language to get people to construct pictures in their minds" (79). Gee also identifies seven "building tasks" of discourse: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics (distribution of social goods), connections, and sign systems and knowledge (*How to Do* 94-8). With a focus on broader application of discourse, CDA may also be especially suited to examining multiple media works. Katherine Lavell encourages this approach: "In order to see how race is upheld in texts, CDA instruct [sic] scholars to examine separate texts together in order to create meaning [...] Looking at multiple texts together shows how a subject is represented by similarities that are found in all texts" (300). This study therefore examines three different media incarnations of *TWD*—the original comic series, the television show, and the Telltale video game—focusing attention on how race is discussed and invoked in those discourses. In light of Gee's identified functions of discourse (*How to Do* 94-8), the foci of the analysis are on how the construction of identity and relationships through multimodal processes compares to and contrasts with iconic American myths. Guiding the analysis of race

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[25] See Moon and Flores; and Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazarro.

[26] See Brown; and Chilton, Tian, and Cao.

[27] See Villenas and Angeles; Morton; and Burdsey.

across the comics, television series, and Telltale's games have been three research questions, identified in the following paragraphs.

Zombie media have often been interpreted through the lens of identity construction. Zombies can easily represent a monstrous "Other," and the term and creature find their origins in Black Afro-Caribbean practices, crafting an historical link with Blackness. Zombies are so near-human that they often force an examination of what humanity means, and the end result is generally something akin to civilization, reason, and compassion. Historically, non-White cultures have often been classified as savage, unthinking, and physical—traits zombies bring even more aggressively to the forefront. With this theme in mind, the study shifts its attention to the actual human characters present to see how their presentation of racial identity compares with traditional zombie tropes. The first research question, then, is simply, "How is racial identity constructed within *TWD*?"

Zombie media have also been used to discuss relationships, as the setting generally mutilates or destroys relational attachments as living humans become the undead. Looking at relationships, then, is also an important part of this study, as identity construction must define a subject to the exclusion of other possible identities. How a particular identity relates to others both in- and out-group is an important part of the construction. The apocalyptic setting also suggests how these relationships aid in basic human survival, an argument that can be mirrored in "surviving" the world today in terms of race relations and cooperating with the dominant discourse. These survival strategies can similarly be analyzed in terms of relational behavior toward the dominant persons of *TWD*. The second research question is then, "How are relationships portrayed between characters in *TWD*?"

Additionally, the highly visual nature of all three *TWD* series means that multimodal concerns can be useful in making sure features do not go unnoticed. Visual composition and

spatial elements in the comics and television series can be a part of this thread of analysis, and the video game series provides procedural elements to analyze. The last research question is, "How do multimodal features within *TWD* impact both identity and relational constructions in these discourses?" Where appropriate, these features are noted in excerpts taken from the media under analysis.

In summary, a CMDA approach is ideal for this study thanks to the critical questions being asked and the need for multimodal analysis. The discourse so identified has been examined for aspects of the cowboy and patriarchal myths under consideration and markers of race, including rhetorical markers. While somewhat underused, CMDA holds a lot of potential for analyzing cultural artifacts that increasingly make use of multiple modes of communication, and this study aims to demonstrate the value in attending to those features.

CHAPTER 3

THE WALKING DEAD IN PRINT

Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* comic series began in 2003 and offered a new

approach to the zombie genre. Set in a world where everyone who dies reanimates into a

shambling, hungry corpse, *The Walking Dead* is about a group of people who are trying to

survive this apocalypse. The story focuses on former sheriff Rick Grimes, who awakens from a

coma to see the world in ruin, and his efforts to lead his family and fellow survivors through the

apocalypse. The group constantly seeks shelter, safety, and community at different places, but

each time they establish themselves they find themselves in conflict with some other group that

threatens their way of life.

The Walking Dead comic series has an approach to the zombie threat similar to that seen

in *Night of the Living Dead*. While acknowledging the horror of undead monsters, Romero's film

primarily serves to highlight *internal* tensions among the survivors exacerbated by their

situation. Dan Hassler-Forest in "Cowboys and Zombies: Destabilizing Patriarchal Discourse in

The Walking Dead" agrees:

> [I]t is not so much the outside threat that represents the true monstrous nature of their
> situation, but rather the inability of the individuals in the group to form a unified front:
> their lack of social, ethical and moral cohesion struck a nerve in the way it represented a
> fractured nation, its nihilistic ending reverberating in a media landscape dominated by
> images of brutal violence that seemed to reflect a nation in a state of near civil war. (341)

The Walking Dead follows the example of Romero's film in being relatively unconcerned with

zombies as the primary threat to survival, even early in the series run. Within Issue 3, we see the

first hints of conflict between Shane and Rick over Rick's wife Lori, and this arc (mostly)

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resolves itself in Shane's death in Issue 6. Hassler-Forest claims that this plot arc illustrates "the notion that within this genre, questions of causality and rational explanations are of far less interest than the dynamics that play out among the survivors" (341). In short, the real significance of this series is found in what it has to say about its characters.

In popular culture, race is usually an important part of a character's identity, and *The Walking Dead* comic series is fairly diverse in terms of race and/or ethnicity. Interracial interactions appear in the comic series from the very beginning. In the first issue, Rick, a White Kentuckian, meets a Black father and son pair, Morgan and Duane Jones. Their encounter begins when Duane attacks Rick with a shovel, thinking the sheriff is a "walker," as he labels the zombies. Despite this violent introduction, Rick is happy to help them with supplies from the police station as he travels to Atlanta to find his family, and he eventually encounters Morgan again and brings him into the main group of survivors.

Although most of the survivors Rick meets in Atlanta are White, non-White characters appear frequently in the comic series, interacting with and becoming a part of the main group of survivors. Glenn, one of the initial Atlanta survivors introduced in Issue 2, is an Asian-American, and his willingness to make dangerous supply runs makes him an important member of the group from the very beginning. His romance with and eventual marriage to Maggie Greene is an important plot arc that shows how humanity and happiness can survive during the zombie apocalypse. Rick's group meets and includes Tyreese and his daughter Julie as they head out of Atlanta (Issue 7), inmates Dexter and Andrew (Issue 13), and Michonne (Issue 19). The first prominent Hispanic character is likely Woodbury's Caesar Martinez (Issue 27), but Rosita's

appearance (Issue 53) marks a definitely Hispanic character becoming part of the primary group.[28]

This focus on diversity was an intentional decision by series creator Robert Kirkman. In an e-mail response to *KoreAm* magazine, Kirkman said, "It's important to me to try and accurately portray the world as it is, i.e., not all white, like some comics do" (Saria). Although many of the comics' initial characters are White, people of different ethnicities frequently enter the cast and frequently become major figures. Despite Kirkman's aspirations, we may be able to see how racialized identities are constructed within this work through examining how he portrays his characters. Although each character can stand on his or her own, there may be commonalities among different characters that would prove valuable to study. Two of the earliest and most prominent non-White characters, Tyreese and Glenn, are especially useful to compare how they are constructed and treated in the comics and how their characteristics compare with similar characters. To contrast their treatment, let us take series protagonist Rick Grimes as an example of a White cowboy figure who echoes archetypal American frontier heroes.

Rick Grimes: Cowboy and Father

From the very beginning, Rick is cast as a mythic cowboy figure. He quickly trades in his bicycle (Issue 1) for a horse (Issue 2) and is shown entering Atlanta in a full-page spread. His occupation as a sheriff calls to mind the "town marshal" of Westerns,[29] and he asserts his authority over the group of Atlanta survivors almost as soon as he arrives, making suggestions about the appropriate course of action and training the group with weapons (Issue 4). As a mythic cowboy, physical prowess must support Rick's authority—and he certainly possesses the

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[28] For a list of the series' early characters and some additional information about them, see the Appendix.

[29] Janice Hocker Rushing illuminates four different variations of this mythic figure in her "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth" beginning on p. 18.

"masculine courage" and "consummate gunmanship" Rushing describes in "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth" (20). Rick also displays an independent streak that necessarily defines the mythic cowboy (Rushing 16; Harter 93; Hoffman 340). Whenever Rick feels the need to do something, he does it essentially without consulting anyone else, which leads to tension with his wife Lori early in the series (Issue 4). Rick's son Carl also notices his father's independent streak at a fairly early point, asking fellow survivor Tyreese if his father truly loves him because of how often Rick goes out on his own and leaves Lori and Carl (Issue 38). While others in the group may question his decisions, Rick is the (mostly) undisputed leader of his community and makes decisions based on whatever he thinks is the best.

Hassler-Forest in "Cowboys and Zombies" agrees that *TWD* should be considered a post-modern western: "Robert Kirkman's writing uses its zombie motif to re-articulate the fundamental narrative paradigm of the western: that of the lone hero struggling to establish a safe and tranquil community in a pastoral frontier surrounded by perpetual savagery and danger" (342). That *TWD* draws on the cowboy myth for inspiration is almost inarguable. This figure, however, is just as inarguably a masculine one, as noted by Hassler-Forest: on the frontier, "power is exercised through violence, with the male heroes' guns and horses presenting an obvious superfluity of phallic imagery" (345). Rushing would agree that the cowboy is a quintessentially masculine figure: "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do" (20). Through *TWD*'s run, Rick is if nothing else a survivor, and his rugged individualism has kept him at the center of whatever survivor groups in which he finds himself.

Rick also draws on another masculine myth, that of the patriarch or "good father." In this role he is less successful, considering his wife and infant daughter die and his relationship with Carl is rocky at best, but he at least tries. For Rick, his patriarchal focus seems to be ensuring that Carl can survive the apocalypse, even when this hurts Rick's relationship with Lori. Jordan

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seems to agree that this focus is seen in popular culture: "Perhaps the quintessential duty of fathers is instructing their sons about what it means to 'be a man'; to raise their sons through an exemplary form of masculinity" (182). As early as Issue 5, we see Rick insist that Carl be taught how to shoot a gun, over Lori's protests.

The tension between Rick and Shane in the first six issues can also be read as a struggle over who can fulfill the role of patriarch to Lori and Carl. Shane, the replacement patriarch, is rejected in the series itself when Carl shoots him dead (Issue 6). Cady and Oates agree with this analysis in "Family Splatters": "*The Walking Dead* narrative […] endorses a reunified husband, wife, and child rather than a found family of wife, child, and new patriarch" (316). Carl's action also validates Rick including him in gun training and, perhaps, suggests that Carl is beginning to embrace his father's aggressive masculinity, which would mean that Rick is fulfilling the patriarchal duty as he sees it. More broadly speaking, Rick also embodies a patriarchal role over the survivor communities in which he participates, always ascending to a leadership position. His journey from being the constable at Alexandria (Issue 71) to receiving leadership over the whole community (Issue 78) is an especially prominent and swift example.

Rick as a patriarch can also be examined through the three "polemics" identified by Jordan: "closeness and distance, giving and taking, and the father-son conflicts" (185). In the first dimension, Rick succeeds to an extent early in the series. He embraces Carl on his arrival in Atlanta (Issue 2), publicly announces that Carl will have a gun (Issue 5), and takes Carl on a hunting trip with him and Shane (Issue 6). Nevertheless, Rick generally fails to be a close father figure, as seen when Carl goes to Tyreese for comfort over Rick's constant leaving (Issue 38). While Tyreese reassures Carl, if a son has to ask someone else if his father loves him, we probably cannot consider the father to be close with the son. As Jordan contrasts the two paternal

figures in *Wall Street*, Rick resembles much more closely "the bad father […] remaining at arms length" than one who "seemingly is always available" (186).

Rick does live up to the other two dimensions more successfully, however. He takes care of his family and generally sees his exploits as ensuring the protection of his family, threatening Otis with death after he accidentally shoots Carl (Issue 9) and finding them shelter at the prison (Issue 13). Though his physical and emotional distance causes some problems with his family, if nothing else Rick continually gives life to his son through his actions. Rick also sees his son unite with him in various conflicts: the first and most obvious occasion is Carl killing Shane (Issue 6), but any time Rick needs his son, Carl is available to help.

Taken together, the cowboy and patriarchal myths embodied by Rick generally highlight ideal masculinity within the comics. Characters do criticize Rick, at least occasionally, but more often than not his decisions are honored and his way is taken. Whenever he encounters a new group of survivors, he either brings them under his authority (eventually) or finds himself in open conflict with them. While Kirkman probably does not intend for Rick's actions to go uncriticized, his continued survival and ascension to authoritative roles reinforce the idea that Rick's masculinity functions effectively in this world.

Tyreese and Black Masculinity

Tyreese is one of the earliest Black characters in *The Walking Dead*, first appearing in Issue 7, alongside his daughter Julie.[30] He becomes a strong ally to Rick and even develops into a leader figure within the group during his time in the series. Tyreese swiftly proves himself an effective fighter against the undead, but he also shows a caring and protective side toward his daughter and later the women with whom he becomes romantically involved. He is also unafraid

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[30] He is even identified as "that **black** guy" by Maggie Greene when the group reaches the Greene farm (Issue 10).

to confront Rick when he feels the former sheriff is making mistakes; their violent argument in Issue 23 consumes most of the pages and nearly kills Rick, leaving him with a crippled hand. Tyreese additionally cares a great deal about the safety and security of the group as a whole, searching in riot gear for the missing Rick, Glenn, and Michonne (Issue 30) and going with Michonne to attack the Woodbury settlement (Issue 45).

Perhaps the most legendary moment in Tyreese's time comes in Issue 16, as several members of the group try to clear the prison gymnasium of zombies. They are nearly surrounded and trapped until Tyreese launches himself into the mob of undead, allowing Glenn, Andrea, and Billy to get free and barricade the door behind them. When Rick returns to the prison, they open the door to find Tyreese and a room full of dead zombies. Even more impressively, Tyreese remained unbitten and is therefore not doomed to death. This incident is so impressive that Glenn tells people in the community of Alexandria about it years later (Issue 72).

Despite all of his good qualities, however, Tyreese in many ways seems stereotypical. His actions often display a strong physicality. For example, he is much more comfortable with his hammer than a firearm, seen when he talks about needing shooting practice just before reminding Carol of his melee prowess (Issue 20), when Rick mentions the hammer's usefulness (Issue 26), or when we see his inability to hit targets (Issue 40). Additionally, he played football for the Atlanta Falcons before the zombie outbreak, as Michonne recognizes on meeting him (Issue 20). Emotionally, he has strong convictions but does not waver from them or even entertain competing views, as seen in his violent brawl with Rick (Issue 23). Finally, his biggest personal mistake is likely his infidelity with Michonne while in a relationship with Carol (Issue 21). These actions position Tyreese as a strongly masculine figure, yet, as described by Avery and colleagues, one who mirrors pop culture "references to [Black] men as competitive, risk taking, violent, antifeminine, sex-focused, aggressive" (180). These typical constructions of

Black masculinity reach as far back as the D. W. Griffith film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a work

described by Hawley and Flint as depicting "Black men as hypersexual, brutal menaces that

White society has no choice but to control through the use of violent force, intimidation, and

fear" (209). Although *TWD*'s Tyreese is not quite so dangerous a caricature, his resemblance to

this stereotype is too close for comfort.

The masculine power upheld within *TWD* is also essentially *White*, due to the prominence

of both Rick and Shane, who more fully embody the cowboy and patriarch myths. In contrast to

these men, Hassler-Forest argues that Tyreese fails to be a "good father" and therefore becomes a

failed enactor of masculinity:

> Remarkably, the only notable challenge to Rick's absolute authority within the group
> comes from Tyreese, the first black male to be taken in by Rick's community. Initially
> Rick's most faithful ally and physically the strongest male in the group, Tyreese's role as
> a figure of similar power and authority is soon weakened by the deaths of his children.
> Unlike Rick, Tyreese is clearly unable to maintain his position as father and therefore his
> hold over patriarchal power, the primary function of which is the innate ability to
> safeguard one's own progeny. (347)

In short, because a difference can be seen between the masculinity Rick embodies and

what Tyreese is able to accomplish, *TWD* has Tyreese enact *Black* masculinity, a role that he can

represent more faithfully. Three of the most prominent traits we see in both *TWD* and

contemporary culture that reflect Black masculinity are physical strength, mature convictions,

and strong sexuality, which are explored more fully in the following paragraphs. Taken together,

these fairly stereotypical traits effectively describe Black masculinity as generally constructed in

this comic series.

Physical strength is frequently ascribed to the Black man in Western culture. As Wong,

Horn, and Chen explain in "Perceived Masculinity: The Potential Influence of Race, Racial

Essentialist Beliefs, and Stereotypes," people generally "perceive Black American men as having

larger physical attributes and stronger physical abilities than other men, which would in turn be

associated with higher levels of perceived masculinity" (454). In his examination of Tyler Perry's films—targeted primarily to Black audiences—Kameron Copeland noted that "male characters are mostly presented […] physically with bulging muscles" (88). Additionally, Wong, Horn, and Chen found in their examination of stereotypes that "Black American men were stereotyped as significantly bigger than Asian and White American men […] were viewed as having significantly stronger physical abilities than Asian and White American men [… and] were perceived as significantly more aggressive than Asian and White American men" (458).

In their discussion of Black masculinity in the wake of Michael Brown's shooting death in Ferguson, Missouri,[31] Jamie Hawley and Staycie Flint observe how officer Wilson's description of Brown, "as an 'it' and 'demon' and as one having the 'most intense aggressive face'" (209), provides evidence of dehumanization and assigned aggression. Hawley and Flint also record that Wilson made additional comments as he "testified before a grand jury he 'felt like a 5 year old holding onto Hulk Hogan'" (209). In short, a Black man at his worst may be seen as a "super-human brute" (Hawley and Flint 210).

Physical attributes also help construct ideas about relational characteristics. According to Griffith Gunter, and Watkins, "African American men […] have conceptualized being healthy as being able to fulfill social roles, such as holding a job, providing for family, protecting and teaching their children and belonging to a social network" (188). This characterization connects their physicality with their social standing and suggests that Black men feel compelled to exhibit personal leadership and patriarchal responsibility. This leads to another stereotype about Black men possessing "mature," independent convictions. In "Made, Laid, and Paid: Photographic

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[31] In August 2014, Brown, an 18-year-old African-American male, was shot to death by Darren Wilson, a White police officer who was responding to a reported convenience store robbery. Brown's death sparked protests across the United States and an investigation into the circumstances of the shooting, which concluded with a Department of Justice report, in March 2015, that upheld Wilson's account and cleared him of any civil rights violations.

Masculinities in a Black Men's Magazine," Stetla Viljoen sees visual elements of this attitude in pictures that "seem to emphasise maturity: manhood as opposed to boyhood" (656). In developing a scale for Black masculinity "that covers both the ideas of being a man and a Black man," (177), Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, and Luque note that masculinity requires success and independence, through such statements as "I am the only person responsible for me," and "A man takes care of business and does what needs to be done," while Black masculinity faces additional disadvantage: "As a Black man, you're up against a lot from birth" (174-75).

This "strong," convicted masculinity is mirrored in Tyreese's continued refusal to stand down in front of Rick, who blames him for Carol's attempted suicide and admonishes him for killing his daughter's boyfriend Chris (Issue 23). In return, Tyreese calls Rick out for killing prison inmate Dexter during a battle with zombies and asks if Rick intends to kill him, too, as they fight (Issue 23). This conversation shows that Tyreese feels responsibility for his decisions but also sees them as necessary, and Rick comes across as hypocritical for his criticism when he has committed similar actions.

Finally, strong sexuality is a common stereotype about Blackness in general and Black men in particular. As Justin Ponder in "Dawn of the Different" notes, "In white supremacist discourse, blacks were monstrous in that they posed a sexual threat—black men supposedly wanted to rape white women and black women supposedly wanted to seduce white men" (560). According to Hawley and Flint, Black men are viewed as "hypersexual" (210). Viljoen sees visual confirmation of this label in her analysis of *BL!NK* magazine. When looking at the magazine's "Seductive Pieces" feature, which depicts a black male and female model clad only in underwear, Viljoen observes how the assigned masculine maturity leads to this perception: "This supports the construction of black men as men and not boys, since active participation in sex is a rite reserved for adult men" (660).

Importantly, this stereotype of sexuality is often contrasted with other ethnic identities. Viljoen notes that this concept may "be juxtaposed with the notion of whites as cold and sexually repressed or emotionally reticent. In contrast to this image of white men as uptight and incapable, black men are expected to exude a kind of sexual ease or inviting sensuality" (660). According to research by Wong, Horn, and Chen, Black men are seen as more sexual than White men and especially more so than Asian American men (458). This perception may be connected to stereotypes about physicality, as Wong, Horn, and Chen suggest:

> Perhaps, like stereotypes about physical attributes and abilities, stereotypes about men's sexual/romantic abilities—especially sexual abilities—are linked to perceived biological characteristics. For instance, in the United States, men's sexual prowess is often perceived to be a function of their penis size, and Asian American men and Black American men are sometimes stereotyped as having small and large penises, respectively (462).

Whatever the justification, the stereotype seems to be one commonly held.

As with the previous stereotypical characteristics, Tyreese also exhibits strong sexuality. He had a girlfriend in high school who committed suicide (Issue 42), starts flirting with Carol almost immediately in his introductory issue (Issue 7), begins a sexual relationship with her shortly afterwards (Issue 9), and receives oral sex from Michonne not long after she arrives at the prison (Issue 21). Beyond being sexually active, even his attitude toward sex could be seen as stereotypical. Through his actions in the comics, Tyreese mirrors a philosophy described by Bowleg and colleagues in their analysis of discourse from Black heterosexual men: "Women, not men, bear the brunt of responsibility and blame for safer sex" (323). Tyreese exhibits this attitude when lecturing his daughter Julie, and not her boyfriend Chris, about the possible consequences of sexual activity (Issue 10). Considering his relationship with Carol, this censure comes across as hypocritical and sexist.

Tyreese is a complex figure, and reducing him to "only" a stereotype may be overstating the case here. However, despite his complexities, much of Tyreese's character resembles other popular constructions of Black masculinity and plays into common stereotypes about Black men. If Tyreese were not the first major African-American character in the comic series, it would be less noticeable and less significant, but, as written, *The Walking Dead* seems to buy into these cultural stereotypes. Further, the fact that Tyreese does not embody Rick's cowboy masculinity or patriarchal status puts him in a subordinate position of authority. Although Dale suggests including Tyreese on a leadership council (Issue 24), three other patriarchal White men—Rick, Dale, and Hershel—are also suggested for the council, which could counterbalance Tyreese's voice.[32]

Beyond Tyreese's presence early in the series, *TWD*'s picture of race does not expand considerably with the introduction of two other African-American characters, Dexter and Andrew, at the end of Issue 13. Rick and his group attempt to clear a prison of zombies, and he and Tyreese find four inmates barricaded in the cafeteria: Thomas, Axel, Dexter, and Andrew. Dexter in fact welcomes them civilly, asking if they "want some meatloaf" in the final panel (Issue 13). Dexter continues being hospitable in the next issue, offering food unconditionally and sharing information about their supplies. As the conversation continues, however, the prisoners reveal their status, and the group members naturally inquire about their crimes:

Axel: "Armed robbery."
Thomas: "**Tax fraud**[33]—but it wasn't **my** fault."[34]

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[32] The comics' prison council does not ever really seem to *happen*, despite Rick and Dale spending a large portion of the issue discussing it. Rick pretty consistently makes decisions and expects the group to fall in line throughout the rest of their stay at the prison.

[33] This bolded dialogue is taken from the comics, where it is used shows emphasis. I have chosen to preserve it here in keeping with a focus on multimodal communication.

Andrew: "Drugs, man—possession, selling, stealing…I've done it **all**. But I'm **clean** now—**totally** clean…gotta be, y'know…

Dexter: "**Murder**."

[beat panel, with entire group looking at an isolated Dexter]

Lori: "Murder?"

Dexter: "Yeah, and I know what you're thinking, but you got **nothing** to worry about unless you're my **wife** or her **boyfriend**. And you **can't** be them, because they're dead." (Issue 14)

Despite Dexter's honesty and initial welcome, his crime brings suspicion on him later when Hershel Greene finds his twin twelve-year-old daughters Rachel and Susie decapitated in the prison's barbershop (Issue 15). With one admitted murderer in the prison, Lori Grimes assumes Dexter's guilt and leads the group to lock him in a cell, saying he was "the only one we **know** is capable of this" (Issue 16). Rick additionally threatens Dexter after returning to the prison: "If I find out you **did it**, I'll **beat** you to **death** myself" (Issue 16). Even after Thomas, the true killer, was revealed, Rick refuses to apologize to Dexter:

Rick: "You're off the hook. It **wasn't** you."

Dexter: "That it? That **all** you gonna say?"

Rick: "**That's it**. You going to start some **trouble**?" (Issue 18)

This treatment results in Dexter, along with Andrew and Patricia, trying to kick the others out at the end of the issue by holding a gun to Rick's head: "I'll make this really **simple** for you, **farm boy**. We were here **first**—and you wore out your welcome **real quick**. **Get the FUCK out of my HOUSE**" (Issue 18).

Unfortunately for Dexter, in accessing the armory to get weapons for them, Andrew released a horde of zombies. Issue 19 sees Dexter forced to ally with Rick and the others to fight them off. Rick even saves Dexter from a zombie bite, but after Dexter chides him for missing an

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[34] He is actually lying—Thomas was a misogynistic killer who later murders the two youngest of Hershel Greene's daughters and attempts to kill Andrea and later Patricia.

opportunity to kill him, Rick decides near the end of the battle to put a bullet through Dexter's

head anyway, with only Tyreese noticing (Issue 19). After a heartbroken Andrew runs away into

the woods, Tyreese later talks to Rick about his actions, approving of the decision but also noting

Rick's hypocrisy in killing Dexter:[35]

> Tyreese: "I **saw** what you did. With **Dexter** I mean."
> Rick: "Yeah."
> Tyreese: "I think you did the **right** thing. The way things were looking that fool was
> going to attack **us** as soon as the roamers were cleared out, anyway. Who knows **who** he
> would have **killed**. **Fuck** him, y'know.
> "Still, kinda throws the whole **"You kill, you die"** thing out the window, huh? Maybe
> you should **rethink** your "no killing" stance.
> Rick: "Yeah."

Despite his antagonistic position, Dexter's portrayal comes across as similar to Tyreese's.

Physically, Dexter is the tallest of the inmates and presumably quite strong, and in terms of

crimes admitted, his is the most violent. Emotionally, Dexter and Andrew "kept to themselves"

compared with Axel and Thomas (Issue 14), and Dexter (rightfully) feels victimized by the

suspicion shown toward him, even telling Rick, "You can't talk to me like **that**" (Issue 16). By

the end of his arc, Dexter has been pushed so far that he gives Rick's group the ultimatum to

leave (Issue 18). Sexually, Dexter is also the most active of the inmates, sharing a relationship

with Andrew but also suggested to be mostly heterosexual by Axel:

> Axel: "Where's **Dex** at? You guys should go to the shower room—get you an **eye full**,
> you follow me? Lori and Carol are **both** in there, wet and soapy. It's a mighty **fine** sight."
> Andrew: "Dexter's taking a **walk**, or something. He said he needed to get some **air**.
> 'sides, we don't go that way no more. Not since we hooked up, y'know."
> Axel: "You think that's gonna **keep**, Andrew? Now that we're not **alone** in here, that is.
> If so, you're setting yourself up for some **heartbreak**. Ol' Dexter'll be switching sides as

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[35] In Issue 17, with the reveal that Thomas killed Hershel's daughters, Rick institutes a new "law": "You kill, you die." It obviously does not take him very long to break the rule.

soon as he finds him a woman willing and **able**—you follow me? You best be **ready** for that, or you get stuck holdin' your d*ck."[36]

Compared with Tyreese and Dexter, Andrew exhibits some differences. Physically and mentally, he is much different: considerably smaller and skinnier and much more emotional. However, Andrew also has few redeeming qualities, essentially being a moonstruck lover for Dexter, and he embodies another, though different, stereotype through his possession of stereotypically gay mannerisms. Andrew's actions threaten the safety of Rick and his companions, and Andrew is a character defined almost entirely by his sexuality, even if his orientation is different from at least Tyreese's. The best illustration of the character's focus on Dexter is in his last appearance (Issue 19). When Dexter is killed, Andrew seems to give up on life itself by running away from the prison, and Robert Kirkman confirmed his fate in a response to user *Wiebeast*'s post on the Image Comics online forum, in 2008: "Andrew died somewhere along the way after we saw him last. He's a zombie roaming out there somewhere and we will never see him again. In real life, in that situation... you would never see him again. To run into Andrew again—would be insanely unrealistic."

Despite some differences in these three characters, Tyreese, Dexter, and Andrew all paint a vision of Black masculinity that is threatening, physical, and sexual. Tyreese may be one of the heroes, but he is also a threat to Rick's leadership in ways the other men and women in the series are not. He also embodies stereotypical constructions of Black masculinity and shares this identity with Dexter. Dexter also tries to assert control over the group, in Issue 19, and despite his failure, he causes Rick to question his morals and actions in killing him. Andrew too has little

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[36] Issue 16; although Andrew protests this comment, Dexter does not later act affectionate toward him when asking him to get weapons for them, which somewhat supports Axel's assessment of their relationship. It is also possible, given Axel's encouragement, that Andrew as well had relationships with women in the past, but this is never really answered.

to redeem him, making him a fairly flat and unsympathetic character. Although later Black characters branch out somewhat from these tropes, it is disappointing that *TWD* begins with such stereotypical depictions of Blackness. The series' treatment of Michonne is little better.

Michonne and Black Femininity

With her arrival at the prison (Issue 19), Michonne quickly makes an impact on Rick's group of survivors. Her skill with a katana quickly makes her one of the group's most valuable warriors.[37] She also quickly pursues Tyreese for sex, which eventually results in the break-up of his relationship with Carol (Issue 21). Unlike other women in the series, Michonne is both physically and sexually quite aggressive. Kinitra D. Brooks, in "The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories," describes Michonne's advances on Tyreese:

> Tyreese is portrayed as being actively seduced by Michonne, who clearly knows of his relationship with Carol. His words and his own personal agency are overshadowed by Michonne's unstoppable sexuality, for the black Superwoman is infinite in her sexual appetites. (470)

Michonne certainly becomes a prominent figure in *TWD*, but her color marks her as different from the other women in the series. Brooks argues that Michonne is a stereotype but also that Kirkman, as a creator, makes her one deliberately. Brooks claims that Kirkman "uses the dynamics of zombie horror to broach the stereotypes that riddle the constructions of the strong black woman, stereotypes of black female sexuality, and the powerful race and gender dynamics that influence the systematic rape of black women" (467).

While Michonne shares some similarities to the Black male characters, especially in terms of her physical prowess and sexual appetite, she also displays characteristics that

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[37] See, for example, Issue 26, where she goes out as part of a rescue party, or Issue 71, where Rick suggests she be appointed constable in Alexandria.

correspond with constructions of Black femininity, the intersection between her race and gender.[38] Gholnecsar Muhammad and Sherell McArthur argue, in "'Styled by Their Perceptions': Black Adolescent Girls Interpret Representations of Black Females in Popular Culture," that cultural portrayals of Black women have demonizing effects similar to those seen in portrayals of Black men: "Stereotypical images throughout history have demonized and dehumanized Black women" (134). Muhammad and McArthur also label two of these stereotypes about Black women: "the Sapphire representation, which characterizes Black women and girls as hostile, hateful, violent, and dangerous,"[39] and "[t]he jezebel, or 'erotic icon,' [which] depicts Black women and girls as amoral, wild, promiscuous, predatory" (138).

Such stereotypes have been noted by other authors as well, especially in terms of sexualization. Edward Morris in "'Ladies' or 'Loudies'?" observes the Sapphire stereotype in how "teachers viewed the existing femininity of these [African-American] girls as coarse and overly assertive" (491). Morris notes that these young girls often responded to physical aggression in kind: "Black girls at Matthews often challenged physical contact initiated by boys by hitting and chasing them back. They did not yield to and accept this behavior from boys, nor did they tend to seek adult authority to protect themselves and punish the boys" (Morris 499). Vannina Sztainbok argues in "Exposing Her Body, Revealing the Nation," an analysis of Uruguayan Carnival performer Rosa Luna, that "seeing a black woman embodying 'her place' as a maternal sex symbol produced resonances with the symbolic order [of white masculinity]" (603). Describing her experiences in teaching about race through popular music, Lauren Leigh

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[38] Given the focus on race throughout the rest of this study, I have mostly omitted a detailed distinction between Black masculinity v. Black femininity, but these two can and should be closely allied. For example, Simien and Clawson note that "feminism benefits the black community by challenging patriarchy as an *institutionalized* oppressive structure" (p. 794). Suffice it to say that, yes, there is a double discrimination in terms of Black femininity, but my focus herein is more on the racialized stereotypes and how they compare to one another.

[39] The name "Sapphire" originates from a character on the mid-twentieth century radio show *Amos 'n' Andy*.

Kelly notes that, for one of her students, maintaining "the popular portrayals of black femininity […] was synonymous with portraying an overtly sexualized identity" (535). In a content analysis of music by Black artists, Avery, Ward, Moss, and Üsküp found that "representations of women were more likely to reflect hyperfeminine, sexualized attributes that emphasize the importance of their physical appearance or utility as sexual objects for male pleasure than other aspects of femininity" (183). Jeffries and Jeffries also comment on "the hypersexualization of the body and the hushed voice of the Black female" that happens in pop culture (128).

The character of Michonne therefore embodies the popular characteristics attributed to women of her race. As Tyreese and Dexter, she is physically strong and powerful: she mentions weightlifting as a passion (Issue 20) and is likely the best melee weapon user in the series with her katana, a skill honed during her years of fencing (Issue 26). Brooks notes how Michonne's race and gender intertwine in showing this skill: "Kirkman continues to highlight Michonne's difference as she is also shown making expert use of a katana to dispatch a bothersome zombie. Her blackness is implicitly associated with a certain masculinity" (469). Michonne also embodies a strong physical sexuality. She is sexually aggressive and more "exotic," especially compared with Carol. As Brooks argues, "Michonne's seduction of Tyreese proves problematic for it is presented in direct contrast to the construction of Tyreese's blond-haired, light-eyed girlfriend Carol, who is presented as typically 'feminine' and continually needs male protection" (470). Undeterred by her role in breaking up the relationship between Carol and Tyreese, Michonne continues a romantic relationship with him (Issue 22) and, after Tyreese's death (Issue 46), enters other relationships over the course of the series.[40]

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[40] She begins to sleep with Morgan Jones, starting in Issue 73, and later "King" Ezekiel, in Issue 115.

Michonne's sexuality, however, is not portrayed as an asset leading to success or happiness. Her advances on Tyreese, which lead to the dissolution of his relationship with Carol (Issue 22), prompt the beginning of Carol's mental instability.[41] The continuation of her relationship with Tyreese motivates him to help her attack the people of Woodbury, which leads to his capture and eventual death. Michonne's relationship with Morgan ends when he dies of blood loss after she has to amputate his bitten arm (Issue 83). Somewhat similarly, Ezekiel dies at the hands of "Alpha" (Issue 144), the leader of a group of nomadic, nearly feral humans, who is punishing the people of Alexandria for trespassing and killing her people. Even Michonne's romantic life before the zombie apocalypse was active but unhappy: she had a husband whom she later divorced, and her boyfriend Mike is one of the zombies seen with her on her first appearance in the series (Issue 19).

Additionally, Michonne becomes the victim of rape and torture by one of the more brutal villains of the series, the Governor. Out of all the villains in the series, the Governor appears to be unique in employing sexual torture against his foes.[42] In contrast, the later villain Negan has no qualms about beating someone to death with a baseball bat but gets furious when one of his underlings, David, attempts to rape a captive. In response, Negan stabs him through the neck, saying "We. Don't. Rape."[43] Michonne endures the Governor's rape over the course of Issues 28–32, and, although she mutilates and maims him in Issue 33, her revenge brings his wrath on

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[41] Carol attempts suicide in the wake of the break-up (Issue 22), comes on to both Rick (Issue 24) and Lori (Issue 26) in advocating a polyamorous relationship, and eventually kills herself by walking up to and engaging a zombie in intimate conversation (Issue 41).

[42] Some mild misogyny is foreshadowed in his first appearance, when he dismisses Michonne by saying, "Believe I was talking to the man [Rick] here, ma'am. I hope you understand" (Issue 27).

[43] Issue 117; as a counter-point, however, Negan does coerce a number of women into being his wives by withholding supplies and/or offering his protection, thereby openly practicing polygamy with women under duress and harshly punishing cheating by pressing a hot iron to the guilty man's face (Issue 105).

the entire prison group, resulting in the death of many of the main group's survivors.[44] Brooks

argues that Michonne's gender makes her the only suitable target in the series for this atrocity:

> Michonne's racially gendered construction marks her as rapeable, as a character whose complex potentiality is forfeited. Michonne allows Kirkman to horrify his readers without alienating them—something that could not have occurred with any of Kirkman's other female characters. (471)

Attempted rape is also mentioned in dialogue in connection with the other African-

American woman found in the first 20 issues: Julie. When Tyreese, Julie, and Chris meet up with

Rick and his group, Tyreese mentions that a man tried to rape Julie, so he was forced to kill him

(Issue 7). *TWD*'s broader treatment of women aside,[45] actual rape seems confined to being a

crime against Black women in this series. This display of violence against Black women is

troubling and unfortunately mirrors other cultural artifacts' treatment of Black women. In

"Queering Sugar: Kara Walker's Sugar Sphinx and the Intractability of Black Female Sexuality,"

Amber Jamilla Musser argues that popular culture sees "black female sexuality [as] nonagential"

(164). Brooks adds that "[t]he rape of black women is an American institution fraught with

intertwined histories of race, gender, and class" (470.) The connection between Black women

and rape seen in the comic series here is simply "in keeping with seeing black female sexuality

as always already violated" (Musser 162) in other cultural artifacts. Musser suggests that this

treatment makes Black women seem to be more acceptable victims of sexual harassment, assault,

and abuse in the real world (162).

Michonne's emotional side, fairly stoic, also resembles an expected stereotype in Black

femininity: "the trope of silent, dominant black women" (Musser 158). Brooks agrees, labeling

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[44] Issues 42–48; Michonne possibly endures sexual assault from others, too—her guard is vaguely suggested to have raped her in Issue 28.

[45] For example, I do not excuse Axel walking in on the showering women (Issue 16).

Michonne an example "of the stereotypical 'strong black woman'" (469). Strength is typical of

this construct: "Black femininity includes expectations that women consistently appear strong,

resilient, independent, self-determined, and display emotional restraint" (Avery et al. 165).

Where Black men may be expected to have strong emotional convictions and violent responses,

Black women simply endure. Michonne embodies this trope throughout *The Walking Dead*.

During one of the Governor's rapes, Michonne begins crying—according to her, not because of

the violence being done to her, but rather over the horror of what she will do to the Governor in

the future (Issue 29). Tyreese later discusses with Axel what happened to her in Woodbury,

saying that she is "keeping things to herself […] So, y'know…It's business as usual" (Issue 36).

Even after Carol's death, Michonne maintains her stoic demeanor, telling Tyreese not to "fuck

up whatever it is we have between us by **talking** about it" (Issue 42).

Additionally, although the setting necessitates such ugly actions at times, Michonne

usually is and, in her opinion, should be the one to kill her ex-lovers in their zombified forms.

The deed has occurred for other characters on occasion (for example, Andrea shooting her sister

Amy in Issue 3), but Michonne's stable of ex-paramours means that she has had to face that

decision multiple times and consistently wants to be the one to do it. The most recent example in

Issue 145 illustrates this point as Michonne approaches Ezekiel's zombified head:

> Rick [stopping her knife and arm]: "Let me."
> Michonne [tears streaming down her face]: "Let go of me."
> Rick: "You don't have to do this. I **can**. Let me do this for you."
> Michonne: "**Let go of me!**" [pushing Rick to the ground] "Let—" [Rick hits the ground]
> Andrea: "Michonne!"
> [Michonne stops, turns back to Rick, and embraces him.]
> Michonne: "I'm sorry." (Issue 145)

During the embrace, Andrea takes Michonne's knife and stabs Ezekiel's head, but we see that

Michonne felt obligated to perform this act just as she had on Tyreese (Issue 49) and Morgan

(Issue 83), which seems again to speak to some perceived need to be "strong," as killing

zombified humans is represented throughout this series.[46]

Glenn and the Model Minority

Discussing *TWD*'s treatment of race could not be complete without including another

main character who appeared in much of the series' run: Asian-American Glenn. Glenn shows

his worth to the main group of survivors from the very beginning. Part of the Atlanta group Rick

finds with his wife and son, Glenn quickly takes responsibility for making supply runs into the

city and is the first to find Rick and help him escape Atlanta (Issue 2). While not as physically

strong as Rick or Tyreese or as gifted with a gun as Dale or Andrea, his speed and cunning make

him an invaluable asset. Despite beginning as a matter of convenience, Glenn's relationship with

Maggie Greene is one of the happiest, long-lasting, and least-troubled relationships shown in the

series, and the birth of their son Hershel is one of the few bright spots in the zombie apocalypse.

Glenn is clearly a heroic figure from his first appearance until his death at the hands of Negan

(Issue 100).

Despite his heroism, Glenn remains confined within the "model minority" stereotype

often applied to Asian-Americans and because of this never fully embodies the cowboy or "good

father" figures as Rick does. In "The Model Minority in the Zombie Apocalypse," Helen Ho

defines the stereotype: "The model minority […] is assimilated as a subservient sidekick to

traditionally white heroes" (60). As Gary Okihiro argues, in *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians*

in American History and Culture, this "complementary, benign image" was often applied to

Asians specifically (139). Okihiro explains that this "concept […] posits a compatibility, if not

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[46] Compare, for example, Carl Grimes killing three zombies on his own while his father Rick lies ill. He reflects on it as a rite of passage and even uses the term "strong" to describe his new status: "I was scared at first when you got sick—but now, I'm not. I'm not scared at all. I don't need you to protect me anymore. I'm strong. I've grown up, I think, a lot. I'm not an adult yet, but close. **Close enough**" (Issue 50).

identity, between key elements of Asian and Anglo-American culture and thus, instead of deconstructing the European identity, Anglicized Asian culture—the representation—reifies and attests the original" (139-40).

As developed in the 1960s, this stereotypical construct was not positive because of its strong social motivation. As Keith Osajima comments, "Asian American success constituted a direct critique of Blacks who sought relief through federally supported social programs. Asian Americans, we were told, were able to make it on their own. Welfare programs were unnecessary" (217). McGowan and Lindgren elaborate:

> [T]his positive image of Asian Americans as a model minority conceals a more sinister core of beliefs about Asian Americans and other racial minorities in America: a view of Asian Americans as foreign and unpatriotic; a belief that there is little racial discrimination in America; a feeling that racial minorities have themselves to blame for persistent poverty and lags in educational and professional attainment; a hostility to foreigners, immigrants, and immigration; and a hostility to government programs to increase opportunities for Asian Americans and other ethnic minorities. (331)

Diana Yeh agrees, adding that "model minority discourse as a contemporary form of racialization […] constrains young people, and men in particular, by limiting ways of imagining the self as an embodied subject" (1198). Essentially, the "model minority" concept served as a way to reinforce majority norms and values and to limit how minority groups, especially Asian Americans, could construct themselves. Glenn's character throughout *TWD* comic series effectively embodies this image.

In *TWD*, Glenn consistently exhibits this model minority behavior in work effort, community involvement, dedication to higher ideals, and intermarriage, all qualities noted by Okihiro's discussion of the model minority stereotype (141-42). Ho connects the stereotype specifically to Glenn's character when discussing an AMC-sponsored online quiz: "The qualities in this summary—clever, skillful, group-minded, self-sacrificing, needing intimacy—closely align with the qualities often attributed to the model minority stereotype" (65). Unlike Tyreese

and Dexter, Glenn is more valuable for his mental attributes and quickness, using his knowledge as a pizza deliverer to make supply runs into Atlanta (Issues 2 and 4). He is swift to volunteer for dangerous situations—a fact noticed and criticized by his partner Maggie when they hear a gunshot from their new home in Alexandria:

> Maggie [watching Glenn descend the stairs]: "Glenn, stop**!** **Please!**"
> Glenn: "It's a gunshot, Maggie. It could be anything…That's not something we hear a lot. Someone could be hurt. I need to check it out."
> Maggie: "No, you **don't**. This is a big place—there are a lot of people who could be checking this out. Stay here. Sophia is scared enough as it is—we need you **here**."
> Glenn: "Maggie, you know I can't—" (Issue 78)

Glenn's predilection for this kind of heroic behavior is such that in Issue 87 Maggie begs Rick not to send Glenn out anymore, to which Rick acquiesces and then enforces in Issue 88. Glenn also cares a great deal about Maggie, their effectively adopted daughter Sophia, and Maggie's unborn child, as seen in his decision to move from Alexandria to the Hilltop.[47] As a character, Glenn's heroism crafts what Celine Parreñas Shimizu identifies as a masculinity that "care[s] for others."[48]

Also unlike Tyreese and Dexter, Glenn is no threat to Rick's leadership and submits to his community's wellbeing. Glenn generally goes along with the wishes of the group and, along with the women in the group of survivors, refuses to be part of the leadership council discussed in Issue 24. Glenn not only saves Rick's life (Issue 2) but consistently proves to be good at finding resources for the group: he locates guns in Atlanta (Issue 4), finds riot gear in the prison (Issue 25), and provides a hotwired car when they want to investigate a crashed helicopter (Issue 26). Through his usefulness and subservience to the community of survivors, Glenn exemplifies

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[47] Issue 99; unfortunately, this decision effectively gets Glenn killed when Negan catches the group and ultimately selects Glenn as his victim (Issue 100).

[48] Pg. 4; despite its potential interaction with the model minority stereotype, Shimizu argues that ultimately this caring manhood, "when we see Asian American men […] risk themselves for the sake of others," is a more ethical one than performances of hegemonic masculinity (5).

the model minority stereotype. Glenn certainly proves himself a valuable member, but he does not threaten Rick's hegemonic leadership, in contrast to Dexter and Tyreese, who caused conflicts.

In terms of his relationship with Maggie, Glenn assimilates within the larger hegemonic community. Glenn eventually marries her (Issue 37), but he does not even initiate the relationship shortly after they meet. Maggie simply says, "I'll **fuck** you" (Issue 10), and their relationship progresses from there. This passivity reflects what Shimizu identifies as an assigned "hyposexuality to Asian American men in popular culture" (3) and upholds the stereotype of Asian-American men as less sexual (Wong, Horn, and Chen 458). Even Glenn's fairly normal English name is a marker of assimilation, not cultural distinctiveness.

Despite Glenn's obvious value to the group, his being a "model" minority does not necessarily make for a more favorable portrayal of race. As Okihiro notes, model minority behavior can "be read as components of the yellow peril" (142), reinforcing fears of difference and continuing to assign stereotypical traits to Asians. Some of these model characteristics may be valuable for a person to have, but they can also be taken to an extreme that threatens the hegemonic majority's way of life. As Okihiro elaborates:

> Asian workers can be "diligent" and "slavish," "frugal" and "cheap," "upwardly mobile" and "aggressive," while Asian families and communities can be "mutual aid" and "self-serving" institutions, "inclusive" and "exclusive" groupings, "multicultural enclaves" and "balkanized ghettos." Asian religious beliefs can be characterized as "transcendentalism" and "paganism," "filial piety" and "superstition," while intermarriage can indicate "assimilation" and "mongrelization," "integration" and "infiltration," and children can be "our second-generation problem" and "our amazing Chinese kids." "Models" can be "perils," and "perils," "models" despite their apparent incongruity. (142)

While Glenn remains a steadfast ally to Rick and one of the first to help however he can for most of the series' run, it is strange that he dies almost immediately after renouncing Rick's leadership at Alexandria and wanting to move his family to the Hilltop. Even if the negative

components of "yellow peril" do not seem to be much of a concern in Glenn's character, racial stereotypes in the present-day continue to reinforce themselves and harm targeted groups with unfair generalizations. As Diana Yeh summarizes, "Conceptualizing the model minority discourse as a contemporary form of racialization, it highlights how it constrains young people, and men in particular, by limiting ways of imagining the self as an embodied subject" (1198).

Glenn can also be read as a feminized character, a problem that has long confronted cultural depictions of Asian men (Shimizu 3-4). Glenn rather passively pines for Carol (Issue 10) before accepting Maggie's proposal of sex. Also, Glenn is grouped with the women when Dale discusses the leadership council with Rick (Issue 24). When Rick asks about why no women in the group are part of the suggested council, Dale notes that refusal of leadership is not exclusive to the women: "But yeah, they're [the women] fine with **us** making the decisions. Truth be told, it's not just the women, **Glenn** feels the same way. I think they just want to be protected" (Issue 24). Although Dale's antecedent is somewhat vague, putting Glenn in a category with the women feminizes him, landing close to the stereotype of Asian-American men being less masculine (Wong, Horn, and Chen 454). Additionally, when Michonne is captured and raped by the Governor, Glenn is the one who breaks down into tears over hearing what the Governor does to her, further emphasizing his relative sensitivity. Noticing Glenn's reaction, the Governor hopes to use this sensitivity as a weakness, trying to find the prison by leveraging Rick's lack of confidence in Glenn's ability to resist interrogation (Issue 29). Glenn seems to reference his perceived lack of masculinity in a comment after his marriage to Maggie:

> Glenn: "That was nice—I mean, I don't want to sound all **girly** or anything but that was a nice ceremony. I mean—**much** nicer than I ever thought it could be.
> Maggie: "Yeah…my **"dress"** was totally pretty. (Issue 37)

Maggie's sarcasm undercuts Glenn's enthusiasm at the wedding, marking her as less concerned with such "girly" things. Maggie's sexual aggressiveness is also reinforced when, a few panels

later after they undress, Maggie is the one to leap at Glenn, saying, "**C'mere, husband!**" (Issue 37). Physically, Maggie claims to be stronger than Glenn shortly afterwards, as some of the group takes weapons from a National Guard armory (Issue 38). While there may not be anything wrong with Glenn being outshone by his wife, the contrast in his relationship with Maggie compared with Rick and Lori or Tyreese and Carol highlights what seems to be his lack of stereotypical masculinity.

Compared to Michonne or even his wife Maggie, Glenn is not a stereotypically masculine character for much of the series. He does, however, begin coming more into his own as he becomes a father and starts making decisions for his family, moving them to the Hilltop (Issue 99). Even later in the run, however, his wife Maggie still prominently makes decisions about and for him, such as when she gets Rick not to send him on dangerous missions (Issue 87). Shimizu would likely argue that Glenn's actions offer a more ethical masculinity (5), one based on cooperation and mutual decision-making with his wife, but it may be telling that the biggest decision he makes—to leave Alexandria—ends up resulting in his death by Negan's hands.

The Walking Dead and the Horror of Miscegenation

Zombie media are often about relationships, and this theme extends to romantic relationships as well. In "Good Girls Don't Date Dead Boys," Chara Kee argues that the first wave of zombie media in the early part of the 20th century toyed with the horror of implied miscegenation: "While voodoo-style zombie films were probably not trying to fill in for what was missing on film screens in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, many of them did serve as substitutes for direct representations of miscegenation" (177). Alister supports this reading of such films: "1932's *White Zombie*, despite its title, holds the threat of enslavement-by-zombie-master over our white heroine" and clarifies that "the woman's spiritual and […] sexual enslavement" is intimated (316).

Even Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* arguably shares this theme. In commenting on

protagonist Ben's race and relational interactions, Robert Lightning argues that Ben connects

"black energy […] with life" (22). Additionally, in light of Ben's verbal and physical interactions

with Barbra, *Night*'s female lead, Lightning argues that Ben's attempts to calm her hysteria

highlight the "historically valid interracial social dynamics" (22) of the day. Ponder's "Dawn of

the Different" goes even further in his discussion of the film: "According to North American

cinematic logic, one could safely assume that Ben and Barbra, the remaining adults, would fall in

love by film's end" (551). Ben's ultimate fate, however, makes this impossible, and Ponder

blames societal attitudes for the film's grim ending:

> While the late 60s might have been ready to see a black man save, protect, and even
> punch a white woman, the era apparently was not prepared to see him walk away hand-
> in-hand with her as innumerable zombies rise from the dead to keep *Night*'s black-white
> couple from the normative romantic conclusion of North American cinema. (551)

In short, Ben's race makes him a disruptive figure to White hegemony, and behind his

relationship with Barbra lies "the oppressive history of the sexual segregation of black men and

white women in America" (Lightning 28).

This theme, however, is not confined to older media. As Kee notes, "[S]urprisingly

enough, zombie films continue to do this work today: in contemporary cannibal-style films, the

fantasies of miscegenation on display in earlier zombie films live on" (177). Ponder points out

that the theme begun in Romero's *Night* was continued in the 2004 Zack Snyder film *Dawn of*

the Dead, itself a kind of remake of Romero's 1978 film of the same name (552). Snyder's *Dawn*

"brings those mere inferences [of an interracial family] to graphic fruition with Andre (Mekhi

Phifer) and Luda (Inna Korobkina), a black–white couple pregnant with an interracial child"

(552). Andre and Luda seem to be a relatively happy couple, considering the circumstances, but

Luda's zombie infection, gained when they fight their way into the film's mall, passes to her

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child. Luda dies in labor after being tied up by Andre, and fellow survivor Norma shoots the zombified Luda after her death. In response, Andre shoots and kills Norma, whose return fire also kills Andre. The rest of the group checks on Luda's baby, but they find that the child is a zombie and must immediately kill him. This birth "dashes the group's last hope, inspiring them to desert the security of their fortress and face the zombie horde."[49]

TWD, thanks to its large cast, long serialization, and focus on human characters naturally takes on this idea. In contrast to early zombie media such as *White Zombie*, zombies in *TWD* are not really a stand-in for race. Further, the comics actually show interracial relationships, in their case through the development (and termination) of two early-series couples: Chris and Julie and Tyreese and Carol. In contrast to Romero's earlier, more ambiguous *Night*, *TWD* suggests that these relationships are undesirable and ultimately destructive, given both how they end and the subsequent lack of interracial relationships in the series. This precursor to miscegenation can be seen as a violation of the patriarchal themes already established in the comics, and this approach to interracial relationships continues the theme found in Snyder's *Dawn*: mixing makes mulatto monsters (cf. Ponder 554),

Children of an interracial union face many challenges, especially in the United States. Evan Lampe argues in the essay "In Praise of the Innsmouth Look—Nautical Terror and the Specter of Atlantic History in H.P. Lovecraft's Fiction" that mixed racial heritage, to many, raises the specter of "degradation [as] a result of [...] worldliness" (168). Legally, this possibility

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[49] Ponder 55; for an excellent contrast at how miscegenation in a zombie film can function as a vehicle for inclusiveness, see Enrique Garcia's "Latino Action Heroes, Strippers, and Non-Hegemonic Miscegenation: Family Apocalypse in Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror*." Garcia's examination, however, does note that historically pop culture miscegenation has been a potential avenue of inclusion for Latinos specifically, such as in *I Love Lucy*.

became a large concern in the United States after the Civil War and the end of slavery.[50] Jeremy

Richter reports:

> Two centuries of slavery had, prior to 1865, created a caste system which maintained, at least officially, the distinction between white and black. With that barrier removed and the federal government attempting to institute legal racial equality, of primary concern to many was the preservation of the purity of the white race. (345-6)

Researcher Deniz Gevrek notes in the essay "Interracial Marriage, Migration, and *Loving*" that

41 U.S. states outlawed interracial marriages at some point in history (27). This American

attitude against interracial relationships echoes that of English imperialist Rudyard Kipling who,

in the view of critic Sharleen Mondal, offered his stories as "a cautionary tale against

miscegenation, warning readers that a 'pure' whiteness […] exists and must be protected" (736).

This attitude spread throughout American society throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Lampe observes how even science supported this anxiety:

> Fears over miscegenation, rooted in scientific racism, took hold in the United States during the progressive era of the early twentieth century, complicating the progressive's vision of civilization advancement. Groups as far apart as the Ku Klux Klan and university anthropologists joined the chorus warning against interracial sex. (197)

Though writing of the colonial history of Australian aboriginals and English settlers, Mitchell

Rolls aptly summarizes the historical problem for those with an interracial identity, which could

easily apply to the United States:

> Descendants of miscegenation, often conceived through violence, were for long the subjects of ostracism, concern and administrative contumely. At various points they were described as inheriting the worst characteristics of both races, as being irretrievably trapped in the chasm betwixt two cultures, as having no culture at all, and always as a problem. In some jurisdictions this led to ever finer and sillier gradations between such descendants so as to more securely locate them within the colonial order, thereby effecting greater administrative control. Descendants of mixed heritage were not granted the liberty to exist in their own complex right. They were instead conceived of as a group

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[50] Though, for example, Deniz Gevrek notes that "anti-miscegenation laws banning interracial relationships between blacks and whites were enforced as early as 1662" (p. 27).

to whom things needed to be done in order to provide them with culture and an identity. (64)

The characters of zombie media are not exempt from this tension, as the interracial unborn child in Zack Snyder's *Dawn* highlights. Given the deep roots of the White-Black binary in the Western hemisphere, Ponder comments thusly about the unborn interracial child: "discourse suggests the extent to which North American assumptions about race would render even the human-born black–white biracial child a mulatto monster" (554). Although the child's eventual zombification amplifies the horror, a living infant would still be cause for societal unease; as Ponder explains, he represents that "a taboo has been broken, that despite prohibitions against interracial sex, miscegenation has occurred and the result of that forbidden sexuality is about to enter a society that forbids it" (554).

This view of interracial sexuality as forbidden can be seen in *TWD* through Tyreese's attitudes toward his daughter Julie's relationship with Chris, which already exists by the time readers meet them (Issue 7). When Tyreese interrupts them kissing, he begins a lengthy (by comics' standards) lecture about the potential danger of sexual intimacy—specifically, pregnancy:

> Tyreese: "Okay, guys. We need to **talk**."
> Julie: "**DAAAD!**"
> Tyreese [finger pointed at the viewer, accusingly]: "Don't '**Dad**' me, young lady. This **isn't** going to go on right under my nose. I just don't have **time** to put up with this. I don't want to have to **worry** about you two fooling around all the time. I don't want to have to keep an eye on you on top of all the other **shit** I've got to do. You want to get **pregnant**? Do you not see how dangerous that would be? I don't know **how** Rick and Lori are dealing with it the way **they** are. This isn't a **game**. I know you two **think** you're **in love** but you're **young**…Think about what you're doing.
> [walking away] *sigh* "Just keep your **hands** to yourselves." (Issue 10)

Of course, pregnancy is challenging and dangerous enough in non-apocalyptic settings, but the peril of reproduction seems to be Tyreese's specific concern for the two of them, as opposed to their activities making them less vigilant, their commitment to each other, or some less biological

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concern. In contrast, he has no similar conversation with Carol (of which we are aware, at least), and her later difficulty with oral sex (Issue 22) all but requires that their relationship primarily involved vaginal intercourse (already suggested when they have sex in Issue 17).

After Tyreese confronts them, Chris and Julie make some cryptic comments about wanting to be together forever, with Chris not wanting to wait, obviously intent on continuing their relationship over her father's protest (Issue 10). Their plan culminates in them having sex for the first time, and then, by prior agreement, they attempt to shoot each other (Issue 14). Chris fires before Julie does, killing her but leaving no one to shoot him in turn. Tyreese, hearing the gunshot, rushes in and cradles his daughter's corpse while Chris weakly protests, "It wasn't supposed to be like this" (Issue 14). In a sense, the pair still gets their wish to be together in death: although Chris shoots her reanimated corpse to save Tyreese, Tyreese shortly after beats him to death and continues his violence on Chris's reanimated corpse (Issue 15).

Perhaps the concept of people being driven to suicide to escape the zombie apocalypse is understandable, but *TWD* seems to argue that such a stance is ultimately weak. Later in the series, Tyreese shares his experience in high school of an ex-girlfriend who killed herself and proclaims that suicide in *TWD* is "not something to be sad about" (Issue 43). Although his words sound harsh (and he does not explicitly apply them to his daughter), *TWD* in general has its characters seeking to survive, while those who despair earn censure and reproach. One other such character is Allen, who, when his wife Donna is eaten, nearly stays behind to be devoured as well (Issue 9). When speaking of Donna's death, Andrea tells the grieving Allen that his "sons **need** you to **deal** with it…and **get over it**" (Issue 10). This same kind of emotional weakness in Chris and Julie juxtaposed with their practicing a "forbidden sexuality" (explicitly condemned by her father and implicitly by the American interracial taboo) argues that something is wrong with them. Tyreese killing Chris is arguably in line with Rick's "You kill, you die" mantra from Issue

17, although in Issue 23 Rick criticizes Tyreese for the action. Other than this heated rebuke, the series never really defends the choice made by Chris and Julie, painting them as deviants even by the potentially lowered standards of the zombie apocalypse.

The comics' other prominent interracial couple, Tyreese and Carol, begin their relationship initially happy but later see it turn troubled. They get together not long after first meeting (Issue 9), but Michonne's arrival drives a wedge between them. Michonne interrupts the pair as they are cuddling in the weight room, making it impossible for her to be unaware of their relationship, and when Michonne brings up football, Tyreese eagerly talks to her about it and ignores Carol (Issue 20). Tyreese and Michonne are seen together in the next issue—alone— trying to relax in the gym:

> Michonne: "Basketball, too? I'm impressed. Is there **any** sport you don't play?"
> Tyreese: "Did you forget? I was **terrible** at football."
> Michonne [smirking]: "But I'm sure you're good at a **lot** of things."

A few panels later Michonne interrupts Tyreese's worry over Rick by saying "I know what you **need**" and lowering herself off panel (Issue 21). Although Tyreese protests, it is not particularly strong, and he eventually accepts Michonne's shushing (Issue 21).

Meanwhile, Carol watches at least part of the act through the door, tears streaming down her face (Issue 21). In the next issue, Carol attempts to mimic Michonne in performing oral sex but cannot complete it. Brooks compares the two women's sexual activity thusly:

> Kirkman clearly juxtaposes Michonne's willingness to perform dirty' sexual acts against Carol's reaction to oral sex. Carol is portrayed as beyond unwilling; she is literally unable to perform the act, evidence of her conjugal sanctity […] Michonne performs a nonprocreative and therefore nonnormative act upon Tyreese, further distinguishing her sexuality from Carol's. (470).

Essentially, Michonne fulfills what Brooks describes as "the stereotype of the strong black woman by establishing a connection to the other black male character, Tyreese, whom she befriends and eventually seduces" (470). When Michonne and Tyreese "find a kinship of spirit

as they converse and find multiple mutual interests" (Brooks 470), the comics seem to be portraying the two as being more in harmony with one another: their relationship is simply more sensible than the what happened between Tyreese and Carol.

The suggested link between interracial relationships and mental instability is perhaps even more disturbing. After breaking up with Tyreese, Carol argues for new patterns of relationships and makes advances on both Rick and Lori, suggesting that they raise their children together in a polyamorous relationship. She first comes on to Rick when he awakens after his fight with Tyreese (Issue 24). As he worries about "losing it," she interrupts his concern with a kiss, explaining that his support for her in his fight with Tyreese "meant a lot to me" (Issue 24). Rick tries to remain sympathetic but still verbally dismisses her: "I understand you doing this but—this ain't **it**, y'know?" (Issue 24). Obviously upset, Carol goes to get her daughter Sophia and tells Rick where the rest of the group can be found (Issue 24).

Carol's advance on Lori comes a bit later, when Rick, Glenn, and Michonne are away seeking a crashed helicopter (Issue 26). Lori, angry at Rick for leaving so close to their child's impending birth, complains about him to Carol, who says that they need to talk:

> Carol: "I kinda want to **marry** you. Not just **you**, you understand—you **and** Rick. Just hear me out—it's not as crazy as it sounds. I mean, I've been thinking about what Rick said—about how things are **never** going to go back to the way they used to be and how we need to just make a new life for ourselves. This just **makes sense** to me. I love you **both** and we could **all** raise Carl and Sophia and the new baby together. I know it seems weird now but we don't have to follow the **old** rules, we can make **new** ones. We could all be **happy** together." (Issue 26)

Other than a worried look in the panel after Carol gushes out her plan, Lori does not respond until the next issue.

Lori's eventual rejection solidifies Carol's proposal as deviant. Lori at first tries to let her down more easily with a "Jesus **Christ**, Carol—I'm from a small town in Kentucky. Did you **really** think I'd go for this?" (Issue 27). Lori then calls the proposal "insane" and argues that it

would scar their children—including Sophia—for life (Issue 27). Carol goes away unhappy, but

a few issues later, as Lori worries over her missing husband, Carol attempts to comfort her:

> Lori: "It's hard enough worrying about raising Carl and this new baby in this world as it is…without worrying about doing it alone."
> Carol [placing a hand on her leg]: "You don't have to be **alone**." (Issue 30)

Lori interprets the gesture not as one of comfort but as a romantic proposition, and she erupts:

"**Jesus Christ**, Carol! I thought you'd given up on that! I can't—I—What the hell is wrong with

you?" (Issue 30). Lori storms away, taking Carl with her, while Carol calls after her: "But that's

not what I **meant**! That's not what I meant" (Issue 30).

This plot is dropped for a bit but sees its conclusion in Issue 41. After Lori gives birth to

her daughter Judith (Issue 39), she has lunch with Carol and tries to make amends (Issue 40).

Near the beginning of the next issue, however, Rick and Lori discuss the "weirdness" with Carol,

calling her behavior "erratic" and mentioning their discomfort with her advances (Issue 41). As

the issue develops, it is clear that Carol has decided living is no longer worthwhile, as she

questions Lori about taking care of Sophia and has sex with Billy Greene. Approaching a zombie

captured by the group for study, Carol vents her frustrations: "You're probably **not** going to like

it here, y'know. They're nice enough people, at first they're great…but they're so goddamn

judgmental. One slip-up…and that's it for you. Really" (Issue 41). Obviously harboring

resentment over Lori's tantrum, Carol approaches the zombie more closely, continuing to

confide in the undead captive: "Everyone thinks I'm **crazy**. I don't really have anyone to talk to,

so I figured I'd introduce myself. I'm Carol. […] I really hope you like me. [as zombie bites into

her neck] **Huakk!** Oh, good…you **do** like me" (Issue 41). Even at the end, Carol seems to accept

the group's evaluation of "crazy," and disbelief and disdain come from most of the survivors

who discuss her actions (Issue 42). At least in the eyes of the other survivors, there is something

very wrong with Carol in her final moments as she succumbs to her delusions, conversing with the zombie as if greeting a good friend.

The final actions taken by Chris, Julie, and Carol argue for them exhibiting mental weaknesses and not just "crazy" behavior. Despair and suicide in *TWD* seem mentally and emotionally weak, and Carol, feeling isolated and unloved, eventually kills herself by zombie (Issue 42) after her previous attempt at slitting her wrists (Issue 22). She displays no survival instinct as she approaches the chained zombie, and, unlike others who react with shock or despair while being eaten, she was a willing victim.[51] Andrea ponders Carol after her death in Issue 42, claiming not to understand her motivations, and Tyreese's hard stance reinforces the audience's negative impressions:

> Tyreese: "Had a girlfriend in high school…It was a long time after we broke up. Well, a few months, but when you're in high school, that's a long time. She committed suicide. […] Suicide…Any more it just pisses me off. Makes me angry at the person who did it. It's not something to be sad about, I don't think. Carol doesn't **deserve** my sorrow." (Issue 42)

With the next page cutting to other survivors, Tyreese's statement on suicide seems relatively final.

Although not as directly condemned, Julie and Chris also essentially commit suicide, casting them into this same category. Tyreese makes this connection as he defends his actions to Rick, claiming that Chris was already committing suicide and he was just finishing the job (Issue 23). Other than Rick's blame throwing in response (Issue 23), no one really faults Tyreese for beating Chris to death, suggesting the low value they place on Chris's life due to his actions. While Julie is never so directly judged, neither does anyone makes any defense of what she did.

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[51] See, for example, Jessie and her son Ron in Issue 83.

Both Chris and Julie are effectively taking the "easy" way out of life, so the rest of the group does not have to concern themselves with their fate.

Expanding Diversity in *The Walking Dead*

TWD as a comic series valorizes Rick, the White cowboy father, and reinforces him as a dominant authority figure. Though Rick is not explicitly identified in these mythic roles to justify his leadership, his rugged individualism has made him a hardened survivor, and his patriarchal impulses cause him to assert his power over whatever survivor group he finds, either to take control or to punish them. Other White characters also embody these myths to varying degrees: Dale becomes a kind of parent to the whole group, and Hershel's introduction into the plot is accompanied by the presence of his numerous children. In fact, Hershel's failure to protect his son Billy during the Governor's assault on the prison leads him to despair (Issue 48). Hershel asks the Governor to kill him as he weeps over the body of this last son (Issue 48). In contrast, when it comes to characters of other races, the series seems to resort to the stereotypes of Black masculinity and femininity or model minority myths.

Nonetheless, the series' portrayal of racial diversity has seemed to improve in more recent arcs. The rescue of Father Gabriel Stokes and the reappearance of Morgan Jones add Black male characters with more emotional depth, ones not defined primarily by their physical prowess or sexuality. Still, both are arguably failed father figures: Gabriel, a figuratively religious father who leaves human survivors to be eaten outside his church, and Morgan, an actual father who fails to protect his son. Ezekiel is another African-American, but one who is depicted in a leadership position, "king" over a group of survivors in the Washington, D.C., area. Beginning with her appearance in Issue 53, Rosita becomes the first long-running Hispanic character in the series. Heath, a Black supply runner for the Alexandria community, first seen in Issue 69, eventually strikes up a relationship with one of the town's doctors, a White woman

named Denise Cloyd (Issue 79). Their romance ends tragically when she forgoes amputation of her arm to save his life after a land mine takes off his leg (Issue 120), but at least this outcome results from outside forces and not inner character flaws. Denise dies saving his life, and, frankly, most relationships in the series do not have a happy ending. The group's arrival at Alexandria also introduces more characters with diverse sexualities: couple Aaron and Eric, who act as recruiters for Alexandria (Issues 67 and 68), and Paul "Jesus" Monroe from the Hilltop colony (Issue 91), who has a relationship with Alex, a male nurse at the Hilltop who eventually moves on to a relationship with another man.

Perhaps society being aware of what happened with *TWD*'s early characters and the popular response to them has helped broaden the potential of new ones. While Kirkman's thoughts about his characters' racial and gendered diversity are hard to find, his depictions of these characters and introductions of new ones have at least been getting better.[52] Such portrayals highlight how popular culture can provide an avenue of change for marginalized groups. As Rhonda Jeffries argues in the introduction to an issue of the *Western Journal of Black Studies*, "Media messages are valued and championed as worthy contributions to help educate the oppressor regarding the systemic discrimination that Black women have endured and the hidden messages behind their acts of resistance" (82). Perhaps better character portrayals will contribute to an expansion of diversity in the comic series and other cultural artifacts.

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[52] Simon Abrams of *The Village Voice* does record Kirkman's words in a *Comics Journal* interview from 2008: "I don't mean to sound sexist, but as far as women have come over the last 40 years, you don't really see a lot of women hunters. They're still in the minority in the military, and there's not a lot of female construction workers. I hope that's not taken the wrong way. I think women are as smart, resourceful, and capable in most things as any man could be … but they are generally physically weaker. That's science."

The world of *The Walking Dead* comics is still one dominated by White men, who hold most of the leadership positions in this world. Dan Hassler-Forest summarizes the comics well in his analysis:

> As protagonist Rick demonstrates an ability to navigate back and forth between opposite roles of sympathetic hero and monstrous villain, the ongoing narrative of *The Walking Dead* should not primarily be read as a critique of patriarchal hegemony and the violence inherent in phallocentric discourse. […] Instead, it creates a space in which the contradictions of this kind of power are made visible, and the problematic ways in which the myth of the White Hero relate to issues such as race, social class and gender are allowed to come to the surface. (353)

In short, the comics may not focus on deconstructing this hegemony, but they still provide valuable fodder for doing so. Examining how Rick relates to Tyreese or Glenn and the myths invoked can inform us about contemporary society and what myths we value. To give Kirkman credit, that the series has made progress is good, but more can be done as the story of Rick Grimes and his associated group of survivors continues.

CHAPTER 4

WALKING FROM THE PAGE TO THE SMALL SCREEN

AMC's *The Walking Dead* may be the most critically and commercially successful

zombie property of the 2010s. Since its brief six-episode first season, *The Walking Dead* has

become a mainstay of American popular culture. A rough adaptation of the comics, *The Walking*

Dead television series similarly focuses on Rick Grimes, his family, and their fellow survivors,

highlighting their travels from the outskirts of Atlanta to the Greene farm to the prison to their

current activities at the settlement of Alexandria. The show has even spawned its own

companion series, *Fear the Walking Dead*, which premiered in 2015 and focuses on life on the

West Coast immediately after the outbreak begins. With seven seasons in the main series

completed, as of 2017, and seemingly no end in sight, things seem bright for AMC's adaptation.

The television series is not only culturally popular but has gained its share of scholarly

analysis as well. As Stephen Gencarella observes in "Thunder without Rain: Fascist Masculinity

in AMC's *The Walking Dead*," the series has attracted both popular and academic attention:

> Since its debut in 2010, AMC's adaptation of the graphic novel *The Walking Dead*
> (*TWD*) has enjoyed swelling acclaim. The show premiered with 5.35 million viewers,
> garnered an average of fourteen million per episode in the fifth season, and drew nearly
> sixteen million for its finale in March 2015. Viewers discuss the series online with
> fervent rumination. Scholarly attention has also surfaced, with an initial burst of laudation
> increasingly giving to exegesis. (126)

Such a successful show naturally attracts critics; still, the series has drawn some criticism for its

treatment of diversity. As Gencarella reports, "A number of professional and amateur media

critics have castigated *TWD* for slow pacing, and several have expressed concerns about its

representation—or lack thereof—of race, gender and LGBT issues, or critiqued its patriarchal underpinnings" ("Thunder" 126). In "*The Walking Dead*: Late Liberalism and Masculine Subjection in Apocalypse Fictions," Katherine Sugg argues that "[t]he show's stereotyping extends to its racial coding as well: in the first three seasons, non-white characters largely play supporting, and usually disposable, roles" (795). If the television show is a decent adaptation of the comics, it should be no surprise that Hassler-Forest's "problematic ways in which the myth of the White Hero relate to issues such as race, social class and gender" (353) could apply almost as much here. Given the emphasis of this study, comparing the television adaptation with the comics that spawned it, we have investigated these representations focusing in two major areas: first, how the TV characters and situations compare to their comics counterparts,[53] and second, how characters and situations unique to the television show are conducted. In this chapter, we ask then how the television series negotiates adaptation of the comics' plotlines with its own innovation of new characters and developments. Specifically, this examination focuses on three issues: how White masculinity is portrayed and then critiqued, especially through TV!Glenn's temporary embrace of its qualities; how the Rick and Michonne pairing argues against the miscegenation typical in zombie media; and how new characters, especially T-Dog, are used to make arguments about diversity.[54]

The Dominance and Deficiency of White Masculinity

A prominent critique of the television show has been that *The Walking Dead* seems to privilege masculinity. As Gencarella observes, this elevation of masculinity, and corresponding

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[53] In an attempt to provide some clarity when discussing characters who appear in both the comics and television series, I have adopted the notation first shown in this paragraph: for example, comics!Glenn v. TV!Glenn.

[54] For an overview of the series' early characters, see the Appendix.

dismissal of femininity, goes back to the very beginning of the series ("Thunder" 132), as seen in

a conversation between Rick and Shane in the first episode:

> Shane: "What's the difference between men and women?"
> Rick: "Is this a joke?"
> Shane: "No, serious. I never met a woman who knew how to turn off a light. They're born thinking the switch only goes one way: on. They're struck blind the second they leave a room. I mean every woman, I ever let have a key I swear to God. It's like I come home, house is all lit up, and my job, you see, apparently because my chromosomes happen to be different. 'Cause I then gotta walk through that house, turn off every single light this chick left on."
> Rick: "Is that right?"
> Shane: "Yeah, baby." ("Days Gone By")

This conversation "proves auspicious for the performance of masculinity throughout *TWD*"

(Gencarella "Thunder" 132), not only by arguing for a strong distinction between men and

women but also in how dismissive Shane is towards women. Later in their conversation, he

confesses to Rick: "I wanna say, 'Bitch, you mean to tell me you've been hearing this your entire

life, and you are still too damn stupid to learn how to turn off a switch?' You know I don't

actually say that, though" ("Days Gone By"). Gencarella argues that this subordination continues

throughout the rest of the series as well, as even the female figures "harden emotionally and

physically and train in weapons to become effective slayers of ghouls and humans as the series

progresses"—a decidedly masculine logic ("Thunder" 134). In other words, Gencarella makes

the case that even these "hardened" female survivors, such as Carol and Sasha, must adopt a

performance of masculinity to survive, in contrast to more domestic women such as Lori and

Beth.[55]

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[55] As a counter-point, the "domestic" women do prove valuable and even display some survival skills in killing zombies, but Beth, for example, is usually shown singing and taking care of the infant Judith as her assigned role. While the "hardened" Sasha and Michonne do seem largely self-taught, Andrea and Carol received training from men in the group to make them better survivors, suggesting that their success is dependent on the men with whom they cooperate.

TWD does not privilege simple masculinity in general, however; the masculinity

portrayed and rewarded is also a White one. We could perhaps assume this perspective given

how many of the cast members are White, but a number of critics have made this argument.

Charing Ball, writing for the website *Madame Noire*, says that the show "is either an allegory for

the pitfalls of following a society based around white male supremacy or an actual celebration of

the Anglo-Saxon patriarchy and supremacy" (para. 3). Gencarella similarly connects *TWD*'s

privileged masculinity with the Fascist movements of Western Europe ("Thunder" 128).

Gencarella explains his comparison when noting the hostile competition encouraged by Fascist

states:

> [S]uch hostility is precisely the world depicted by *TWD*. The organized groups that
> populate the series represent political factions at war with one another to determine
> sovereignty over an emerging state. The primary survivors regularly self-identify as 'our
> people' or 'our group', and often debate the inclusion, exclusion and potential violence
> towards strangers. Their actions mimic other groups who thwart their progress during the
> series, and as *The Doctrine* [*of Fascism*, written by Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile]
> applauds, not everyone is welcome. Solitary individuals (such as a hitchhiker begging for
> assistance [the episode "Clear"]) are hastily disregarded unless they offer immediate
> benefit to a group. *TWD* knows friends and enemies but not neighbours. ("Thunder" 129)

In Gencarella's view, this competition is based on performances of masculinity in particular,

because of the show's emphasis on "heroic males who sacrifice for the state by denying

themselves or killing others" ("Thunder" 131). Gencarella continues: "*TWD* relies upon

representation of the leader and the heroic male who subjugate the masses, living and undead"

("Thunder" 131).

Few critics go as far as Gencarella, but a more typical analysis of *TWD* television show

connects the masculinity on display with the mythic cowboy, as several authors have pointed out.

Helen Ho in "The Model Minority in the Zombie Apocalypse" speaks of *TWD*'s "flawed

masculinity of the group's white 'cowboys'" (61) and adds that "the qualities of white

masculinity become untenable in the postapocalypse" (71). Sugg agrees that "[b]oth the western

and *The Walking Dead* present audiences with an explicitly white masculinist survival narrative whose apparent goal is to uphold the mythologies of liberal ideology and individualism" (801). Although discussing only the comic series, Hassler-Forest also connects the masculinity on display in *TWD* with the American Western genre: "The connection between the western and zombie genre is made explicit from the very start of *The Walking Dead*, the first two issues bearing covers that portray protagonist Rick Grimes as a cowboy figure in a zombie wasteland" (342). The comics' iconic shot of Rick entering Atlanta on horseback (Issue 2) is recreated in the television series' first episode ("Days Gone By") and even used as the DVD cover for the first season.

The masculine myth of patriarchy also finds representation in the television show. Rick's goal in the first couple of episodes is to find his lost family, and, as his comics' counterpart, he will do essentially anything in defense of them. As Cady and Oates observe, "Seasons one and two of the popular AMC television show *The Walking Dead* […] have several key moments that focus on family, especially on rebuilding a heteronormative familial unit" (317). Shane's increased prominence in the TV series contributes to this emphasis, and the conflict between the two men throughout the first two seasons over Lori and Carl can be read as a conflict over who can fulfill the role of patriarch.[56] Cady and Oates elaborate on this narrative:

> Although Rick's police partner, Shane, comes to the hospital to try to rescue Rick when the zombie apocalypse begins, he believes his partner dead, so leaves to help Rick's wife, Lori, and 12-year-old son, Carl, escape the zombie hordes. Shane seemingly wastes no time in reconstituting a heterosexual family, with Lori as his sexual partner and Carl as a son who looks to Shane for advice and guidance. (317)

This conflict eventually leads to Shane's death, as it does in the comics:

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[56] Arguably, both men "qualify" for this position by already embodying the cowboy masculinity described above. This characteristic positions them as good leaders, protectors, and providers.

Rick stabs Shane, and when he reanimates as a zombie, Carl shoots him—the adoptive son killing the fake father. Despite the fact that pandemonium reigns for the rest of season two and Lori dies in season three, Rick, Lori, and Carl's original family is repeatedly framed as the central family that establishes the series. (Cady and Oates 318)

Unlike its comic forerunner, however, *TWD* television series does not necessarily hold this cowboy masculinity or patriarchy as particularly powerful or worthy of emulation. While the Grimes family is the initial one we see featured, Rick's failure to protect Lori causes him to spiral into despair, highlighting his failure as a patriarch. As we examine the relationships between different characters, we also see how other non-White or female characters resist this White masculinity and seek their own role in the new society. The next section of this chapter considers some of these relationships and how the initially powerful White perspective is refuted and dethroned in the service of other perspectives.

White Men and (Sometimes Subtle) Southern Bigotry

Rick and Shane are not the only White men in the television series, though they most effectively embody both the cowboy and the patriarch myths. Most of the other White men fit fairly well as one myth or the other but not both; that they also do not occupy leadership roles early in the series suggests that the television show in its first few years continued to promote the power of the cowboy patriarch much as its comics forerunner. As episodes continued, however, *TWD* television series began to include more diverse perspectives and hold them up as worthy of representation within the on-screen survivor communities. Examining the interpersonal relationships established by Merle and Daryl Dixon, Hershel Greene, and Dale Horvath within the television series highlights how the show began to move away from being dominated by masculinity myths and opened the door for other perspectives. Merle and Daryl exemplify the rugged individualism of the cowboy taken to an extreme, which results in their (potential)

isolation from the group, while Hershel and Dale figure as elderly patriarchal figures whose exercise of paternal power constricts the women in their lives.

As noted in the first chapter, Merle Dixon provides the series' first direct address of race at nearly the beginning of its run. After being beaten and rebuked by Rick, we see that Merle's rugged racism is not so easy to overcome. He bluntly replies, "Screw you, man" to Rick's "There's us—and the dead," and the group leaves the injured T-Dog to watch over him ("Guts"). A bit later, the two are still on the roof when Merle asks T-Dog to cut him out of the handcuffs. T-Dog asks why: "So you can beat my ass again? Or call me a n*gger some more?" Merle is unfazed by the remarks and replies, "Oh, come on now, it wasn't personal. It's just that your kind and my kind ain't meant to mix. That's all. It don't mean we can't work together, parley, as long as there's some kind of mutual gain involved" ("Guts"). While Merle is obviously racist, and therefore an "evil" character, he expresses a perspective on race that some people today share, if not as openly.

Race continues to be an issue in the next episode. When the group flees Atlanta and leaves Merle behind, T-Dog and Rick debate over who should tell Merle's brother Daryl about what happened. T-Dog accepts responsibility because he left Merle, but Rick says it is his own fault for handcuffing Merle in the first place. Glenn supports Rick talking to Daryl, saying that it will sound better "coming from a white guy." T-Dog shrugs this off, again claiming responsibility for what happened: "I did what I did. Hell if I'm going to hide from it" ("Tell It to the Frogs"). Even knowing that his race may complicate the anticipated interaction and having a way out through Rick, T-Dog still believes he should handle the situation himself. Although Rick is the first to talk to Daryl, avoiding potential racialized tensions, T-Dog later volunteers to go with the rescue party to save Merle despite the beating he delivered. In the process, T-Dog throws the brothers' racism back in Daryl's face. When Daryl questions why T-Dog would help

on the mission, T-Dog tells him that "you don't even speak the same language" ("Tell It to the Frogs"). Given Merle's treatment of T-Dog, T-Dog seems to be suggesting that the brothers' language of hatred marks them as different and effectively outsiders to the main group.

Although the group does not find Merle on their return to Atlanta, he returns in Season 3's "Walk with Me," as the Governor's right-hand enforcer.[57] Merle's time away from the main group did little to change his personality, however. When he interrogates Glenn, Merle asks about T-Dog and calls him a "big ol' spearchucker." ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). However, Merle quickly learns that even the Governor considers him expendable. When Daryl turns up alive in Woodbury ("Made to Suffer"), the Governor orders the brothers to fight to the death in retaliation for Daryl's participation in attacking Woodbury. To avoid this fate, Merle roughs up his brother a bit but not seriously, and a second attack by Rick and company give them an opportunity to escape ("Made to Suffer").

Although Rick and the rest of his group save the brothers, no one wants to bring Merle back. Effectively, Merle's unpleasant demeanor and hateful actions have left him without a place in either community. The comments made by the group as they discuss what to do about Merle is illustrative: "I'm not having him at the prison," "There's no way Merle's gonna live there without putting everyone at each other's throats," "Merle is your blood […] But he's not [part of the survivor "family"]" ("The Suicide King"). Merle's hard racism and independence drive him away from both Rick's group of survivors and the people of Woodbury, and though Daryl loyally leaves with him, Merle's embodiment of rugged individualism has made him an outsider.

In contrast, the patriarchal Hershel Greene is one of the TV series' characters who most resembles his comics' counterpart. Thanks to the group's lengthy stay on his farm in Season 2

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[57] This position is rather ironic, considering the hand he lost.

and the show's somewhat smaller main cast, Hershel is afforded more opportunities for character development. The audience gets to see more of him and better appreciate his perspective; he even gets moments of weakness and self-disclosure, such as in the episode "Nebraska" when he goes to an abandoned bar to drink after years of abstinence. Nevertheless, Hershel's core traits change little across the two forms: he remains a Southern, devoutly religious family man who sympathizes with the walking dead's condition and urges patience, hope, and optimism.

For all of his positive qualities, Hershel nevertheless displays a subtle racism in his rhetorical emasculation of Glenn, one that might be more characteristic of real-life people than the overt bigotry displayed by Merle. In the episodes "Chupacabra" and "Pretty Much Dead Already," Hershel twice refers to Glenn as "the Asian boy" when talking to his daughter Maggie. Both times, Maggie corrects him with his name, but this tactic should not go unnoticed by the television audience. Not only does Hershel reduce Glenn's most salient characteristic to his ethnicity, he also removes Glenn's masculinity: Glenn is a "boy," not a true man. This tactic mirrors the emasculation of Asian-American men in popular media (see Shimizu 3-4; or the less masculine stereotypes noted by Wong, Horn, and Chen 456-458). This approach also has deep historical roots, as seen in the usage of "boy" to address African Americans, especially in the South. Roland Martin, in his "Understanding Why You Don't Call a Black Man a Boy," attempts to explain the background of this style of rhetoric:

> For years black men were summarily dismissed and treated with disregard. It was as if their stature was diminished when someone white called them a boy. I've heard black men describe the hurt and pain of growing up and having someone white call them a boy in front of their own child.[58]

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58 For more on the general emasculation or denigration of African-American men in larger society, see Bush and Bush in "God Bless the Child Who Got His Own: Toward a Comprehensive Theory for African-American Boys and Men" arguing this point: "Some scholars argue that African American men have been collectively emasculated because: (a) slavery caused a situation where many African American men could not protect themselves or their families; (b) a 'matriarchal system' within African American communities, caused by an absent father or an

Hershel invoking the term here disregards Glenn's status within the group, subordinating him to the rest of the (White) male leadership.

Additionally, Hershel's discussion of Glenn in this context echoes fears of racial integration. In initiating this conversation, Hershel tells Maggie that the family needs to be "setting clear boundaries with these people" before asking "What's going on with you and the Asian boy?" ("Chupacabra"). When Maggie tells her father that Glenn is "a friend," Hershel responds with "I'd rather he wasn't" ("Chupacabra"). Mirroring comics!Tyreese's concerns about Chris and Julie, Hershel lectures:

> Hershel: "Bad enough I have to chase Beth and Jimmy around."
> Maggie: "Well, you don't have to chase me around. I'm not sixteen."
> Hershel: "I know you're not. That's why I'm counting on you to be the mature one. You know how I feel. Please, don't make things harder than they need to be."
> Maggie: "I'm a little old for us to be having this conversation."
> Hershel: "Don't get close to them. They're not going to be around forever."
> ("Chupacabra")

This conversation clearly alludes to Hershel finding his presence necessary to disrupt potential moments of physical intimacy, as it pertains to his daughter Beth and her boyfriend Jimmy, while Maggie resents her father's attempt to restrict her relationships in a similar fashion.

The juxtaposition of the explicit invocation of Glenn's ethnicity with the expression of Hershel's disapproval might raise the specter of miscegenation, but the television series shows Hershel quickly warming to Glenn, effectively dismissing this possible concern. TV!Hershel

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'overpowering African American woman' emerged within the context of a patriarchal U.S. society that expects men to be the heads of households; and (c) economic oppression rendered African American men unable to provide for their families in a society where manhood and the provider role are inextricable" (p. 2). As seen by Hershel's use in this series, it can also serve a similar function in denying other minorities manhood and the social status that accompanies it.

follows comics!Hershel in blessing Glenn and Maggie's relationship. However, TV!Hershel

approves of Glenn much more quickly, bonding with him by sharing his heritage:

> Hershel: "Where's your family from?"
> Glenn: "Michigan. But, uh, before that, Korea."
> Hershel: "Immigrants built this country. Never forget that. Our family came from Ireland."
> Glenn [chuckling]: "Maggie Greene—I kind of figured." ("Judge, Jury, and Executioner")

While Hershel's question does in some way minimize Glenn's American heritage, Hershel builds

on that question so as to produce sympathy and commonality. While we may criticize

TV!Hershel's eventual position as idealistic, the American melting pot suggested here is one that

the Greenes, too, had to enter. By bonding with Glenn over this issue, Hershel argues that there

is no real difference in this discussion between the Greenes and the Rhees: both families became

a part of the American community after leaving other places. This conversation in TV!*TWD*

therefore promotes a more optimistic and inclusive message: both Hershel and Glenn are

essentially the same and should be considered equals as people.

Hershel continues sharing his ancestral history by showing Glenn a family pocket watch

brought from Ireland, as well as how he pawned it "for a night of drinking I no longer

remember" ("Judge, Jury, and Executioner"). Hershel concludes the conversation by giving

Glenn both the watch and his blessing: "No man is good enough for your little girl, until one is.

Go on now, before I change my mind about you" ("Judge, Jury, and Executioner"). This

conversation extends Hershel's argument beyond mere inclusiveness; passing this heirloom to

Glenn shows that Hershel has accepted him as part of *his* family and deems him worthy of

inclusion in this more intimate unit.

In this way, *TWD* television series displays its hearty approval of this interracial pairing

beyond that of the comics. TV!Hershel, for all of his flaws, has sympathetic motives and an

understandable position. Comics!Hershel, on the other hand, seems to approve of Glenn and Maggie's marriage in part because it means their physical intimacy is now authorized by God. In a conversation with Maggie, Hershel gives his blessing to their relationship but also says that "What you're doing is a **sin**, no doubt" (Issue 22). Probably because of his religiosity, Comics!Glenn also considers Hershel the closest thing the group has to a priest and so asks him to perform the wedding (Issue 36).

Moving beyond race, TV!Hershel also exhibits patriarchal views in his dealings with his daughters, especially his continued attempt to control Maggie's romantic life. The conversation between Hershel and Maggie in "Chupacabra" highlights a conflict between sexual control and maturity. Hershel seems to connect maturity to a lack of sexual activity; Maggie in turn seems to agree that unrestrained sex is immature, as she describes herself as "not sixteen" and seems to agree with Hershel's concerns about Beth, while still affirming her right to make her own decisions. Maggie's implicit counter-argument is that real maturity is shown by self-control of sexual activity, not in its simple abstinence. Unlike her younger sister, Maggie is an adult; she should have autonomy unrestricted by her father's wishes and possesses the maturity both to understand make decisions about herself. Reminding her father of her physical age is an implicit assertion of her maturity and shuts down his potential to refute her argument. While Hershel does not seem to approve of her new relationship in this initial conversation, he does accept Glenn shortly thereafter and seems less judgmental than his comics counterpart; there is no mention of "sin," for example, just a general warning not to "make things harder than they have to be" ("Chupacabra").

Finally, Hershel's rise to becoming the group's voice of reason and the fatherly leader of the leadership council ("30 Days Without an Accident") coincides with an abandonment of his patriarchal concern for his daughters. When Rick is faced with the dilemma of handing

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Michonne over to the Governor, in exchange for the Governor guaranteeing the rest of the group's safety, he asks Hershel for advice ("Arrow on the Doorpost"). While the episode ends before the audience hears Hershel's response, the next episode to feature Rick's group begins with Rick and Hershel debating the matter with Daryl ("This Sorrowful Life"). To them both, Rick argues, "We do this; we avoid a fight. No one else dies." Apparently convinced, the trio goes to Merle to enlist his help in the endeavor.

Later in the episode, Hershel reads to his daughters Psalm 91, a passage about the protection provided by God. The camera repeatedly cuts between the Greenes' reading and Rick preparing to kidnap Michonne while Hershel's narration plays over the whole scene. The scene ends with Beth asking her father if he is okay and with Hershel responding tearfully, "What I wouldn't do to keep you two safe" ("This Sorrowful Life"). In the scene immediately following, Hershel approaches Rick to tell him not to go through with his plan—Hershel clearly realizes that the morality of some actions transcends even his patriarchal responsibility. Two episodes later, he finds a new responsibility as the leader of the prison's council and therefore the whole community of survivors ("30 Days without an Accident").

A similarly stifling patriarchal relationship develops between Andrea and Dale, after he convinces her not to die in the Center for Disease Control self-destruct ("TS-19"). When the CDC's Dr. Jenner offers the group a chance to stay behind and escape the world through suicide, TV newcomer Jacqui along with Andrea, who is still grieving over the death of her sister Amy, both accept. Dale sits down with Andrea, saying that he does not want to live without Andrea because of his affection for her. Apparently not wanting his death on her conscience, Andrea

leaves with Dale and the others as the group barely escapes the explosion.[59] Later, this event

becomes a point of contention between Andrea and Dale as she starts to resent him for his

actions. Additionally, Dale continues to treat her paternalistically, refusing to let her have a gun

even after a zombie nearly killed her and caused her to panic over fear of succumbing to that

state.[60] As with Hershel and Maggie, however, this conflict is resolved in the woman's favor.

Dale eventually recognizes how he has treated her, and he agrees that she should be able to make

her own decisions ("Save the Last One").

Lastly, Daryl Dixon provides another avenue through which the writers explore rugged

individualism and its connection with racism. At first, Daryl seems to share his brother Merle's

attitudes about non-Whites: he stereotypes T-Dog as having a "do-rag" and improperly labels

Glenn a "Chinaman" ("Vatos"). In his actions, however, Daryl does not seem to treat these men

more poorly than anyone else; he even gives T-Dog antibiotics to fight a blood infection

("Bloodletting"). Perhaps the only time we see him really struggle with these attitudes is when he

hears a litany of abuse from a hallucination of his brother Merle:

> You're a joke is what you are, playing errand boy to a bunch of pansy-asses, n*ggers and democrats. You're nothing but a freak to them. Redneck trash. That's all you are. They're laughing at you behind your back. You know that, don't you?
> I got a little news for you, son. One day they gonna scrape you off their heels like you was dogshit. […] They ain't your kin, your blood. Hell, you had any damn nuts in that sack of yours, you'd go back there and shoot your pal Rick in the face for me. Now you listen to me. Ain't nobody ever gonna care about you except me, little brother. Nobody ever will. ("Chupacabra")

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[59] Given that Andrea herself was minutes from death, her concern over having Dale's death on her conscience seems strange.

[60] "What Lies Ahead"; of course, Dale *is* old enough to be her father, though he seems romantically interested in her, much as is comics!Dale.

Given that the Merle seen in this episode is a figment of Daryl's imagination, these words originate within Daryl to some extent. In direct refutation of the imaginary Merle, Carol shares her gratitude with Daryl at the end of the episode and highlights his worth:

> Carol: "You need to know something. You did more for my little girl today than her own daddy ever did in his whole life."
> Daryl: "I didn't do anything Rick or Shane wouldn't have done."
> Carol: "I know. You're every bit as good as them. Every bit." ("Chupacabra")

By comparing Daryl to these "virtuous" mythic cowboys, Carol affirms his place in the group. Somewhat strangely, Daryl also seems to be mostly "cured" of his racism after this point, which is underscored in several places. In the final episode of Season 2, we see Daryl invoking an "easy" racial stereotype as a joke, showing his acceptance of the rest of the group ("Beside the Dying Fire"). As Rick, Carl, and Hershel are about to give up on seeing the rest of their group again, nearly everyone starts showing up, and Daryl's story gets in a jab at Glenn: "Caught this guy's taillights zigzagging all over the road. Figured he had to be Asian driving like that" ("Beside the Dying Fire").

Additionally, after Daryl finally reunites with his brother Merle in Season 3 ("The Suicide King"), several incidents highlight just how different they now are from one another. While Daryl does choose to go with Merle when Rick refuses to let Merle into the group again, the brothers' time together reveals just how much Daryl has changed from who he was. In the episode "Home," Daryl and Merle encounter a Hispanic family of four trapped on a bridge by a group of zombies. Daryl rushes to their aid, but Merle stays back and mostly observes, though he does protect his brother. After the battle concludes, Merle starts going through the family's possessions, hoping to find food or some other spoil and calling the father a "beaner." The non-English-speaking family reacts in terror, however, so Daryl orders Merle out of the car at crossbow-point.

This fight causes Daryl to realize he belongs with the prison survivors, and the resulting

conversation parallels Daryl's words from Season 1 ("Vatos"), only with Merle in Daryl's place:

> Merle [as Daryl walks away]: "Where you going?"
> Daryl: "Back where I belong."
> Merle: "I can't go with you. I tried to kill that black bitch [Michonne]. Damn near killed the Chinese kid [Glenn]."
> Daryl: "He's Korean."
> Merle: [yelling] Whatever! Doesn't matter, man. I just can't go with you."
> Daryl: "You know, I may be the one walking away but you're the one that's leaving—again." ("Home")

Out of loyalty to his brother, Merle does follow Daryl back and is reincorporated into the group,

though to the distaste of nearly everyone, showing that the brothers' extreme individualism had

gone too far. Merle even displays group loyalty of a sort: he kidnaps Michonne to deliver her to

the Governor, though he eventually decides he cannot go through with it ("Made to Suffer").

While *The Walking Dead* does not necessarily need more racist characters, by making

racism such an easy problem for Daryl to overcome, the show might oversimplify the issue and

its related problems, as well as the solutions offered. The series almost argues that the racist

"cowboy" just needs to spend some time with others so he can learn to love them. Alternatively,

perhaps Daryl's joke ("Beside the Dying Fire") suggests that cooperating with diverse groups

leads to acceptance and suggests a possible solution, but relying on zombies to force different

people to work together does not seem a viable solution for our society. Complicating matters,

the roots of the brothers' individualism and subsequent racism also seem grounded in outside

factors, attributed somewhat to their father's physical abuse.[61] Their abusive upbringing

potentially excuses their behavior, by locating the blame for their attitudes somewhere else,

rather than casting their mistakes as personal failures.

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[61] In "Home," for example, Merle tears Daryl's shirt and sees scars, saying simply he "didn't know" Daryl was abused like he was. Their close connection to each other and distrust of outsiders therefore seems predicated on this idea that everyone else is dangerous to them.

Compared with the comics that spawned it, however, *TWD* television series shows progress on this issue. In part, the show depowers its dominant White masculinity and exposes the limitations of patriarchy, regardless of its intentions. The individualist Merle is driven away from survivor communities and consistently made an outsider. Although initially hostile to racial difference, the patriarchal Hershel comes to accept Glenn as part of an inclusive American dream and accepts that his daughters have the right to their own agency. Dale admits his paternalistic actions toward Andrea and tries to change, though he dies before we can see much evidence of it ("Judge, Jury, and Executioner"). Daryl comes perhaps farther than any of them, transforming his casual racism into casual jokes. Bigotry in the show is not always effectively confronted, but overall the message does seem to be one of intolerance for the intolerant. In the next section, I discuss how no character illustrates this rejection of the show's White masculinity better than the television version of Glenn through his narrative arc in Season 3.

The Failed Asian Cowboy: Glenn's Embrace and Rejection of Rugged Individualism

Although the initial potency of White masculinity can be seen in the White characters of *TWD*, the character who best illustrates the ideology and reveals its failures is actually Asian-American Glenn Rhee. Thanks to his "outsider" status at the beginning of the series, Glenn highlights how a character might be drawn toward White masculinity through the violence of the cowboy and protectiveness of the patriarch. His attempts to embody this ideology harm his relationship with his partner, Maggie, and he ultimately abandons the effort. The journey he makes from the less masculine "model minority" character to a member of White hegemonic masculinity to the ultimate rejection of its tenets occurs primarily in Season 3.

Comics!Glenn is one of the more important characters in the series, but he displays a stereotypically Asian, marginalized masculinity, being subordinate to his wife and putting the group needs above his own. Although his TV counterpart shares a number of traits with the

comics version, TV!Glenn starts to deviate considerably during Season 3, displaying aggression

and strength not really seen in the comics. This portrayal in the TV series emphasizes his

character as the next (White) man up rather than playing up his ethnicity. During this string of

episodes, TV!Glenn feels more as though he is an embodiment and extension of White

masculinity rather than a genuinely alternative masculinity, and Glenn himself makes that claim

during a conversation with Hershel: "With Daryl gone and Rick wandering Crazytown, I'm the

next in charge" ("Home"). Because this claim is predicated on the two other men being

indisposed, it shows that to claim this authority Glenn must be seen as similar to them. Episodes

after making this claim, however, Glenn eventually rejects their aggressive masculinity. Through

this rejection, the TV series highlights the weakness of White masculinity and suggests a

different performance.

With Rick's emphasis on cooperation in the early episodes, a viewer might assume that

the sheriff is arguing for an egalitarian society. The group dynamics, however, including Rick's

headship during the show's first three seasons, tell a different story. As Ho observes:

> Despite Rick's colorblind talk, the power dynamics that arise in the survivor camp create
> a logic that supports a particular white, cowboy masculinity. Rick's ranger persona, with
> his refusal to wear anything but his cowboy-like deputy hat and his entry into Atlanta on
> a horse with a rifle slung over his back, places him at the top of the survivor hierarchy.
> (63)

Rick's leadership, crystallized in "Beside the Dying Fire," is based not on charisma or cunning

but on his physical ability to survive through violence and gun expertise. Rick's position also

impacts the rest of the group. As Ho notes, other survivors must "fulfill their roles in relation to

his position of power, as helpful or expendable minorities" (63).

Although Ho argues that Glenn is a role model, a character that questions this hegemonic

Whiteness and whose "model minority characteristics fill the leadership gaps that Rick's flaws

create" (70), the narrative of the television series does not really support this analysis. Glenn's

acquisition of greater masculinity is not predicated on his minority characteristics but on becoming more like Rick and, essentially, a "Whitened" male figure. This specific portrayal of Glenn swaps a marginalized Asian masculinity for stereotypical machismo, strength, and the gunmanship of the cowboy (Rushing 20). Nevertheless, the show does not wholeheartedly embrace this role for Glenn. He does not become more heroic as a result of claiming this masculinity, so the show ultimately suggests that this masculinity may be untenable.

Glenn's arc in Season 3 sees him and his lover Maggie captured by the Governor, being rescued, and ultimately coming into further conflict with the Governor and his citizens in Woodbury. Throughout this season, Glenn attempts to become a more masculine figure to protect Maggie and to emulate his perception of Rick's leadership, but by the last few episodes he rejects this way of life. His prominence in the story really begins in the episode "Hounded," when Glenn and Maggie are captured by Merle Dixon and forced back to Woodbury. The subsequent interrogation plays out quite differently than the corresponding scene in the comics, which involved Glenn overhearing Michonne's rape and torture and reinforces his character as sensitive and vulnerable. TV!Glenn instead starts showing a more aggressive and physically powerful side.

After bringing Glenn and Maggie back to Woodbury in the television series, Merle at first threatens Maggie to force Glenn into compliance, but that fails as Glenn remains silent ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). Instead, Maggie has to hear Glenn being beaten by Merle ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). Glenn stays silent throughout, head-butting Merle and seemingly breaking his nose, so Merle leaves a zombie in the room with the still-restrained Glenn, who manages to break out of his chair and kill it ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). Rather than the somewhat traumatized comics!Glenn, TV!Glenn is a badass—tough, aggressive, and strong. Glenn embodies what Ronald H. Carpenter describes, in "Revisiting Janice Rushing

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About 'The Western Myth,'" as the obligation of the Western hero: "[T]he heroic tradition requires the *individual's* aggressive if not deadly violent behavior but on behalf of building and strengthening *community* values that are 'warm and homely'" (180). In defending himself and, in a sense, protecting his lover Maggie, Glenn fulfills this responsibility. Although comics!Glenn does not break either, neither does he kill a zombie in such impressive fashion. Maggie, on the other hand, becomes the weak link in this episode: she is forced to go topless for the Governor and tells him about the prison when he threatens to kill Glenn ("When the Dead Come Knocking").

TV!Glenn's reaction to his interrogation and abuse as well as Maggie's assault is instructive. Compared to his portrayal in the comics, TV!Glenn is a much more "macho" character in this arc, while Maggie is more feminized. Merle describes Glenn as "the one with nerve" and commends his bravery: "You don't scare easy, do you? I like that" ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). Even after Glenn and Maggie have gone through their respective mistreatments, we see that Glenn still seems aggressive toward their captors and views her humiliation as the greater harm:

> Glenn: "Maggie, did he—"
> Maggie: "No. *No*. [looking at Glenn pointedly] He barely touched me."
> Glenn: "All this time, running from walkers…You forget what people do—have always done."
> Maggie: "Look at what they did to you."
> Glenn: "Doesn't matter. As long as he didn't—"
> Maggie: "No. I promise." ("Made to Suffer")

Despite his wounds, Glenn seems ready to fight on her behalf, downplaying his own wounds at Merle's hand.[62] Although Maggie assures Glenn that she was not raped in "Made to Suffer," he clearly does not believe her based on how he reacts in later episodes, calling the Governor a

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[62] He only has the one, remember.

rapist ("The Suicide King") and wanting to assassinate him ("Home"). After a couple of episodes of tension between the two, Glenn finally asks Maggie again about what happened, and though she does elaborate on exactly what happened ("Home"), the answer she gave him in "Made to Suffer" does not really change. His readiness to fight—even kill—to "defend" her honor highlights how Glenn has become a much more masculine figure, but he achieves this by abandoning his ethnicity in terms of his "group-minded" focus (Ho 65).

This portrayal of Glenn is no better than casting him as a model minority, and he becomes increasingly physical and reliant on violent action. Just as other cowboy figures, Glenn's power in these episodes "is exercised through violence" (Hassler-Forest 345). Angry over his belief that Maggie was raped, along with Daryl abandoning the group to go with Merle, Glenn actually pulls a zombie out of a truck with his bare hands and stomps it to death ("The Suicide King"), which makes for the second zombie he kills bare handedly within a day. He plans for armed defense of the prison, assuming that the Governor will attack, and even advocates a two-person (Michonne and he) infiltration and assassination at Woodbury ("Home"). His conversation with Hershel near the end of "Home" brings his mindset into focus as Hershel rebukes him for his aggressiveness:

> Hershel: "You went on a simple formula run and got the crap beat out of you. [pause] Maggie was attacked."
> Glenn: "Are you saying this is my fault?"
> Hershel: "No."
> Glenn: "I did what I could."
> Hershel: "I know you did. So does Maggie. She's one of the two people most precious to me in this world. I trust you with her life. I still do. This rage is going to get you killed." ("Home")

Hershel tries offering Glenn an alternative to his rage and violence, but Glenn counters by asserting his claim to authority as the "next in charge" ("Home"), suggesting that an appropriate leader is violent and active.

Glenn not only embraces physical violence; he abandons emotional intimacy as well.

Although he hates the idea of Maggie being raped, their conversation about it in "Home"

suggests that she feels he has prioritized his feelings or emotions about it, not hers:

> Glenn: "Are we gonna talk about this? Maggie, you need to talk about it."
> Maggie: "I do? Or you do?"
> Glenn: "What does that mean?"
> Maggie: "What do you want me to say? You want me to say he made me get naked and stand in front of him? He came up behind me. Pushed himself against me, put his hands all over me. He slammed my head down and bent me over a table. Did he rape me? No. No. Do you feel better?"
> Glenn: "I'm not trying to—"
> Maggie: "I had a choice. Either I take off my shirt or he would take off your hand. I just listened to Merle beating the shit out of you in the other room. What could I do? I'm sorry. Go away. You got your answer. Now go away."

Glenn also refuses to discuss his feelings with Hershel in "The Suicide King" and "Home." He

instead blames himself for what happened to Maggie although Hershel tells him that none of

what happened was his fault.

Essentially, Glenn becomes so consumed with the idea of protecting Maggie "properly,"

that is, through physical violence, that he overlooks her emotional needs and ignores her agency

in trying to protect him. His actions toward Maggie in these episodes resemble the paternalistic

approach Dale took toward Andrea and that of Hershel's admonishments of Maggie in Season 2.

This violent approach contrasts with Glenn's more emotionally grounded behavior at other

times, such as in Season 2 when he becomes the confidant of both Lori and Maggie in "Secrets"

and develops an almost filial relationship with Dale. Additionally, his actions in this arc are at

odds with those of Maggie's family: both Hershel Beth approach Maggie to talk if she wants, but

they also reassure her with physical affection when she does not oblige ("Home"). Maggie

clearly appreciates her family's more comforting response than Glenn's, which shows the

deficiency of Glenn's actions here.

This narrative thus supports the position that White masculinity—both the violent cowboy and the protective patriarch—is flawed, at least in this story. Glenn eventually calms down in "Home" as Rick takes back control, but it seems clear throughout Season 3 that Rick's patriarchal dictatorship has failed, no matter who is trying to implement it. Hershel's reprimand of Rick in "I Ain't a Judas," combined with Carl asking his father to step down a bit later, crystallizes this failure:

> I said we should leave. Now Axel's dead. We can't just sit here. [*Rick tries to leave the room*] Get back here! You're slipping, Rick. We've all seen it. We understand why, but now is not the time. You once said this isn't a democracy; now you have to own up to that. I put my family's life in your hands, so get your head clear and do something.

By the end of the episode, Rick leaves Hershel *and* Daryl in charge, in contrast to the group's previous assumption of a single leader, suggesting that he recognizes this failure and is admitting a more democratic system is better ("I Ain't a Judas").

Additionally, "When the Dead Come Knocking" and Glenn's subsequent reaction minimize Maggie's strength in two ways: first, by making her cave to protect her partner, when the narrative suggests the better decision is to prevent the people of Woodbury from knowing about their group; and second, by overlooking Maggie's own choice in trying to help Glenn. This first idea is reinforced somewhat after Glenn and Maggie are rescued, when Glenn apologizes for letting this information slip: "Rick, I'm sorry. We told him where the prison was" ("Made to Suffer"). By including himself in this action, Glenn takes a patriarchal responsibility for Maggie's actions. Rick assures them that this was all right, but the Governor's multiple reprisals over the series result in many deaths and, eventually, the end of the prison as their haven ("Too Far Gone").

The other problem with Glenn's reaction to Maggie's decision is implicitly seen in how he minimizes her agency. As she points out in "Home," she had a choice—an awful one, to be

sure, but one she made willingly and gladly. Glenn's aggressive reaction to her decision devalues what she did to protect him and seems to be the source of her frustration with him. Complicating this tension is also Glenn's unwillingness to believe Maggie when she says she was not raped ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). By referring to the Governor as a rapist ("The Suicide King"), he is effectively calling Maggie a liar.

For all of these problems, Glenn's embrace of hegemonic masculinity does not last particularly long. He shoots down Merle's suggestion to assassinate the Governor during a diplomatic meeting and physically blocks Merle from leaving to attempt it ("Arrow on the Doorpost"). Merle even attempts to needle Glenn by reminding him of what happened to Maggie, but Glenn refuses to take the bait:

> Merle: "What's the matter with y'all?"
> Glenn: "I'm not gonna let you put them in danger."
> Merle: "Nut up already, boy. This guy cops a feel of your woman and you pussy out like this? Get out of my way." ("Arrow on the Doorpost")

The derogatory "boy" further emphasizes Glenn's lack of masculinity, as Merle sees it, but the scuffle here seems to help Glenn reconcile with Maggie, as he soon apologizes:

> Glenn: "When we got back from Woodbury I made it all about me. And you needed your space and I didn't give you that."
> Maggie: "Oh, I didn't need my space from you. I just wanted you to see me. I'm with you. I'm always with you, you know?"
> Glenn: "I'm sorry." ("Arrow on the Doorpost")

Nevertheless, despite showing the flaws of White hegemonic masculinity, the show does not necessarily offer a strong alternative. For example, it does not show that Glenn personally can introduce something that is less problematic, but it does suggest a rejection of this masculinity. This reading is reinforced by the Governor's somewhat parallel story arc in Seasons 3 and 4, whose failure as a patriarch leads him down the road to villainy.

The Failed Fallen Patriarch: The Governor's Violent Masculinity

The last episode of Season 3, "Welcome to the Tombs," underscores this critique of

violent White masculinity along with the rest of the Governor's arc. Throughout the season, the

narrative seems to build to a climactic showdown between the Governor and his people at

Woodbury and Rick and his group of survivors at the prison. Fans expected some intense,

presumably violent resolution to this character conflict that had been building all season. As *The*

A.V. Club's Zack Handlen put it, "it looked like these two groups would have to deal with each

other, and as the Governor became more and more blatantly threatening, that confrontation was

inevitably going to be violent." *Forbes.com*'s Eric Kain also admitted this expectation, along

with and some disappointment over what actually happened:

> I won't lie: I was hoping for the big, dramatic showdown between Rick and the
> Governor. […] As a season finale, I'm not sure this works. The last five or six episodes of
> the show have been all about rising tension. The drama, the stakes of the game, the whole
> arms race between Woodbury and the prison, all of it has built up to a breaking point.

This expectation makes some narrative sense, but by forgoing this kind of "all-out" battle, *TWD*

television series implies that this kind of violence is senseless. As exciting as it might have been

for fans to see this kind of showdown, the actions taken by Rick and his group, when contrasted

with the Governor's straightforward violence, show the flaws in that approach.

When the Governor and his armed followers from Woodbury arrive at the prison ready to

kill Rick and his people, they meet no resistance. The Woodbury survivors effectively defeat

themselves by descending into the lower parts of the prison and disturbing the zombies that had

penetrated the prison exterior. While Rick and his people do fire on the Woodbury group as they

flee, their strategy results in no casualties for Rick's group. The Governor tries to rally his people

as they flee, but when they refuse to go back and fight after retreating down the road he

slaughters nearly all of them. Effectively, the most powerful thing Rick's group did was let the

Governor and his violent rage destroy himself; they win by not confronting this powerful

masculinity directly.

This rejection of violence is further reinforced when Rick, Daryl, and Michonne go to

Woodbury, initially to kill the Governor, and find out that those left behind—mostly the old,

young, or sick—know nothing of the massacre and have seen nothing of their leader ("Welcome

to the Tombs"). Were Rick wanting to exercise autocratic power, he had a number of options,

but instead he invites the remaining people of Woodbury to join his group at the prison, making

them a part of the thriving community we eventually see in Season 4. Rick's actions in this finale

stand in stark contrast to how he rejected Tyreese and Sasha earlier in the season ("The Suicide

King"), which drove them to Woodbury; now, he welcomes the brother and sister into his

community and shows a better example of how to treat people.

There may be room for other positions in "Welcome to the Tombs" that embrace the

violent masculinity previously on display throughout the series. For example, Carl kills a

surrendering Woodbury soldier and justifies it with "I couldn't take the chance […] I did what I

had to do" ("Welcome to the Tombs"). But Carl is also reprimanded by his father when he

compares his action here to not killing the zombie that earlier killed Dale. Rick tells him, "Son,

that is not the same thing" ("Welcome to the Tombs"), and this response suggests that the

audience should not side with Carl. Rick certainly seems to have grown to see the value in

cooperation and democratization by the end of Season 3, and he even renounces his leadership

position in favor of a council in the off-screen gap between Seasons 3 and 4. While the future

problems caused by the Governor in Season 4 might suggest that violence is sometimes

necessary, "Welcome to the Tombs" in particular highlights a lack of violence as powerful in its

own right.

The rest of the Governor's story also reinforces this critique. We gain some useful insight

into his mentality in a conversation he has with his friend and ally Milton, who has become

disillusioned with the Governor's leadership:

> I'm gonna tell you the secret. There's a threat, you end it. And you don't feel ashamed about enjoying it. You smell the gunpowder and you see the blood—you know what that means? It means you're alive. You've won. You take the heads so that you don't ever forget. You kill or you die. ("Welcome to the Tombs")

Milton pushes back against this philosophy, however, asking "What would your daughter think

about what you are?" ("Welcome to the Tombs"). The Governor's response reveals that his

failure as a White patriarch serves as the motivation for his mania: "She'd be afraid of me. But if

I had been like this from the start, she'd be alive today."[63]

Nor does the Governor really change despite his failures in Season 3. In "Too Far Gone,"

an episode in Season 4, the Governor has gathered another group of survivors to assault the

prison and finish his vendetta against Rick and the rest of the group. He manages to take

Michonne and Hershel as captives and holds a conversation with them in which he suggests that

he has changed:

> Governor: "Michonne, I want you to know. [pause] Penny, my daughter, she was dead. I know that now. Now, I don't want to hurt you. I don't want to hurt anyone. I need the prison, that's it. There are people I need to keep alive. You two are gonna help me take it. No one needs to die."
> Michonne: "I'm gonna kill you."
> Governor: "No, you won't."
> Michonne: "I'm gonna take my—"
> Hershel: "Stop it. You want the prison?"
> 'Governor: "Yeah. And I'll take it as peacefully as I can."
> Hershel: "Governor—"
> Governor: "Don't call me that."

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[63] This assertion from "Welcome to the Tombs" helps explain other incidents shown during the season, such as the Governor encouraging Milton's research into zombies in "Walk with Me," "Say the Word," and "When the Dead Come Knocking," and the Governor's treatment of his zombified daughter Penny in "Say the Word" and "Made to Suffer."

> Hershel: "Your people, our people, we can find a way to live together. These people you need to keep alive—do you love them?"
> Governor: "You're a good man, Hershel. A better man than Rick."
> Hershel: "Everything you've said, the way you've said it, you've changed. So has Rick."
> Governor: "The two of us will never be able to live together. Michonne and I, we'll never be able to live together."
> Hershel: "We'll find a way." ("Too Far Gone")

Despite Hershel's offer of a peaceful solution, the Governor is not genuine in seeking this kind of approach, as Hershel later observes:

> Hershel: "You say you want to take this prison as peacefully as possible. That means you'd be willing to hurt people to get it. My daughters would be there. That's who you'd be hurting. If you understand what it's like to have a daughter, then how can you threaten to kill someone else's?"
> The Governor: "Because they aren't mine." ("Too Far Gone")

This cruelty and the Governor's other actions in the episode—such as beheading Hershel in front of Rick's group—show that he really has not changed. The Governor remains a failed patriarchal figure, leading his new group to their deaths and ruining the sanctuary the prison provided for Rick and, in counterpoint to Hershel's offer of harmony, showing that this White patriarchy is a dangerous system in this post-apocalyptic world. This critique of Whiteness is also stronger when considering how interracial relationships in the series are portrayed differently compared with the comics. The next section further deconstructs hegemonic ideals about the White family by examining one of the television show's biggest departures from the comic series and one of the more recent events in the series: the Rick-Michonne romance.

"Richonne": Defying Miscegenation

The Walking Dead television series has handled its source material in interesting ways. Deaths do not always come predictably when comparing the two series. Comics!Shane, dead by

the end of Issue 6, survived until the penultimate episode of Season 2.[64] Comics!Sophia is still

alive as of Issue 169, in contrast to TV!Sophia's rather swift demise after getting lost in Season

2's premiere episode, "What Lies Ahead." While comics!Dale survives until after the group is

expelled from the prison, TV!Dale meets his end even before Shane does ("Judge, Jury, and

Executioner").

Characters may also drastically change between the comics and the television series.

TV!Andrea, at least after the first season, could hardly be said to be the same character, and fans

both noticed and complained. Erik Kain describes TV!Andrea as slipping "from merely irritating

and stubborn (in the first two seasons) to willfully blind and a terrible judge of character (in the

first half of season 3)" (para. 18), while Angie Barry describes an "overwhelming consensus"

that "Andrea was an idiot. So many problems would be fixed if only Andrea did the right thing.

In fact, Andrea was *the worst*" (para. 2). In his own comparison of the two versions of Andrea,

J.M. Brandt illustrates just how much comics and television characters can diverge:

> In the comics […] Andrea is level-headed and resolute, a crack shot sniper, and one of
> the most respected members of the human communities thriving in the present day after
> 'the jump.' In the television show? Andrea isn't painted so kindly. Time and again she
> shows, despite her desire to be a decision-maker, that she is not fit to be; culminating in
> her clipping Daryl with a rifle round by mistake and accidentally allowing Beth to
> attempt suicide on her watch. (para. 7-8)

In the comics, Rick's second love becomes Andrea, who is quite a different figure in that

series, but her TV arc (and eventual death) in Season 3 meant that Rick's next romance, if any,

would have to be with a different character. Perhaps the *best* change in *TWD* TV universe, then,

was the choice to solidify the romantic pairing of Rick and Michonne. A relatively recent

development in the show, this relationship finally blossoms in Season 6's "The Next World."

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[64] "Better Angels"; these changes, it must be said, are also not always bad. TV!Shane is a much more interesting
character, and Season 2's storyline would have been very weak without him.

Near the end of the episode, Rick and Michonne sit on their couch together and begin making out after some relaxed conversation ("The Next World"). The two sleep together that night as well, though they are awakened in the morning rather creepily by Paul "Jesus" Monroe, who is trying to find more trading partners for his community ("The Next World"). With this episode, however, their relationship is finally solidified in a sensible way.

Narratively, this development makes a lot of sense, and the critical response seems to be approval. In "Why the Rick-Michonne Romance Is *The Walking Dead*'s Best Comic Change Yet," Paul Tassi gives his opinion:

> This has been in the works for a very, very long time. If you thought this was out of nowhere, you'd be wrong. Back in season three, Michonne is introduced to Rick's life almost exactly when Lori is ripped out of it. Though she's sullen and distant at first, Rick and Carl are the two she opens up to the most, outside of Andrea. (para. 10-11)

By the end of Season 3, Michonne is an important part of the group. Her bonding with Carl in "Clear," over finding a crib for Judith, not only wins the boy's approval but also prompts a commendation to his father: "I think she might be one of us." Michonne additionally bonds with Rick over his hallucinations, admitting that she "used to talk to my dead boyfriend. It happens" ("Clear"). Even though Rick considers turning her over to the Governor in "Made to Suffer," he and the rest of the group realize that is not the right choice, and therefore they have fully accepted her by the end of the season. As the episodes progress, Michonne consistently becomes someone on whom not only the group but Rick in particular can always rely. As Tassi puts it, "Michonne essentially becomes Carl's surrogate mother, and Rick's uh, 'battle wife,' for lack of better term. The two have each other's backs at every turn, and it's Michonne who pulls Rick back from the brink when he starts to crack in Alexandria" (para. 13).

Fan reaction also seems to be positive for this relationship, despite its absence from the comics. *Vanity Fair*'s Joanna Robinson praised the divergence:

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> *The Walking Dead* took a major departure from its source material Sunday night, and—for the most part—audiences cheered. Rick Grimes and Michonne No-Last-Name-Required made good on the sexual tension and mutual affection that's been simmering for three seasons. ("Progressive" para. 1).

Tassi writes, "[T]his relationship *has* been a long time coming, and I love the fact that it's finally arrived" (para. 4). Even the actors themselves have praised this decision. In an interview with *Hollywood Reporter*, Michonne's actor Danai Gurira has spoken about how fans pushed for this relationship: "I'm so glad I won't get railed about it every time I'm anywhere. People are like, 'Why aren't you with Rick?!' Everywhere I go I get that!" (Goldberg para. 11). In the same interview, Rick Grimes' actor, Andrew Lincoln, noted how good Rick and Michonne should be for each other:

> We wanted it to be these two grownups and warriors who love and respect each other. That's a given. And then they get completely surprised in this moment. And then they look at each other and say, "Of course." That was the transition that we wanted: for it to be sexy, committed and key. We wanted it to be different and grown up and very relaxed and natural. That's what we were fighting for. (Goldberg para. 8)

> Both narratively and popularly "Richonne" makes sense. The decision also feels good

from a more critical perspective, broadening the diversity of relationships in the show and making for a more inclusive series than the comics. Comics!Michonne's romantic relationships are not particularly diverse. Tassi summarizes:

> There's a common thread here, and I'll just be blunt about it. Every man Michonne is paired with is black. It almost becomes a running joke in the comic that if there's a major black male character in the cast, that Michonne will eventually hook up with him. (para. 8)

There is nothing wrong with writing characters that prefer partners of their own race, but comics!Michonne goes a step beyond: she always ends up in a relationship with the most prominent Black male character at the time, whoever that ends up being. One or two occurrences might be forgivable, but given that she has had three paramours in a row, all of whom meet this criterion, it seems odd. As Tassi continues:

This is not to say that the comic is doing anything maliciously…stereotypical, per se. After all, it did create the famous, fantastic Maggie/Glenn relationship. But it does get to a point where it's just a little bit weird. Like by the time Michonne gets to Ezekiel, who is an older, strange guy with a pet tiger who thinks he's a king, you're thinking "Really, Michonne? *Really?*" It seems forced, like there's a new prominent black character, so naturally Michonne has to be with him. (para. 9)

By taking a different tack, the television series furthers Rick's argument of a colorblind society and shows that people do not have to be romantically involved only with people of their own ethnicity. This lesson should be obvious, but it is absent from a number of pop culture artifacts, including the *TWD* comics, given its theme of miscegenation.

Coupling Rick and Michonne in the TV series also avoids another problem of the comics—and zombie media in general—by minimizing the association of interracial relationships and mental or emotional failings.[65] Unlike the early comics' suggestion that those in interracial relationships are weak and deviant, the Rick-Michonne pairing matches two of the strongest survivors, both of whom receive a major amount of screen time. Nonetheless, both characters exhibit some mental weakness; both comics!Rick (Issue 55) and TV!Rick ("Hounded") experience hallucinations after Lori's death, and both versions of Michonne talk to her dead boyfriend (Issue 21; "Clear"). However, these mental issues seem to be temporary and less harmful than Chris and Julie's suicide pact or Carol's depression. In contrast, Rick and Michonne overcome their problems and remain functioning, even dominant members of this post-apocalyptic society.

Highlighting an interracial relationship—or rather, treating it as any other romantic relationship—disavows the specter of miscegenation that has plagued American media and that has extended to the *TWD* comics. Both the Chris-Julie and Tyreese-Carol relationships are

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[65] To be fair in this critique, Rick's phone delusions in which he hears dead associates speaking to him (shared somewhat by Michonne in both comics and show) probably do qualify as a mental weakness.

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ultimately doomed, with Julie even hearing a warning against sex because of its reproductive

possibilities (Issue 10). Although TV!Rick and Michonne might be some distance from wanting

children of their own, at the very least they have begun forming a new family unit of their own

with Carl and Judith. This possibility was foreshadowed as far back as Season 3's "Clear," when

Michonne and Carl look for a crib for Judith, as well as a picture of Lori (so Judith will know

what her mother looked like).

Importantly, these kinds of messages can exert a rhetorical impact in popular culture. As

one of the most popular shows on cable television, *The Walking Dead* has the potential to

influence other shows in a positive direction. Perhaps other shows will realize that these

decisions do not risk alienating audiences. Robinson provides this argument:

> [I]f the ratings are any indication, the inter-racial and queer couples at the center of this
> show (Glenn/Maggie, Aaron/Eric, Denise/Tara, now Rick/Michonne) have done nothing
> to dampen the [sic] *The Walking Dead*'s popularity with millions of viewers from coast
> to coast. […] [T]he show has proven again and again that […] its bolder storytelling
> strokes have been embraced. ("Progressive" para. 7)

Tassi also summarizes the importance of the "Richonne" pairing very well:

> Say what you will about diversity on television, but only rarely do we get high profile
> interracial relationships on shows that aren't run by Shonda Rhimes. This is progress,
> both for *The Walking Dead* as a show, but for television in general. So I'm glad this
> happen [sic] for progressive reasons, but I'm also glad it happened because it's a logical
> evolution of the relationship between these two characters. I think they sort of fumbled
> the episode itself, but now that "Richonne" is here, it's fantastic, and should be here to
> stay. (para. 17-18)

Perhaps this relationship suggests that society has matured after all—that we do not harbor the

same fears about racial mixing that have haunted us for so long. One can hope that such media

messages will make things better for people of all kinds.

Because both the cowboy and patriarch myths exclude non-White perspectives, it is

important as a contrast to see how these other perspectives are represented against these myths.

The television series discusses diversity more openly and explicitly than the comic series, and

the last two sections of this chapter examine the non-White perspectives both within and outside of the show's protagonist survivors. In particular, T-Dog, the show's most prominent African-American character of the first two-and-a-half seasons (and essentially only one, for much of that time), advocates for a more inclusive ethic in contrast to the cowboy individualism that is valorized by the series.

T-Dog and Non-White Perspectives

As the object of Merle Dixon's racist abuse, *The Walking Dead*'s Theodore Douglas ("Bloodletting"), better known as T-Dog, features prominently in the show's earliest discussions of race. While arguably an under-used and poorly written character,[66] T-Dog does, however, speak from a unique perspective on occasion, bringing race-motivated concerns to the forefront and offering an alternative to Rick's assertion in "Guts" that race no longer matters. As the most prominent Black character during the first two seasons, T-Dog essentially occupies the place of comics!Tyreese: they even die at somewhat similar points in their series' overall arcs. Looking at events with T-Dog, then, shows how the television series handles race and puts forward a possible non-White perspective in its setting.

Despite Rick's rebuke of Merle Dixon's racism in "Guts," the group of survivors does not really seem to believe that race no longer matters. For example, when T-Dog abandons Merle after dropping the keys to his handcuffs, the group members worriedly discuss how Merle's brother, Daryl, will take the news:

> Dale: "Have you given any thought to Daryl Dixon? He won't be happy to hear his brother was left behind."
> T-Dog: "I'll tell him. I dropped the key. It's on me."
> Rick: "I cuffed him. That makes it mine."

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[66] For more on this attack of the show's writing, see Mark Abraham's ""All of T-Dog's Lines from Season 2 of *The Walking Dead*" and Cyriaque Lamar's sarcastic "What I Did during the Second Season of *The Walking Dead*, by T-Dog.".

Glenn: "Guys, it's not a competition. [*To T-Dog*] I don't mean to bring race into this, but it might sound better coming from a white guy."
T-Dog: "I did what I did. Hell if I'm gonna hide from him."
Amy: "We could lie."
Andrea: "Or tell the truth. Merle was out of control. Something had to be done or he'd have gotten us killed. [*To Lori*] Your husband did what was necessary. And if Merle got left behind, it is nobody's fault but Merle's."
Dale: "And that's what we tell Daryl? I don't see a rational discussion to be had from that, do you? Word to the wise—we're gonna have our hands full when he gets back from his hunt." ("Tell It to the Frogs")

Although Glenn is the one to bring up the probability of racism, no one in this conversation refutes his point. Rather, they assume racism will be Daryl's starting point, as seen by Dale's pessimism about "rational discussion" and Amy's proposal simply to hide the truth. Despite this expectation about Daryl's character, T-Dog thinks the truth as he sees it is more important and breaks from the group's suggestions. They may be sympathetic to T-Dog's experience, but they do not have to live his life, and he wants to take responsibility for what he did regardless of the consequences. Neither, however, does T-Dog quietly accept injustice: he throws a bit of the Dixons' abuse back at them when he asks Daryl, "You see anybody else here stepping up to save your brother's cracker ass"? ("Tell It to the Frogs).

While T-Dog does not discuss race very much in the episode "Vatos," which features a conflict between the rescue party seeking Merle and an apparent Hispanic gang, the subject still comes up later in the series. Aside from the mentioned interactions with Merle and Daryl Dixon, T-Dog next mentions how his race relates to the other survivors and their relationships in the new world during a conversation with Dale in Season 2's "Bloodletting." While the rest of the group searches for the lost Sophia, Carol's ten-year-old daughter, T-Dog and Dale keep watch over the group's vehicles on the highway and continue to scavenge for supplies. As Dale returns with some assorted things, T-Dog broaches the subject:

Dale: "Found some more batteries, a bottle of very trendy pink water, an excellent new machete, and I thought Glenn might like this guitar. Maybe he plays."

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T-Dog: "What are we doing?"
Dale: "Pulling supplies together."
T-Dog: "No, I mean... What are we doin'? People off in the woods, they's looking for that poor girl and we're here. Why? 'Cause they think we're the weakest. What are you, 70?"
Dale: "64."
T-Dog: "Uh-huh... And I'm the one black guy. Realize how precarious that makes my situation?"
Dale: "What the hell are you talking about?"
T-Dog: "I'm talking about two good-ol'-boy cowboy sheriffs [Rick and Shane] and a redneck [Daryl] whose brother cut off his own hand because I dropped a key. Who in that scenario you think is gonna be first to get lynched?" ("Bloodletting")

T-Dog here notes the precariousness of race relations even in a post-apocalyptic world, and his interactions with the Dixon brothers have underscored this fear. In discussing his trepidations, T-Dog directly invokes the cowboy myth as something into which he cannot fit. However, *TWD* immediately refutes this point of view as Dale rebukes him: "You can't be serious. Am I... Hey, am I missing something? Those cowboys have done all right by us. And if I'm not mistaken, that redneck went out of his way to save your ass. More than once" ("Bloodletting"). Dale's framing of the situation almost makes it sound as if T-Dog owes his loyalty to the survivor group, ignoring that T-Dog has also risked his life for others and been a contributing member throughout the series.

Beyond Dale's chiding, *TWD* offers other reasons for the audience to dismiss T-Dog's fears. Dale next checks T-Dog's temperature and realizes that he has a fever from an infected wound,[67] offering an easy scapegoat for T-Dog's concerns. Near the end of the episode, Daryl underscores Dale's faith in him by offering T-Dog doxycycline taken from his brother Merle's "stash," which Merle kept to manage his gonorrhea and presumably other sexually transmitted

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[67] Perhaps somewhat foolishly, T-Dog in the previous episode "What Lies Ahead" cut his arm open to distract zombies away from the rest of the group.

infections.[68] Most conclusive in encouraging the audience to dismiss T-Dog's worries, however,

is T-Dog's own disavowal of these words in a later episode:

> T-Dog [approaching Dale]: "I'm not weak and I'm not a coward."
> Dale: "I never said you were."
> T-Dog: "No, what I said on the highway. [pause] I don't know what that was, where it came from. That wasn't me. If it's okay, I'd rather you never told anybody about that stuff I said."
> Dale: "What stuff? I couldn't get a word out of you all day." ("Cherokee Rose")

Rather than validate T-Dog's concerns about his place in this new tribe, the show sweeps them

under the rug, painting them as something even their confessor sees as shameful once he has his

wits about him. Instead of using this situation to open up a serious conversation about race, *TWD*

treats T-Dog's statements as nothing more than the ramblings of a feverish man.

While the show takes pains to dismiss T-Dog's perspective (in "Bloodletting"), the next

season does a better job in suggesting a conversation about difference and inclusion. Perhaps the

best example of this perspective, as espoused by T-Dog, comes in the character's last episode,

Season 3's "Killer Within." Taking place after the group has taken over the prison and killed

Tomas, the television counterpart to Dexter, the two remaining prisoners Oscar and Axel come

out of their cell block to beg Rick for full integration into the group. Axel, who is White, takes

the role of primary spokesperson at first:

> Rick: "We had an agreement."
> Axel: "Please, mister. We know that, we made a deal. But you've gotta understand: we can't live in that place another minute. You follow me? All the bodies--people we knew. Blood, brains everywhere. There's ghosts." ("Killer Within")

Despite Axel's plea, Rick remains firm. Seeing this, Oscar, who is Black, finally responds:

> I told you this was a waste of time. They ain't no different than the pricks who shot up our boys. You know how many friends' corpses we had to drag out this week? Just threw

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[68] "Bloodletting"; there's a nice payoff when Hershel asks T-Dog about the medicine and says it probably saved his life. Hershel: "I'd say Merle Dixon's clap was the best thing to ever happen to you." T-Dog: "I'm really trying not to think about that."

'em out, like, humph. These were good guys. Good guys who had our backs against the really bad dudes in the joint, like Thomas and Andrew. We've all made mistakes to get in here, chief. And I'm not gonna pretend to be a saint, but believe me: we've paid our due. Enough that we would rather hit that road than to go back into that shithole. ("Killer Within")

Oscar's address makes no impact on Rick, at least, as the scene cuts to Daryl locking

Axel and Oscar outside the prison. Inside, however, we see Rick's group continuing to discuss

what to do with these prisoners. This exchange establishes the positions well and shows how T-

Dog becomes an advocate for inclusion, while acknowledging the prisoners' difference:

Rick [facing T-Dog]: "Are you serious? You want them living in a cell next to you? They'll just be waiting for a chance to grab our weapons. You want to go back to sleeping with one eye open?"
T-Dog: "I never stopped. Bring them into the fold. If we send them off packing, we might as well execute them ourselves."
Glenn: "I don't know; Axel seems a little unstable."
Carol: "After all we've been through? We fought so hard for all this. What if they decide to take it?"
Maggie: "It's just been us for so long. They're strangers. I don't—[pause] it feels weird all of a sudden to have these other people around."
T-Dog: "You brought us in."
Maggie: "Yeah, but you turned up with a shot boy in your arms. Didn't give us a choice."
Glenn: "They can't even kill walkers!"
Carol: "They're convicts, bottom line!"
T-Dog: "Those two might actually have less blood on their hands than we do."
Daryl: "I get guys like this. Hell, I grew up with them. They're degenerates, but they ain't psychos. I could have been with them just as easy as I'm out here with you guys."
T-Dog: "So you with me?"
Daryl: "Hell no! Let 'em take their chances out on the road, just like we did!"
T-Dog: "What I'm saying, Daryl—"
Rick: "When I was a rookie, I arrested this kid. Nineteen years old, wanted for stabbing his girlfriend. The kid blubbered like a baby during the interrogation, during the trial, suckered the jury. He was acquitted due to insufficient evidence, and two weeks later shot another girl. We've been through too much. Our deal with them stands." ("Killer Within")

This conversation is not really a group discussion. Rather, we see T-Dog, the only Black

member of Rick's group, standing up for a group of marginalized people who are about to be

forced into a dangerous world with little hope of survival. Whatever reason the group produces

to reject these outsiders, T-Dog has an answer, but that does not mean people are listening, as a later exchange shows:

> Rick: "We'll give the prisoners a week's worth of supplies for the road."
> T-Dog: "Might not last a week."
> Rick: "Their choice!"
> T-Dog: "Did they really have one?"
> Rick: "*Hey*! Hey, whose blood would you rather have on your hands? Maggie's, Glenn's, or theirs?"
> T-Dog: "Neither." ("Killer Within")

What T-Dog espouses in these conversations is very different from the zero-sum game the others see in welcoming these prisoners. The mythic cowboy's rugged individualism would argue that one should turn inward in times of danger and reject others. There is a risk associated with bringing outsiders into a group, and in the zombie apocalypse that risk means death. Rick (and the others) sees this choice as being their companions or outsiders, but T-Dog offers an alternative. He understands that cooperation and mutual benefit are better strategies. Of course, T-Dog's argument is not merely a crude cost-analysis benefit. He includes this argument because it applies directly to the others' reasoning, but his process involves a higher purpose. T-Dog instead argues for a moral component to the group's choice: they are "executing" people no more evil than Rick's own group (who even at this point have a bit of a body count), and T-Dog does not want that responsibility on his account. Essentially, T-Dog provides a third option between cruelly evicting people who have not proven to be a threat and causing the deaths of his close relationship group.

T-Dog's actions highlight him as a good, sympathetic character. In "All of T-Dog's Lines from Season 2 in *The Walking Dead*," Mark Abraham rails against the shallowness of T-Dog's character, but he accurately describes what T-Dog shows of his morals here:

> [T-Dog is] an individual who is deeply ambivalent about betraying pre-epidemic human values. Rather than an afterthought, T-Dog becomes a kind of tragic figure: a man who

tries to reason with his fellow survivors and despairs as they flail about, lashing out at everything that seems to be against them. (para. 8)

T-Dog understands here that zombie hordes have not removed what humans see as difference, but he understands the value of compassion, forgiveness, and inclusion and urges his companions in this direction. Unfortunately for T-Dog, he does not survive to see how the others, at least partly, come around to his way of thinking.

The narrative of "Killer Within," combined with that of the previous episode, "Sick," in which they first deal with the convicts, supports T-Dog's argument. "Killer Within" sees TV!Andrew, who is much more dangerous than his comics counterpart, enacting a clever scheme to send zombies through the prison and kill the survivors who cast him out after Tomas's death. Rick's treatment of Andrew was similar to what he now wants to do to Axel and Oscar in "Killer Within": after Tomas tries to kill Rick in "Sick," Andrew makes a brief attempt to attack Rick but is eventually chased out of the prison. Andrew begs for his life, but Rick leaves him in a small courtyard with a handful of zombies ("Sick"). Andrew escapes into the woods off screen and becomes resentful, violent, and vindictive during his exile. He leads zombies to the prison, mutilating a deer for bait, and causes the group to be divided between the zombies, making a defense of the facility more difficult ("Killer Within").

Andrew's actions exact a deadly price from Rick's group: this invasion kills T-Dog, who closes an inner gate after being bitten and eventually urges Carol to run for safety while he stays behind ("Killer Within"). Additionally, Lori goes into labor from stress and dies in childbirth, forcing Carl to shoot her corpse in order to prevent her reanimation as a zombie ("Killer Within"). The episode concludes with a confrontation between Rick, Andrew, and Oscar that arguably underscores where Rick went astray. When Andrew ambushes Rick and Oscar inside the prison, he urges Oscar to kill Rick so that they can take back the prison: "Shoot him! We can

take back this prison. What you waiting for? Do it! It's our house—shoot him!" ("Killer Within"). Oscar kills Andrew instead, proving his worth to Rick and securing his and Axel's position in the prison, but Rick's earlier actions toward Andrew led directly to the harmful events seen in the episode. As Andrew says, the prison was more a place where the prisoners belonged, not the ones who invaded it. While there is no guarantee that Andrew could have assimilated into the group, "Killer Within" does show that Rick's cowboy approach failed in the past and therefore argues that the group should consider a better way of handling outsiders. However, it is not our White leader who bears the severest punishment. Instead, T-Dog and Lori give their lives for Rick's mistake with Andrew, and only after T-Dog's death is his argument for including Axel and Oscar accepted ("Killer Within").

T-Dog's argument is generally upheld by the rest of the season's narrative, too. For all of the group's initial protest, Oscar proves his loyalty to the group, even acting somewhat more ethically—or at least less ruthless—than others. As the group gathers to rescue Glenn and Maggie in "When the Dead Come Knocking," Oscar volunteers to go with them. Zombies attack the rescue party, and they seek shelter in a small house near Woodbury, waking up its occupant.[69] While he yells at them and threatens to call the cops, Rick, Daryl, and Michonne try to quiet him. Eventually, Michonne kills him as he runs for the door. Cornered by the horde outside, Daryl asks, "Remember the Alamo?" But, another solution presents itself as the group looks at the body. Oscar, however, protests this implied action:

> Oscar [grimacing]: "You've got to be kidding."
> Rick: He's *dead*. [to Daryl] Check the back. ("When the Dead Come Knocking")

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[69] This anonymous character in "When the Dead Come Knocking" is an interesting one: a rotting dog is inside his house, and he threatens to call the cops, seemingly oblivious to the zombies that have been walking around for roughly a year at this point. It seems likely that he suffers from sort of mental disorder. Personally, I thought his eyes indicated that he had cataracts and was essentially blind, but this does not seem to have been either noted or confirmed by showrunners as far as I can tell.

This quick change of address dismisses Oscar's complaint, and they throw the man's body to the zombies and make their getaway as the creatures feast on the corpse ("When the Dead Come Knocking"). Despite his group loyalty and ethical qualms, the narrative does not reward Oscar's virtue:[70] he—and he alone—dies in the next episode helping rescue Glenn and Maggie ("Made to Suffer"). Axel, too, despite being somewhat creepy in his interactions with the female characters, maintains his loyalty to the group until the Governor shoots him in the episode "Home."

The fate of Oscar and Axel notwithstanding, *TWD*'s narrative supports T-Dog's position in "Killer Within" over Rick's. Even Rick himself seems to have accepted it during the time gap between Seasons 3 and 4. In "30 Days Without an Accident," we see a much larger community at the prison, one almost comparable to the town at Woodbury. Tyreese and Sasha, once turned away by Rick ("The Suicide King"), have become valuable members of the prison community, with Sasha even becoming incorporated into the prison leadership council ("30 Days Without an Accident"). Rick's group also comes to need this inclusiveness returned to them in Season 5, which they eventually receive by being welcomed into the Alexandria community ("The Distance"). It is also tested during Season 7, when Negan's group of "Saviors" terrorizes different communities in the Washington, D.C. area, and affirmed when Alexandria, the Hilltop, and the Kingdom unite against Negan's oppression ("The First Day of the Rest of Your Life").

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[70] This is not to say that it *should* necessarily—*The Walking Dead* in every incarnation likes to kill people almost regardless of behavior. But it is troubling that the most "expendable" (meaning, in this case, a character not really from the comics and not someone who has had a lot of screen time) character in the rescue mission in this arc is the only one to die.

Certainly this theme could be emphasized more, but when looking at the diversity on display in the TV series and the characters who occupy leadership roles, it far outpaces the comics.[71]

Perhaps Sang Kyu Kim, the writer of "Killer Within," was not considering T-Dog's race in assigning his position in the episode. Nevertheless, T-Dog's argument seems to connect effectively to his earlier concerns about being a racial outsider. In *TWD*, T-Dog convincingly argues for empathy, understanding, and considering the disadvantaged where more privileged characters refuse to do so. Even Daryl, who given his less privileged background probably should be more sympathetic to criminals, upholds the majority opinion. This argument harkens back to Hershel's ideas about the American culture in "Judge, Jury, and Executioner"; T-Dog extends the inclusiveness already advocated by Hershel and actively works to realize it. While these characters do seem to suffer for their positions, the television series generally reinforces this theme of inclusion. It sees people who are willing to work for the communal good as worthy of life, no matter their characteristics.

The Same as It Ever Was?

For the most part, *TWD*'s television incarnation proves itself more sensitive in treating diversity than the comics, confronting these issues more directly and pushing viewers to engage these ideas. Season 1's fourth episode "Vatos" perhaps best illustrates this thrust as it becomes a delightful subversion of racial stereotypes. The central conflict in this episode eventually centers on the ownership of a collection of guns Rick brought with him to Atlanta but lost while

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[71] Compare, for example, the alleged prison council in the comics (Issue 24), which is Rick (White male), Hershel (White male), Dale (White male), and Tyreese (African-American male), against the prison council in Season 4, which consisted of Hershel Greene (White male), Carol Peletier (White female), Glenn Rhee (Asian-American male), Sasha Williams (African-American female), and Daryl Dixon (White male). The comics' prison council even disavows diversity, as Rick and Dale discuss the idea that no women want to be part of it or even *want* female representation, except for Carol wanting Lori on the council instead of Rick. For whatever reason, the comics' council barely seems to matter, while the TV council does make decisions for the group of survivors, perhaps even further reinforcing the theme of diversity and inclusiveness in the TV series.

escaping the walkers. After Rick, Daryl, T-Dog, and Glenn go into the city to find Daryl's brother Merle, they see that he cut off his hand and escaped the zombie hordes. While searching for him, the group also decides to retrieve the guns, but in the process Glenn is captured by a group of assumedly Hispanic thugs who beat Daryl but are forced to leave one of their own, Miguel, behind. The rest of the screen time with Rick's group in Atlanta follows the interactions first between Rick's group and Miguel and then Rick and the Hispanic leader Guillermo, as Rick seeks to recover Glenn while retaining the weapons.

Near the end of the episode, Guillermo reveals a twist to both Rick and the audience: Guillermo and his lieutenant Felipé are not the rough gang leaders they seem to be but rather two nursing home employees who stayed behind to help the elderly inhabitants ("Vatos"). Guillermo may pose as a thug but used to be a custodian, and Felipé serves as his right hand as well as continuing his duties as a nurse. Their apparent "gang" is made up of people who came to check on relatives and stayed to help out. After realizing that the "Vatos" of the episode are (at least mostly) not hardened gang members, Rick harshly reprimands Guillermo:

> Rick: "Could I have a word with you? [moving into a face-to-face conversation] You're the dumbest son of a bitch I ever met. We walked in there ready to kill every last one of you."
> Guillermo: "Well, I'm glad it didn't go down that way."
> Rick: "If it had, that blood would be on my hands."
> Guillermo: "Mine too." ("Vatos")

Rick expects Guillermo to have trusted him for no reason, especially considering he and his associates took Miguel, one of the Vatos, hostage earlier in the episode. Guillermo calls him out on this hypocrisy as Rick continues to rebuke him:

> Guillermo: "The people we've encountered since things fell apart, the worst kind plunderers, the kind that take by force."
> Rick: "That's not who we are."
> Guillermo: "How was I to know? My people got attacked and you show up with Miguel hostage—appearances."
> T-Dog: "Guess the world changed."

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Guillermo: "No. It's the same as it ever was. The weak get taken. So we do what we can here." ("Vatos")

The evidence in this episode suggests Guillermo is right: he obviously had no way to know Rick's intentions, and the Vatos have clearly experienced problems with other survivors previously. Rick, due to his status in the pre-apocalypse world, does not understand things the way the Vatos perceive them.[72]

However, as much as Rick's group may argue that the world has changed and its former problems need to remain in the past, Guillermo reminds viewers that problems do not necessarily go away when society changes. People have taken advantage of the weak on many occasions, and the zombie apocalypse is not going to change this fact. In the case of the Vatos, they understand weakness from the perspective of race (Hispanic) as well as class, given their relatively lowly occupations. Nevertheless, this idea is not all hopeless. Guillermo and the other Vatos also show the benefit of solidarity by coming together and building a community, and they strengthen their image by playing with expected stereotypes to project a tough front.[73] Additionally, their goals remain noble and altruistic: helping those who can no longer care for themselves, pre- or post-apocalypse.

Beyond "Vatos," the series narrative reinforces Guillermo's message: beginning with the shady survivors the group encounters in "Nebraska," the biggest problems in the show come from the living, not from the literal walking dead.[74] Brutal dictators, crazed survivors, desperate

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[72] Perhaps evidencing weak moments in the show's writing, even T-Dog seems to support Rick's uncritical perspective, which seems strange in light of T-Dog's later arguments about other survivors.

[73] The episode does not make this connection explicit, but presumably posing as an ethnic gang would seem tougher than the reality of their circumstances.

[74] A nearly identical shift happens in the comics, though later than its corresponding television arc. While one could probably argue human villains become the primary threat with the introduction of the Governor in Issue 27, zombies

cannibals—humans are the real monsters of *The Walking Dead* and often for exactly the same reasons as they are without zombies around. Glenn's comment after the Governor sends Maggie back to him supports this point: "You forget what people do—have always done" ("Made to Suffer"). Glenn's amended comment highlights that, at least as the television series sees it, the awful deeds done on the show are just the same kinds of things people were doing before the zombie apocalypse. We can always do with Guillermo's "same as it ever was." As it pertains to race and diversity, things getting better does not mean we forget the lessons of the past or assume the world has changed enough that we no longer have problems. Unlike lessons we might derive about zombies and post-apocalyptic survival, this message is also one we can apply to contemporary society: are we monstrous toward the weak?

The Walking Dead as a television series identifies this tension, suggesting that diversity and inclusiveness is a good thing but also portraying a world in which people who fight for this ideal often suffer. T-Dog dies defending Carol specifically and the other survivors as a whole. The Governor, enraged by Rick to the point of mania, beheads the conciliatory and cooperative Hershel. Other minority characters who embody this kind of diversity and inclusion have also died along the way, including Bob Stookey, Tyreese, Glenn, and Sasha.[75] Given the show's themes, these deaths undercut the message of diversity a bit, though perhaps suffering for this cause is a somewhat realistic argument. Ultimately, however, the television series does a much better job introducing, handling, and adapting diversity to the small screen than the comics on

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definitively move to a minor role after the defense of Alexandria in Issue 84. As Rick says at the end, "[T]he dead…they're a **manageable** threat."

[75] A number of White characters have also died, but for the most part (Andrea was until recently perhaps the most obvious exception) their comics' counterpart is also dead. Sasha and Bob are original characters to the TV series, and given T-Dog's early role in the show, TV!Tyreese is arguably an entirely different character as well.

which it was based. Although the series could do a better job handling its non-White characters, that is, treating them as less "expendable" than it currently does, it still critiques White masculinity and opens the possibility for other societal approaches to flourish.

Returning to Charing Ball's critique of the show, *The Walking Dead* clearly seems to be "an allegory for the pitfalls of following a society based around white male *s*upremacy" (para. 3), and the failures of different White leaders in this series are both multitudinous and varied. Center for Disease Control researcher Edwin Jenner succumbs to despair and dies in the CDC's self-destruction, showing the failure of science ("TS-19"). "Cowboy" cop Shane Walsh dies trying to kill his former best friend Rick, so that he can form a new family with Lori, Carl, and his unborn child ("Better Angels"). Rick loses his wife Lori as well as his friend T-Dog, in large part thanks to his treatment of the "outsider" Andrew ("Killer Within"). Other failed adversarial groups might also reasonably be coded as White, from the savage hunters of Terminus in Seasons 4 and 5 to the fascist society at the Grady Memorial Hospital in Season 5 to Negan's corrupted messianic "Saviors" in Seasons 6 and 7 (who will almost assuredly meet their downfall in the future).

This opposition to violent White masculinity, along with Glenn's arc in Season 3, the growth and softening of White characters, and the series' disavowal of miscegenation in the "Richonne" relationships, makes *The Walking Dead* television series stronger than the comics that preceded it. It shows how strength is found in cooperation and has the survivors attempting to build communities much earlier and more effectively than seen in the comics. "30 Days Without an Accident" shows how democratic—and diverse—leadership is preferable to the autocracy invoked by Rick in "Beside the Dying Fire." Also, minority characters simply feature more prominently in the show than comics: for example, Sasha, Tyreese, and Bob are some of

the most prominent characters during the first part of Season 4.[76] In contrast to the comics that

consistently privilege White masculinity and marginalize people of color, the television show

argues that a better world is a more diverse one.

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[76] These three are important here because they do not really have counterparts in the comics; T-Dog resembles comics!Tyreese more strongly than TV!Tyreese, and Sasha and Bob are both original to the show.

CHAPTER 5

RACE IN THE DIGITAL REALM

Video game adaptations of media properties are extremely common. *The Walking Dead*

franchise alone has more than half a dozen, with *Fear the Walking Dead* earning itself a mobile

game spin-off as well and another high-profile shooter, Overkill's *The Walking Dead*, scheduled

for 2018 (Starbreeze Studios). The most acclaimed of these adaptations, however, is Telltale's

video game series, the first of which was simply *The Walking Dead: The Game*, before being

renamed *The Walking Dead: Season One* (*TWD: S1*) as development began on its sequels.

TWD: S1 follows former professor and convicted murderer Lee Everett, who at the very

beginning is being taken to prison by an Atlanta police officer at the very beginning of the

zombie outbreak. When the car crashes after hitting a zombie, Lee escapes into the suburbs and

encounters a young girl named Clementine, who has hidden in her tree house after her babysitter

was bitten. Lee and Clementine meet up with other survivors on their way to Macon, where

Lee's family lives, and the group eventually makes their way to Savannah, both to find shelter at

the ocean and locate Clementine's parents, who were in Savannah when the outbreak hit. *The*

Walking Dead: Season Two (*TWD: S2*) follows Clementine's story after Lee's death at the end

of the first game as she tries to survive essentially on her own, while *The Walking Dead:*

Michonne (*Michonne*) focuses on the titular comic character during her time aboard the sailing

vessel *The Companion*.

TWD: S1 sold well. *Major Nelson*'s Larry Hyrb posted Xbox LIVE sales figures showing

that the game topped the platform's arcade titles just after its first episode release in 2012. In July

of 2014, Kevin Ohannessian reported that the first two games (*TWD: S2* was in the middle of its release schedule) had sold 28 million episodes: "[and] with such strong sales, it is no shock that the company has decided to make a third season" (para. 2) Critical praise soon followed. George Prundaru, in "Walking the Dead: The Makings of a Game within a Successful Transmedia Franchise," provides a summary of the game's awards: "[T]he first season of the game received very high critical acclaims, being named game of the year 2012 by almost 100 institutions (professional institutions, specialized and general media – e.g. Metacritic, Wired, USA Today, gamesradar.com, Spike Video Game Awards to name just a few)" (95). In "Player Agency in Telltale Games' Transmedia and Cross-Genre Adaptations," Sarah Stang also argues in favor of the game's importance:

> Telltale's first attempt at this type of decision-based episodic adaptation, The Walking Dead, remains its most commercially successful and critically acclaimed production. The adaptation won numerous Game of the Year awards from several gaming publications and is credited with revitalizing the point-and-click adventure game genre. (21)

The series now consists of three main games (each labeled as a different "season") and a "mini-series," *The Walking Dead: Michonne* (*Michonne*), which follows one of the comic series' most prominent characters.[77]

Compared with the television series, which offers its own, fairly different take on Kirkman's characters, Telltale's game franchise is supposedly set within the same universe as the comic series. *TWD: S1* features scenes with Hershel and Shawn Greene at their farm, as well as time spent with Glenn Rhee as one of the survivors found in the Macon pharmacy. Telltale has featured additional parallels beyond these characters' appearances, too. Charlie Ecenbarger argues in "Comic Books, Video Games, and Transmedia Storytelling: A Case Study of *The*

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[77] While the game series obviously borrows terminology from television media, the title is a standalone game. The label "mini-series" is because the main games consist of five separately released episodes that all tell a single story, while *Michonne* has only three.

Walking Dead," that "the main protagonists of the game, Lee Everett and Clementine, are strikingly reminiscent of Rick and Carl Grimes from the comic series" (36), reinforcing the connections between the two properties. In its description on the digital download platform Steam, *Michonne* makes the tie between comics and games even more explicit, stating that it "stars the iconic, blade-wielding character from Robert Kirkman's best-selling comic books. Haunted by her past, and coping with unimaginable loss and regret, the story explores Michonne's absence between issues #126 and #139 of the comic book."

To ensure canonical consistency, Telltale included franchise co-creator Robert Kirkman as a consultant for their game, providing authenticity and coherence with the comics continuity. In an interview with the website *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, CEO Dan Connors praised Kirkman: "He's always filling us in on the universe. He likes to go to lunch with us and talk about things. He comes up and does press for us. He's been a great partner" (Grayson para. 3). Kirkman was similarly complimentary of the partnership in an interview with *Game Informer*:

> I thought they [Telltale Games] were more focused on telling a good story, and I thought they were good at engaging the player in the narrative. That's what interested me in making a Walking Dead game. They came to me with a proposal that involved decision-making and consequences rather than ammunition gathering or jumping over things; I was impressed by that. The only thing that's really special about The Walking Dead is the human characters and the narrative that they exist in. It's all about drama and loss, so I felt like doing a game with that focus, but that wasn't something that I knew was really possible. When Telltale came and told me about the way that making decisions changed the game and the way that players would be forced to choose between two bad decisions and how the survival aspect of The Walking Dead would actually be brought to the forefront—that's when I was sold on the game. (Reeves para. 3)

According to Kirkman, his involvement provided much of the thematic foundation for the game that would resonate with the comics. In an interview with website *IGN*'s Anthony Gallegos, Kirkman set forth what he felt Telltale needed to do with the first game to make it resemble the comics:

> The thing about The Walking Dead is the huge emotional component […] it's about human loss, making decisions and coming together as a community for the cause of survival. It's more about the struggle to survive than it is about the zombies chasing you or trying to eat you. (Gallegos para. 2)

Kirkman's *Game Informer* interview further underscores one aspect of what he perceives as the key to Telltale's success: good writing. Kirkman states:

> I've been kind of the godfather, saying, "This is what The Walking Dead is about and this is what I think is its secret." Then they turn all that stuff into a video game. I've been kind of hands-off, but I'm impressed with the brilliant storytelling and with how good this game has turned out, which is really a testament to how talented their writers are. (Reeves para. 4)

This assertion of canonicity and conscious effort to make the games reflect themes seen in the comic series not only increase the games' appeal to fans of the comics, but also make the comics and games directly comparable. If they are set in the same universe and the game developers are trying to achieve a similar feel, we could expect the comics and Telltale games both to reflect treatment of similar issues. Critics have generally agreed that the games were successful in doing so. As Stang comments on *TWD: S1*, the "focus follows the theming of the comic" (22). Gallegos adds, "It makes sense that the games stay true to the tone and themes of The Walking Dead comics, since both take place within the same canon" (para. 4).

Even the visual composition of the game reinforces this connection. Ecenbarger highlights the "intertextual techniques used by Telltale Games to build upon *The Walking Dead* world and maintain an association with the comic book series" (40), noting features such as cel shading and typefaces that mimic the comics' style (38). Ecenbarger further argues that these techniques reward players on a cognitive level by "adding new knowledge and new understanding to what it is like to live in the post-apocalyptic world" (41). Similarly, Prundaru points out that "*The Walking Dead* adventure game uses visual procedures that are standard in other media" (107), creating what we might call a more "cinematic quality" in the game (104).

As Ecenbarger summarizes, "By including the art style of the comic and referencing the comic book throughout the game with the typeface, Telltale is visually assisting players to access the transmedia story between comic and game" (38). This strategy ought necessarily to invite comparison with the comics and what they communicate. Examining Telltale's output, however, highlights a world that is more critical of and ambivalent toward the White masculinity and fears of miscegenation that prevail in the comics.

Here, for context, I begin with some of my reflections on playing *TWD* and why it seems to have become so popular with gamers. Although my experiences may not be completely generalizable, I think they show some of the emotional connections I formed and suggest how others may have responded to the games. Afterwards, I examine the first three games in Telltale's franchise and how they deal with diversity within their digital worlds through mythic figures. I conclude this chapter with some observations about the games' strengths and weaknesses and how their play experience differs from the other *TWD* media in this study.

Telltale Game Design

The highest point of frustration in *TWD: S1* for me came fairly early in the game. Knowing about the choices throughout the game and being a bit aware of people's complaints about its lack of actual versus perceived choice, I had resolved that not only did I not want to know how other choices would turn out, but also I did not want to retry sections if the decision I made went poorly. I worried that knowing or second-guessing decisions would make me see the seams and, to some extent, how little the choices made in the game matter. I made it five minutes into the second episode, "Starved for Help," before breaking that resolution.

The beginning of "Starved for Help" sees Lee and new character Mark talking about the group's current situation—little food—and personal conflicts. After a bit of dialogue, the two hear a scream and assume it might be their companion Kenny. Instead, Lee, Mark, and Kenny

find a schoolteacher named David, caught by a bear trap, and two teenagers looking on and

pleading for help. David's screams attract zombies, adding to the urgency of the situation, and,

although Lee can try other options, the only way to save David is to amputate his leg with an

axe. Few games would likely force a player through this process as *TWD* does: players have to

click each time they swing the axe, hearing David screaming in pain and begging for an

alternative.

At this point I was immensely frustrated: after trying to pry the trap open and using my

axe on the chain, I realized that cutting David free was his only chance. I made it about halfway

through his leg before the zombies got too close, causing Mark and Kenny to usher me away.

Not only was David left to be eaten, but his student Travis also grabbed for Mark's rifle and was

shot in the gut. I both felt responsible for not saving David and thought I had gotten the worst

possible outcome, so I tried again, this time more decisively hacking through David's leg.

Arguably, I need not have bothered. If a player takes that route, Travis is (somehow)

separated from the others and eaten by zombies, and whichever mortally wounded character one

brings back to the camp dies almost immediately afterward. Without replaying it, though, the

choice is less obvious and leaves some uncertainty about how the other branch might have gone,

so I did myself a disservice in my actions. The uninjured student Ben becomes a prominent cast

member, so the excursion does have narrative import, but this story illustrates how the game

disguises its choices—as well as not always offering as much choice as it appears.

Although not by any means the first narrative-focused choice-based game, Telltale's *The

Walking Dead* is the series that seems to have popularized such a trend in gaming in recent years.

Scholars have consistently pointed to *TWD: S1* as a trailblazer. In "Keys to Successful

Interactive Storytelling: A Study of the Booming 'Choose-Your-Own-Adventure' Video Game

Industry," Eric Tyndale and Franklin Ramsoomair credit the game with starting this trend and

call it "a highly acclaimed interactive [story]" (29). Prundaru agrees: "It has […] given rise to a new wave of adventure games that are often referred to as being 'in the style of The Walking Dead'" (95). Telltale itself followed *TWD* with similar games based on, first, literary properties, such as *The Wolf Among Us*, an adaptation of the *Fables* comic series, and *Game of Thrones*; second, video game franchises such as *Tales from the Borderlands*, an adaptation of the *Borderlands* video game series, and *Minecraft: Story Mode*; and lastly, multimedia franchises, seen in *Batman: The Telltale Series* and *Guardians of the Galaxy: The Telltale Series*. Other companies' games, such as *Life Is Strange* and *Fahrenheit: Indigo Prophecy*, have mimicked Telltale's approach, creating a wave of narrative-focused games in recent years.

This strong narrative approach in *TWD* games has resonated with players. Tyndale and Ramsoomair identify immersion, choice, and investment as themes that contribute to players' satisfaction with these games (31). Stang generally agrees; she ascribes the appeal such games have to the exercise of perceived agency: "Telltale's games foster an incredibly realistic illusion of player agency […] The appeal of video game adaptations, then, is in the pleasures associated with entering into the familiar world of the film, comic, book, show, etc., and exercising control over the characters and events therein."[78] This agency and its favorable reception among players make Telltale's games in particular important objects of study when considering the messages found within them, because the more widely played and appreciated, the stronger the potential for rhetorical impact on society. All three games examined in this study—*S1*, *S2*, and

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[78] Pg. 20; some critics have echoed Stang's implied censure and condemned what she describes as Telltale's "illusion" of choice. However, Tyndale and Ramsoomair found evidence that disagrees: "[I]n the thematic analysis, only two or three were critical of the illusion of choice tactic that was heavily employed by the five games being studied. The rest of the reviewers not only understood the practical necessity of this storytelling device, but they even praised its execution in situations where the game writers had been able to convince them that they had more control over the events of the story than they actually did" (p. 33). In short, an actual lack of choice does not seem to detract from players' enjoyment so long as they feel they can influence events.

Michonne—have been commercially successful and feature African-American protagonists, thereby highlighting diversity in a distinct manner from their comics and television counterparts.

Season 1: Educating Players on the Mythic Professor

As the first and most critically successful of Telltale's *Walking Dead* games, *TWD: S1* began the series on a high note. With literally dozens of awards, the game obviously struck a chord with audiences (Prundaru 95). The game's critical and popular success came despite featuring an African-American lead and relying heavily on dialogue and decision-making, rather than action. Let me begin by examining some comparisons that have been made between *TWD* comics and Telltale's games, which cast Lee as a mythic figure of another kind, and that help explain why players have developed such strong emotional connections to the game. Those connections also work to prime players to be sympathetic to Lee's experiences. I follow this discussion with one considering how Lee's ethnicity emerges in his interactions with other characters and helps players understand a racialized perspective in an immersive way.

In a speech given at the 2013 Game Developers Convention, Sean Vanaman and Jake Rodkin, the lead writers for *S1*, explained some of the thoughts that went into how they would craft their adventure-game protagonist. For them, race was certainly a topic of conversation. As Vanaman and Rodkin said, "White is the default for a protagonist," and they had "really long conversations about this [decision to include a minority protagonist]." The two designers obviously felt a need to approach Lee's character carefully: "*The Walking Dead* features a black man in the leading role. But the theme is not about race. But it has to feature the politics of race in the game context to be honest." Additionally, Vanaman and Rodkin shared three major qualities they wanted for Lee: "old enough to want a family but not have one," "physically able but not imposing," and "someone you root for, but has major personal flaws." The way they

navigated these desired qualities may also provide some clues as to how they avoided making

Lee just another stereotype.

Throughout *TWD: S1*, Lee kills a lot of zombies, begins his journey in the backseat of a

cop car, and displays a lot of physical strength and endurance. Given these qualities, it would be

easy to assume Lee is another stereotypical Black male, but Telltale gave him many other

qualities as well. He gets some relatively tender moments, apologizing to his family for not being

there for them and consistently treating Clementine with gentleness. Lee also shows an

intellectual side, given his former position as a history professor at the University of Georgia.

Through this interest, Lee subverts an expectation about his race when he reveals his background

to Christa, who is complaining about Omid wanting to take a sight-seeing trip through Georgia:

"Who the hell is interested in Civil War history anyway? Other than old white guys." Lee

sheepishly raises his hand, but the subtext of two men, one of Middle Eastern heritage and one

African American, being interested in Civil War history breaks not only Christa's, but also the

audience's likely expectations of how people in the United States "should" feel about the event.

Wordpress blogger *Howmanyprincesses* argues this point about Lee's racial identity

being more nuanced in pointing out Lee's non-stereotypical traits and how Telltale navigated this

issue:

> Because of his many tender, nuggets-of-wisdom moments with Clementine we see much
> more of his professor/teacher side than his murderer one, and his professor self is also the
> part of himself that is less racially stereotypical. I'll admit that I was a little worried when
> the game—finally, I had thought, a game with a black protagonist—started with Lee in
> the backseat of a cop car. But by the end of the game, I think they were able to pull that
> plot point off without the game ever descending into harmful stereotype—an impressive
> feat.

In fact, Telltale handled Lee with so much sympathy that until the game's very last episode I

personally wondered if Lee was actually guilty of murder, or at least how to explain this facet of

his character.[79] After all, being convicted as a murderer does not prove that a person actually committed the crime, but even finding out that Lee was guilty did not make me think less of the character.

In terms of his characteristics, Lee is almost the exact opposite of the mythic cowboy embodied by Rick Grimes. Their heritage is different, their pre-apocalypse occupations were different, and their family situations were different. Lee has an estranged ex-wife and no children, and we see his immediate family (post-death) in "A New Day." Further comparisons could be made. Ecenbarger notes that "Lee was a convicted criminal while Rick was an officer of the law" (40). Lee is a surrogate father to Clementine, while Rick is Carl's actual father. Lee, in contrast to the sheriff, has a more intellectual profession (though he is still physically powerful) and, as Stang observes, is "compassionate and caring" in his relationship with Clementine (22). Both men serve as the effective leaders of their groups, though *TWD: S1* sees more joint leadership than the early part of the comics' run.

The narrative similarities are admittedly striking, especially after looking at Vanaman and Rodkin's list of wanting a family, physically able, and flawed. With these comparisons in mind, Ecenbarger argues further that Telltale must have created Lee's character as an intentional foil to comics!Rick Grimes (39). Ecenbarger explains several of these points of comparison in his essay:

> At the very start of the game players learn that Lee Everett is on his way to prison for murder. At first this may seem diametric to Rick given he was a police officer prior to the apocalypse, but as the game carries forth their similarities become evident. Within the first few minutes of the game starting, after the previously described opening scene, Lee

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[79] Near the end of the fifth episode, "No Time Left," Lee sits down for a confrontation with "the Stranger," a man whom the group robbed earlier in the game at the end of "Starved for Help" and who has captured Clementine. He challenges many of Lee's decisions throughout the game (thanks to having the companion walkie-talkie to the one Clementine has carried all game), providing players with another opportunity to justify and reflect on the decisions they made in the game. At one point he discusses whom Lee has hurt, which I used as an opportunity to talk about Lee's criminal past and get some closure on this question.

is involved in a car crash and is knocked unconscious […] Rick Grimes […] begins his journey very much the same way. Rick awakens from a coma in a hospital. Little does he know the zombie epidemic has taken place, his only safety being the confines of his hospital room. He is still in pain and calls for a nurse but receives no response. After struggling through the pain and finding his clothes, he changes from his hospital gown and leaves the hospital room where he encounters zombies for the first time. Both characters awoke to this new world in pain, struggling, and uncertain of what is going on in the world. (39-40).

Additionally, the highway seen in the background of *TWD: S1*, as Lee is taken out of Atlanta, is the same one by which Rick approaches the doomed city.

Taking all of these contrasts together, I would argue that Lee, rather than being cast as a mythic cowboy figure, embodies the "non-violent Easterner" of the Western. Rushing contrasts this character with the mythic cowboy, noting him as "often a businessman or Harvard graduate" (17). Lee's professorial position reinforces him in this role, [80] but, unlike the Easterner of cinematic Westerns, Lee is successful in this apocalyptic frontier. Where the comics and, to a lesser extent, the television series privilege rugged survival skills in their leaders, Lee's leadership position within the game's survivor group suggests that one does not have to be a cowboy to be a hero in this world.

While Lee certainly does not embody a cowboy masculinity, he is nevertheless affirmed as a "good father" through his interactions with Clementine: he is available for her, gives to her, and finds her siding with him in times of conflict, all aspects noted by Jordan as characteristic of the myth (185). Although Lee is not Clem's actual father, their relationship grounds the game and forms the core of Lee's goals in the apocalypse. Stang argues that "Lee's primary motivation throughout the game is to protect Clementine at all costs" (22). Lee also stresses "the importance of survival" to her and teaches her to shoot much as Rick does with Carl (Ecenbarger 40).

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[80] Lee actually has a page on *ratemyprofessors.com* connecting him with the University of Georgia, which shows how meaningful players found the character. The comments on his page are subtly connected to the game, effectively reviewing it.

Ecenbarger notices other similarities between Carl and Clem, for example, their hats and

their helpfulness:

> In any event, no matter the circumstances, throughout most of the narrative Clem and
> Carl can be found wearing their father's hat. Furthermore, the dynamic that the two pairs
> share is also similar. Although Rick and Lee are the adults of the group, both Clem and
> Carl find a way to be of some sort of help in precarious situations. For instance, Carl
> saves Rick from being murdered by Shane in the comics, while Clem saves Lee (and
> others) from cannibals in the game. (40).

The resemblance between these characters can also be extended to Lee's attempts to teach

Clementine proper morals and decision-making, just as Rick tries to teach Carl. Lee's behavior

influences "what kind of a person Clementine becomes. The weight of the player's choices is

especially heavy when the game informs the player that 'Clementine witnessed what you did'

and 'Clementine will remember that'" (Stang 22). Lee often takes time during episodes to talk to

Clementine directly, asking for her thoughts on their situation and providing father-like

guidance. Though strong and capable of physical action, these moments show that Lee is also a

man of intelligence and emotional depth. These interactions feel much as do some of those

between Rick and Carl in the comics, such as in Issue 5 when Rick lets his son have a gun or in

Issue 6 when Rick comforts Carl after he kills Shane.

Overall, the relationship between Lee and Clementine seems designed to remind

audiences of *TWD*'s primary father-son pair but also changes it enough to make it different and

interesting. Such comparisons only further the thematic consistency between the comics and

Telltale series, and the changes Telltale made suggest the benefits of a more inclusive world

beyond Rick's "cowboy masculinity": there is a place, too, for Lee's professorial father.

Additionally, Telltale used this archetype to connect players with Lee's race and help them

understand his position compared with hegemonic Whiteness.

Lee's embodiment of the "good father" has helped players respond favorably to him: they gladly "entered into the role of protective, surrogate father-figure, […] able to see an enactment of mature paternal identity" (Stang 22). This identity even perhaps surpasses Rick's paternal care for Carl in the comics;[81] the only major conflict that happens between Lee and Clementine is when Lee tells her that it is unsafe to look for her parents in Savannah, which is motivated by Lee's concern for her well-being. In addition to making for an enjoyable experience, drawing players into this relationship makes them more connected to the game and urges them to consider their decisions' impact on Clementine. This relationship therefore gives player decisions more meaning and emotional weight, as Stang explains:

> The quality of the writing in *The Walking Dead* is such that the feelings of protectiveness and concern for Clementine, as well as the guilt felt for frightening her, are real sensations experienced by many players. Depending on how the player chooses to act, Clementine will learn to trust others, or to be wary of them. Choices do not matter on a grand scale in *The Walking Dead*—Lee will never save the world from its fate—however, the player's choices do influence what kind of person Clementine becomes. (23)

Making these choices matter is the real strength of this game, and this strategy encourages players to reflect on the game's themes in a more thoughtful way.

We have shown, then, that *TWD: S1* intentionally crafts Lee as a well-developed character, draws on themes and characters from the comics, and establishes that decisions matter for players. Throughout all of the game's factors, Lee's race also matters. Within the gameplay of various episodes, Telltale provides audiences with a more embodied and reflective understanding of Lee's African-American experience. This more nuanced approach differs from many video game titles. As Custer comments:

> The Walking Dead deviates […] in important ways that allow players to experience, construct, and assess race and racism for themselves. […] The Walking Dead uses its

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[81] Compare Carl asking Tyreese in Issue 38 if his dad loves him because he is always leaving, or Carl's outburst in Issue 50 blaming Rick for the deaths of Lori and Judith (though he does take it back).

first episodes as a platform to establish mechanics and character interactions that force players to consider what it means to be black. (para. 7)

Much as does the television series, which highlights race early in the series, *TWD: S1* confronts players with this racial reality from the very beginning. Augustine also highlights how Lee's race impacts not only his character, but also players' experiences:

> The team used [Lee's ethnicity] to enhance the subtle emotional experiences found throughout the entire game. That's what The Walking Dead creators want to see race used for in their game: [...] as just one of many defining attributes and life experiences that mold their creations into lifelike characters that can inspire love, hate, envy, and all the other tough-to-grab emotions in gamers. (para. 14-15)

> Because players do not experience games as passively as they would read a comic or watch a television show, putting these kinds of events in a video game and inviting players to respond to them should cause even more careful consideration than in another medium. As Prundaru notes:

> The player ends up empathizing with their avatar or assuming the social relationships the avatar has with the other characters in the game, be they positive or negative. The fact that the relationship statuses are determined by the player's actions, who has the power to direct them through deeds and dialogue choices contributes to this level of empathy. (107)

Tyndale similarly identifies two factors that increased players' connections to games: player agency over character development and consequences to selected actions (31). Combined, these factors built "a stronger connection to the game" and caused an experience that "resonated with participants and caused them to consider how they treated other characters" (Tyndale 31).

Lee's patriarchal role especially makes him more sympathetic to players, and Telltale uses this sympathy to engage players on the topic of racism. This potential impact on the player is worth analyzing further, especially through two of Lee's interpersonal relationships in *TWD: S1*—his relationship with Larry and his relationship with Kenny. Because these relationships

occur through gameplay, this discussion includes player options for navigating these relationships and responding to Lee's experiences.

Season 1: Confronting Lee's Racialized Experiences

As established in the first chapter of this study (see p. 21), while racism in *TWD: S1* may be subtle, it certainly and intentionally exists. Vanaman and Rodkin reference "coded racism," which can be found in the dialogue of both Larry and, more apologetically, Kenny. The player's introduction to Larry comes when Lee, Clementine, and Kenny and his family arrive in Macon and seek shelter at the Everett Pharmacy.[82] Kenny's son Duck stumbles near a zombie and gets blood on him, and when the group arrives inside, Larry argues that Duck must have been bitten and is therefore a danger to everyone. Because Kenny defends his son, the game frames the resulting argument as a fight between Larry and Kenny, with whichever person the player supports feeling more kindly toward Lee. Larry seems to be a hard person regardless, though; even if the player gives Kenny's wife, Katjaa, time to check Duck and prove Larry wrong, his apology is merely "I'm fucking sorry."

Even if the player sides with Larry and treat him and his daughter well, the relationship with Larry always takes a negative turn. Near the end of the first episode, Larry punches Lee in the face as the group tries to escape the pharmacy, adding, "You're not coming with us, you son of a bitch." Lee will not die, as Kenny returns to help him (again, no matter how he has been treated), but Larry's aggression is essentially unexplained. A player may have argued with Larry about Duck being bitten, but that would not seem to be anything that would justify Larry trying to kill Lee, and Lee has helped prevent the group being trapped in the pharmacy.

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[82] For an overview of the major characters in this game, as well as the others made by Telltale, see the Appendix.

Thankfully, the player does not have to wait very long to get some justification, as Larry's comments at the hotel a few minutes later help explain his motivations. After the group arrives at their new haven, Larry calls Lee over to ask if Lee likes his daughter Lilly. On the surface, this inquiry seems to be strange; Lee may have had positive interactions with Lilly, but it seems a stretch to assume automatically a potential romantic interest. Players have five options: "Yeah, she's great," "Not really," "She's fine," "Her dad tried to kill me, so…" or simply remaining silent. No matter what the player chooses, Larry will bully Lee: he knows about Lee's murder conviction and threatens to reveal it to the group and also probably harm Lee if anything happens to Lilly or Clementine. The most revealing response happens if the player chooses "Not really." Larry takes this response extremely negatively and says, "Good, stay away from her, or everyone will know that Lee Everett is a killer […] You hear me?" Lee will shrug in response, so Larry rebukes him in a racist way: "I asked you a question, boy."[83] By referring to Lee as a "boy," Larry attacks Lee's status as a man and shows no respect for his person. Larry's preoccupation with his daughter's romantic partners, even in the zombie apocalypse, also mirrors fears of miscegenation. As Mondal would describe it, Larry sees in his daughter "a 'pure' whiteness [that] exists and must be protected" (736); otherwise he would not ask his initial question. Larry's treatment of Lee may originate from his role as a patriarchal figure, but the negative emotions his comments elicit from Lee, and likely in players as well, argues that this masculine performance is undesirable.

While other forms of media might invite viewers to ponder such statements, *TWD: S1* requires a direct response to such racism because it is an interactive medium. In the game's second episode, "Starved for Help," as Lee and newcomer Mark (who will definitely survive the

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[83] As previously established, this rhetorical term has a long and negative history of racism (Bush and Bush 2; Roland Martin).

episode) hunt for food, Mark asks Lee about Larry and why he treats him so poorly. Mark asks, "What's the old guy's deal, anyway? Seems like he has a problem with you in particular." Lee can remain silent or choose one of four responses to explain his mistreatment: "He thinks I'm dangerous," "He's an old racist asshole," "He's just looking out for his daughter," or "I have no idea." Telltale not only poses the question of whether Larry's behavior is racist, but also asks the player to indicate whether the topic is even appropriate to discuss with Mark. Presumably Lee and Mark have a good relationship, as their initial conversation in this episode is very amicable, but some players might feel that this is a topic that should not be broached.

Players must also consider the consequences of their decision, if they choose to discuss Larry's racism with Mark. Whichever option the player chooses, Mark brings up those words in a later conversation between Lee, Larry, and himself.[84] If Lee told Mark that Larry was racist, Mark will tell Larry to his face that being racist is unacceptable and "outdated," but Mark also makes it clear that this accusation came from Lee. If accused of racism here, Larry will angrily deny the assertion, but the player through Lee can further affirm the statement. Larry will then get in Lee's face and ask what Lee is going to do about it. Although the conversation basically ends there (so no outright violent consequences ensue), this challenge remains open. Players are not further informed of Larry's "true" feelings on the matter, but they can certainly make their own conclusions about the source of his hatred for Lee. Even if Larry may not be completely aware of his racist attitudes, the evidence supports players making this evaluation.

Telltale's game developers deserve additional commendation here because of how they took pains to make Larry more than just a racist stereotype. Vanaman and Rodkin remark, "Were we careful to craft Larry as a character […] players *could* empathize with? I hope so." When

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[84] If the player chose silence, Mark simply asks why Larry hates Lee.

Larry explains his reasons for distrusting Lee, players can understand—even if they disagree with his position and see his racism as a problem. Custer explains: "Larry is made an ever-so-slightly more complex stock racist character by only making racist barbs at Lee in passing, but also [sic] by contextualizing his concerns through his daughter." By creating even antagonistic characters with some perspective and understanding, Telltale has resisted the temptation to scapegoat its characters as overwhelmingly evil. Taking this "scapegoating" approach might have conveyed the message that racism is bad, but such a process confines the racism to the character and lessens the rhetorical impact for players.

Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki argue this point about scapegoating in their examination of the media coverage of Matthew Shephard's murder, in 1998. The hypothetical, unsympathetic Larry, according to Ott and Aoki's approach, would be considered an example of a tragic frame. Ott and Aoki explain tragic frames in this way:

> Our analysis of the Matthew Shepard story suggests that it was framed primarily in tragic terms, in which the public, through the scapegoat mechanism, cleansed itself of the guilt associated with prejudice, hatred, violence, and their intersection. The shortcoming of tragic framing is that it brings about symbolic resolution without turning the event into a lesson for those involved. (496)

In *S1*'s case, the choice of a tragic frame would therefore have lead players to dismiss Larry and say, "Well, I obviously don't need to be like that cartoonishly evil Larry."

Making Larry more sympathetic, on the other hand, shows players that even "bad" people are not all evil. Racism may cloak itself in understandable intentions, such as Larry's desire to protect his daughter from a convicted murderer. Telltale's decision here serves as an example of the contrasting comic frame identified by Ott and Aoki: "Framed in comic terms, however, one can identify with the mistaken […] by emphasizing humility (the recognition that we are all sometimes wrong) over humiliation (the desire to victimize others)" (497). We can empathize with Larry despite his failures, and, significantly, this emotional closeness should help us learn

from his mistakes. By helping players understand Larry's motivations, Telltale can more likely change attitudes as opposed to causing a simple emotional reaction to the character.

Kenny offers a contrast to Larry's treatment of Lee, though he also ultimately becomes an example from whose mistakes players should learn. As most of the characters in *The Walking Dead* media, Kenny hails from the South, though in his case he lived in Florida before the zombie outbreak. His job as a fisherman likely explains his fixation on finding a boat and using it to evade zombies along the coast—a goal that he constantly mentions as the group heads toward Savannah. Despite some stubbornness and other character flaws, Kenny generally treats Lee better than Larry does, giving him a ride into Macon, saving him at the end of "A New Day," and continually emphasizing their common paternal connections (Kenny with his family and Lee with Clementine).

For all his positive qualities, Kenny shares a character flaw with Larry, in terms of how he stereotypes people. Identified as a White working-class Southern male, Kenny probably does not surprise players when he invokes racist stereotypes. In "Starved for Help," Lee and Kenny find a locked door. As *TWD: S1* is an adventure game, the player has the opportunity to examine the lock and get insight from Lee on how to deal with it, but Kenny interrupts the player:

> Kenny: "Hey, Lee. You know how to pick a lock, right?"
> Lee [shocked expression]: "No. No! Why would you say that?"
> Kenny: "Well. You're…you know…urban?" [eyebrows raise questioningly]

Players have no control over Lee's response in this instance: his expression turns to anger, and he says, "Oh, you are not saying what I think you're saying." Kenny's hesitation and substitution for what he sees as a more politically correct term cannot erase the underlying reality: he assumes Lee has some ethically questionable skills only because of his skin color. Custer further elaborates on this interaction in his "Walking Black" post:

Moments like this strip the player of choice and force them to acknowledge […] how they define Lee, his gender, and his race. We see that dynamic unfolding here with the player being forced to acknowledge that racism is, in fact, a part of this world and Lee's interactions in The Walking Dead. (para. 3).

This acknowledgement comes despite the ostensible colorblindness that should exist in contemporary society and be seen even more so in the zombie apocalypse.

The importance of gameplay mechanics in this exchange should also not be overlooked. Kenny's interruption shows players in a ludic manner how racism can interrupt and intrude without warning. Players may have expected a moment of contemplation, but Kenny's assumptions throw them off balance and interrupt what they were doing. The lack of choice in this exchange is also significant for a game that has been built on this kind of dialogic options. That players cannot choose Lee's response argues that only one response is really acceptable given the circumstances: justified outrage.

To the character's credit, Kenny immediately backtracks: "Jesus, man! I'm from Florida! Crazy shit just comes out of my mouth sometimes. Sorry." Lee shakes his head dismissively and returns his attention to the lock, a response that could be interpreted as accepting Kenny's apology or not letting him off the hook. Kenny's apology, though, attempts to shift blame for his comments away from his person and onto society. He blames his heritage, puts his action in a passive voice, and even labels the words "crazy." This shifting of blame mirrors what Ott and Aoki noted about the coverage of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, Matthew Shepard's murderers:

Division or the "casting out" of the vessel of unwanted evils is accomplished through vilification and through a redrawing of boundaries that excludes the scapegoat. Slowly, almost unnoticeably, discourse in the news media was shifting from the country's homophobia to that of the perpetrators, where it was being recoded as a character flaw rather than a wide-scale institutional prejudice. (492)

For McKinney and Henderson, the media labeling them as deviant held them at fault and not

society; while Kenny's strategy assigns blame oppositely, the tactic is identical. It is not Kenny

we should blame for being crazy, and locating "crazy" away from himself provides closure from

having to confront that attitude more directly.

On the other hand, players should be able to recognize the transparency of his excuse.

The Spoiler Warning crew discussed the exchange with some amusement as they approached

this conversation in the game:

> Rutskarn: "This is my favorite line in the game from Larry, I mean Kenny.
> Shamus: "It's interesting—at the top of this episode you get the opportunity to call Larry
> racist when he hasn't done anything *overtly* racist, but then Kenny, who's supposedly
> your buddy, actually is kind of racist." ("What's Not to Like?")

The group laughed at Kenny's lines and weak defense of himself and continued their critique:

> Campster: "I've lived in Florida; I can vouch for that [crazy words]."
> Shamus: "Yeah, it did ring—that rang totally true; I've known guys who would think like
> that, and would say something like that, then would be embarrassed just like that. That—
> that just really worked. […] And would be wearing a baseball cap just like that while he
> said it." ("What's Not to Like?")

For at least this group of players, Kenny's words had the intended effect, and they recognized

both his mistake and the underlying lesson.

As seen in both Larry and Kenny, *TWD: S1* locates racist stereotypes as part of a deep-

seated institutional problem. Larry does not even seem fully aware of his perspective, while

Kenny might generally think well of Lee but still expresses his offensive thoughts without

concern for Lee's feelings. Players might expect that people would put aside such petty attitudes

when the world falls apart, but *TWD: S1* argues that even a zombie crisis will not necessarily

change people all that much. Telltale writes their game in such a way that these characters'

attitudes feel realistic, so players are given the opportunity to learn from these negative examples

and to gain more reflection on race or similar stereotypical discourse in their own lives.

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Seasons 1 and 2: Patriarchal Failures All Around

TWD: S1 confronts stereotypes through Lee's character, but it also has a narrative arc with Kenny's character that criticizes White masculinity similarly to arcs found in the comics and television series. Where the comics and television series focus more on Rick's "cowboy masculinity" (Ho 61; Sugg 801), Kenny figures more as a patriarchal figure whose esteem is tied to his success in taking care of his family. His failures in *TWD: S1* suggest that this approach is ineffective given the changed world. His story in *TWD: S2* reinforces this argument as he tries to replace his family and continues to fail,[85] and *S2* arguably extends this argument to critique nearly all hegemonic systems. Herein, I explore Kenny's narrative throughout both games as well as examining other characters from *S2* that form a comprehensive indictment of societal structures.

Players meet Kenny when Lee and Clementine arrive at Hershel Greene's farm in *TWD: S1*. Players can spend time talking to Kenny, his wife Katjaa, and their son Ken, Jr., who goes by the nickname "Duck." Knowing that Lee wants to reach Macon, Kenny offers him and Clementine a ride to the town, saying that he would "appreciate the company of a guy who can knock a couple of heads together if he has to."[86] From the very beginning, Kenny's focus on family is evident. After introducing Lee and Clementine to his family, Kenny goes to check on his truck and asks Lee if he understands how to take care of Clementine. If the player asks about Kenny and his family's experience, Kenny illustrates just how protective he is of his family:

> Katjaa's got a sister up in Memphis; we were coming back from visiting her. We were in a gas station and some guy grabbed my boy. I thought he was kidnapping him. I was on the fucker in about two seconds and… Christ. Just lucky I was there. We saw a lot of

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[85] One or two of the endings, perhaps, see Kenny redeeming himself in a sense and forming a new family unit, but even if he survives the game he dies in a flashback seen early in *ANF*.

[86] *TWD: S1*; this comment seems to foreshadow Kenny's later stereotyping: Black = physically powerful.

bodies before we stumbled upon Hershel's. But we're a tough family, Lee. Ain't nothing gonna faze us. (*TWD: S1*).

If the player continues the conversation, Kenny also suggests that his plan for his family is to live on his boat if the government cannot handle the problem, which reveals his job as a commercial fisherman.

Based on this introduction, we easily see in Kenny's character two of Trujillo's characteristics of hegemonic masculinity: familial patriarchy and occupational success (290-1). These two traits drive Kenny's actions throughout the game, putting him and Larry at odds when Larry insists that Duck is bitten and pushing Kenny to continue searching for safer places and better plans. In the second episode "Starved for Help," Lee gets to hand out limited rations to some members of the group, and Kenny refuses to eat unless the children, Duck and Clementine, have food. At the end of the same episode, he happily takes supplies from an abandoned car to provide for his family.

Things take a darker turn for Kenny's family as the game approaches its halfway point. After Duck is bitten during the group's escape the motel in the third episode "Long Road Ahead," Kenny sinks into denial and despair. When Katjaa and Kenny reveal Duck's bite to Lee, Kenny says, "We keep the same plan unless something changes," obviously downplaying the possibility of his son transforming. The group finds an abandoned train and gets it moving toward Savannah. Kenny appoints himself conductor while Katjaa stays in the train car with Duck, but the boy's condition worsens. Lee must persuade Kenny to stop the train before Duck turns through one of multiple methods,[87] but the following exchange is emblematic of Kenny's denial of the situation:

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[87] Players who fail to convince Kenny return to the railroad car find a zombified Duck, who has killed everyone in the train, and the boy shambles towards Lee, tackling him off the train.

Lee: "You need to stop the train."
[Kenny pauses, looks back, and scowls]
Lee: "Duck's just about gone back there."
Kenny: "Don't feed me that bullshit. He'll be fine."
Lee: "He won't be. He's going, Kenny."
Kenny: "What is the goddamn deal? He's a little sick, but we can't just quit. It's a scratch. He's not like the others. Jesus, all y'all are just making it worse." ("Long Road Ahead")

After the train stops, Lee shares a conversation with Kenny, Katjaa, and the ailing Duck as the rest of the group watches. Katjaa tells her husband that Duck is dying and that they should ensure he will not turn. Kenny asks what if he does not, but Katjaa shoots down his question as foolish. As they continue to discuss Duck's condition, players realize that the pair is discussing who will need to shoot their son:

Kenny: "There's…come on, Kat…"
Katjaa: "If you think of one, you let me know."
Kenny: "Isn't there some sort of pill, or something we can just give him…"
Katjaa: "Stop it."
Kenny: "He can just drift off to sleep [voice breaking], right, hon? I mean, Jesus, this is our son."
Katjaa: "I KNOW. But we know it's…[points to temple] here. Or nothing."
Kenny: "Well…fuck…just…who then? You want me to?"

Players can interject at this point, giving an opinion about who should shoot Duck and even volunteering to do the deed, but Katjaa demands that she be allowed to do it and that no one accompany her into the woods. Unfortunately for the group and Kenny's sanity, Katjaa takes the opportunity to kill herself, and Lee and Kenny must still decide what to do about Duck.

Kenny shows emotional vulnerability in these scenes, giving a feel for just how much he relies on his family for his sense of self-worth, and his inability to protect them reemerges throughout the rest of the game. At one point, Kenny even blames himself for their deaths, saying it was only fair that he lost his son because Duck contributed to Hershel's son Shawn's death. Kenny becomes even more focused on finding a boat—drawing on his occupational success as a fisherman—and using it to escape the zombies, likely in an effort to cope with his

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grief. The group's loss of a small fishing boat pushes him into utter despair in the last episode, "No Time Left," and he becomes somewhat subdued for a few scenes.

A bit later, the group comes across a couple in an abandoned house who committed suicide together. Omid and Christa stop and muse over them, and Kenny takes the opportunity to try coming to terms with his family's deaths:

> Christa: "We've seen so many people…I don't know why these ones break my heart."
> Kenny: "What's heartbreakin' is not givin' yourself a chance. [pause] It's what Katjaa did."
> Lee [variable response, but one of the options]: "You did everything you could."
> Kenny: "No, Lee. [long pause, camera cuts to Omid and Christa and back to Kenny] She left me…my son…people that cared about us…I forgive her, but it don't make it any less wrong. You don't just end it 'cause it's hard. You stick it out, and you help the folks you care about. So let's figure a way outta here and get that little girl."

Kenny in this conversation rejects his wife's decision and reframes his motivation as a broader patriarchal impulse. With his own family gone, he expands his idea of family under the rhetoric of "folks you care about" and to saving the kidnapped Clementine in particular. He also gets one more chance to be a hero after this scene, either euthanizing the teenager Ben, when he impales himself on an iron fence post as zombies approach, or saving Christa after she falls into a building full of zombies. In either case, the group assumes him to be dead, though the event happens off-screen, and he turns up alive in the second episode of *S2*, "A House Divided."

For all his speech-making, Kenny's attempts to uphold his patriarchal duty in *TWD: S1* are not particularly successful. While he does kill Ben or save Christa, he clearly feels responsible for Katjaa and Duck and sees their deaths as a failure on his part. Kenny nevertheless does not abandon his patriarchal identity through this loss, and his speech in "No Time Left" in *S1* hints at how he sees an opportunity to reclaim and reinforce this identity.

Kenny's attempt to start a new family of "folks you care about" forms his narrative arc in *S2*. In *S2*'s "A House Divided," an older Clementine finds herself with a group of survivors on

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the run from a tyrannical leader named Bill Carver. The group seeks shelter in a ski lodge run by

a kindly man named Walter, and Clementine reunites with Kenny here. In the year and a half

since the end of *TWD: S1*, Kenny has grown a full beard and found a new love interest, an Indian

American woman named Sarita who "saved" him and has become his girlfriend. Clem's arrival

at the lodge brings back the old Kenny, as he shares stories of Lee with her and her new

companions, but Kenny's attitude in this scene seems somewhat strange. The scene ends when

Kenny calls Clementine "Duck," which suggests Kenny's perspective of this unanticipated

reunion. In Sarita and Clementine, Kenny seems to see a replacement family for the one he lost

and a chance at redemption. As Nick Dinicola of *Pop Matters* comments on the episode:

> The game has already started repeating itself. Kenny has started a relationship with a woman named Sarita, a clear stand-in for his dead wife, and he accidentally called Clementine 'Duck,' his son's nickname. Kenny is set up to repeat his tragic cycle with no new twist. (para. 6)

Despite his reinvigorated drive, Kenny has a hard journey throughout the rest of the

game. The group is captured by Carver at the end of "A House Divided" but eventually escapes

in the third episode, "In Harm's Way." Sarita either dies or is fatally wounded in the escape, and

Kenny turns again to grief in the fourth episode, "Amid the Ruins," blaming Clementine for his

loss. When Rebecca dies after childbirth at the end of "Amid the Ruins," Kenny sees the infant

Alvin Jr. (AJ) as his new responsibility but becomes almost fanatical in his protectiveness. His

instability causes most of the group to leave him, Clem, and AJ behind with only one other

survivor, a loner named Jane who sees Clementine as a surrogate sister. Kenny and Jane hate

each other, and Jane, in an effort to convince Clementine just how dangerous Kenny has become,

hides AJ in a snowstorm and tells Kenny the child is dead. As a player, I saw through the ruse,

but Clementine apparently does not.[88] An enraged Kenny tries to kill Jane, blaming her for AJ's death, and Clementine can choose to shoot one of them after her attempts to stop the brawl fail.

Patriarchs have it rough in *S2*. Aside from Kenny's potential death, a lot of other fathers die. Omid, father to Christa's unborn child, dies in the opening sequence of the game. While not an actual father, Pete, oldest of the cabin survivors Clementine encounters, is the first of that group to die at the hands of zombies, and he leaves behind his nephew Nick, who saw Pete as a surrogate father. Carver pursues Clementine's group because Rebecca is possibly carrying his child, and he kills Rebecca's husband Alvin because of it. This tyrannical impulse results in Carver being beaten to death by Kenny when the group finally gets the upper hand. Carlos, one of the other cabin survivors and the father of a girl named Sarah, dies in the group's escape from Carver.

These continued failures suggest a world in which fatherhood itself may be imperiled, or at least undesirable, and Ian Danskin argues on his "Innuendo Studios" *YouTube* channel that the events of *S2* show Kenny as Lee's dark mirror and ultimately a perversion of fatherhood. Danskin elaborates on the arc between Clem and Kenny in *S2*:

> I didn't see what was going on while I was in the thick of it. It took a little while. But I think I get it now. My choices don't matter the way they used to, but that doesn't mean they don't matter at all, and this is still very much a game about a relationship. It's a relationship between a child and the broken, violent, self-hating man who wants to protect her so badly that he just might get her killed. She keeps him near because she knows she might need him, but no one knows better than her what he's capable of. She sees a soft and remorseful side that no one else sees. He's there to take care of her but she frequently has to play the adult and take care of him. People are constantly telling her to get away from him while he swears up and down that he will always protect her. And he alienates everyone else who might keep her safe.
> God, it's textbook. Kenny is Clementine's abusive stepfather.

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[88] Players cannot talk them down or suggest that AJ is alive as a possibility. Kenny is also not very genre-savvy, given that he takes Jane's implication of a tragic fate for AJ—she just looks sad and shakes her head when he asks what happened to the child—at literal face value.

The game itself seems to agree with this assessment. Fatherhood in *S2* goes nothing but wrong. As Cady and Oates put it, "Patriarchal structures crumble in the face of the zombie apocalypse" (311). If the player chooses to shoot Kenny, he lives long enough to tell Clementine that she did the right thing;[89] he also tells Clementine this if he kills Jane and then the player chooses to move on without him. Given the fate of so many fathers, the game ultimately suggests such patriarchy is either impotent or dangerous. Either way, it cannot protect people as it desires and results in tragedy for the fathers who try to hold onto it.

Michonne: Working against Itself

Michonne even more blatantly than the other *TWD* games intersects the comics' canon by featuring one of the series' popular, long-running characters as its protagonist. For fans of the comics, learning more about Michonne would be a strong motive to play. This game in particular tries the strategy Ecenbarger finds even in *TWD: S1*; it attempts to "reward players by adding new knowledge to the canon of the comics" (38). On the surface, it offers players a chance to get to know more about one of *TWD*'s most prominent characters across all its media incarnations, but it does not necessarily live up to its potential. Though it offers another villainous portrayal of White leadership through the matriarchal Norma, it suffers from some narrative and intertextual problems that distract the reader from its rhetorical themes.

First, we should examine how *Michonne* compares with other *TWD* media, especially the other Telltale games, in its treatment of diversity. Obviously the protagonist Michonne is African-American, but the game also continues Telltale's solid track record of featuring diverse casts and nuanced perspectives. The crew on Pete's boat is mostly non-White, with African-Americans Pete and Michonne, Hispanic Berto, and Arab-American Siddiq. Oak, the one

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[89] As a player, I was offended because of course I made the right choice.

Caucasian, is not even American but British, at least if his accent is any indication. As the plot progresses, Michonne and her fellow crew members find themselves in conflict with the people of Monroe, who are led by the sister-brother duo Norma and Randall. Michonne and Pete also encounter the Fairbanks family, whose Amerindian heritage introduces still another ethnic group.

The main plot begins when Pete tries to contact a couple of his trading partners by radio but fails to reach them. Almost immediately afterwards, the crew's boat, *The Companion*, hits a shipwreck and becomes grounded. Pete and Michonne go ashore and explore *The Mobjack*, an abandoned ferry, to find supplies or any sign of Pete's friends. The duo finds the ferry's occupants massacred, and then they encounter Samantha (Sam) and Greg Fairbanks, who had stolen some supplies from the nearby community of Monroe. Randall and some of his group then capture Pete, Michonne, Sam, and Greg, assuming that Pete and Michonne are with the thieves, and the rest of the game focuses on Michonne's attempt to escape Monroe and to end the conflict with Monroe's Norma and Randall.

As in Telltale's other games, it would be hard to ignore race in these interactions. The most obvious difference is seen in the ethnic composition of the three different groups. Norma, Randall, and several others in Monroe are White, while the characters outside Monroe (other than Oak and Samantha's friend Paige) are not. [90] For better or for worse, the events of the game also push Michonne and her group into siding with the Fairbanks family, setting up a clear dichotomy between Monroe and those outside it. Because of his aggression toward anyone outside of Monroe, Randall does display some of the rugged individualism associated with the cowboy myth, and, while Norma might not be a patriarch, she displays a matriarchal,

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[90] Even then, Oak and Paige arguably fall outside hegemonic American Whiteness. Oak is foreign-born, and Paige harbors romantic feelings toward Sam based on dialogue with Michonne in "Give No Shelter" and "What We Deserve": "If it wasn't for Sam…" Paige says after admitting to contemplating suicide in "Give No Shelter."

authoritarian leadership over her people not too different from the leadership portrayed by either

incarnation of Rick Grimes.

Although *Michonne* does not discuss race as directly as its predecessors, several

conversations are nevertheless shaped by some of its markers. The most obvious tension can be

seen in a conversation between Norma and Michonne about her name shortly after her capture:

> Norma: "So… Michonne. [gestures Randall to leave; he motions Michonne forward before he complies] I overheard your friend call you that. That's a great name. Norma? Always wanted to be a Veronica or Gwendolyn when I was a girl. But I've made my peace with it, I suppose. You're lucky, though. You've got a name people remember. [walking away] Michonne… Damn, that's good. A nice, strong name."

At this point, the player can choose one of four short responses: "Get to the point," "Don't kiss

my ass," "Norma's not a bad name," or silence. The first option skips a bit of conversation, as

does silence. The sympathetic option makes Norma seem fairly reasonable: "Nah. And who

knows. It's a new world. Maybe the name'll make a comeback." However, the second option is

more illuminating, cutting through Norma's veneer of hospitality to reveal her true feelings about

Michonne:

> Michonne: "You can stop kissing my ass. That's not gonna work with me."
> Norma: [chuckles] "Sure thing, honey." [shakes her head dismissively]

Although not all players will see this line, it reinforces Norma's low opinion of Michonne as an

exotic "Other" and attempts to assign Michonne a subordinate position with the derogatory

"honey." The conversation about Michonne's name does not invoke race directly, but personal

names often originate from an ethnic heritage. Compare the example of President Barack

Obama, whose name according to Michelle Johnson "was 'exotic' to some people, which also

meant that he was 'foreign' to others" (154). This mirrors Michonne's treatment, and the

preceding name conversation primes players to read it in a racialized way. Norma's use of

"honey" reminds players of how Larry referred to Lee as "boy" in *TWD: S1* and suggests that both have similar views on people with different skin colors.

Detractors may respond that Norma makes no mention of race and reading race into the exchange goes too far. This tactic, however, results in a rhetorical dismissal of racism by pretending racism does not exist and therefore contributes to the problem. As Mark Orbe and Tina Harris argue in *Interracial Communication: Theory into Practice*, we should reject such "social claims of neutrality, objectivity, and color blindness" (154). Orbe develops this argument in "#AllLivesMatter as Post-Racial Rhetorical Strategy" to show "how post-racial fantasies render the legitimacy of race-specification assertions as null and void" (90). Indeed, as Orbe continues, asserting a society that has gotten past racism, whether in real-world 2017 or during the zombie apocalypse, can damage efforts to improve race relations: "post-racial rhetoric can be understood as a form of 'historical amnesia' whereby the intergenerational effects of centuries of racism are forgotten" (94). Colorblindness may be well-intentioned, but it does not fix the problem:

> For many Whites, advocating for a race-neutral, color-blind world is a practical strategy toward an admirable goal: the elimination of racism. While the end goal is laudable, what oftentimes remains unspoken (and unchallenged) are the ways in which color-blind rhetoric fails to recognize and address continued forms of racial discrimination and institutionalized racism. Thus, perceptions of the U.S. as a post-racial society are best understood as a reflection of a lived experienced steeped in white privilege. (Orbe 94)

Similarly, ignoring the racialized roots of Norma's conversation with Michonne denies Michonne's race and how it impacts her as a character.

Factional conflicts aside, Monroe's leadership also seems intolerant of difference within its ranks. Although their doctor Jonas is African-American and his boyfriend Zachary appears to be of Asian heritage, they are nevertheless bullied by Randall, who uses their sexuality as the scapegoat for his verbal mistreatment of them when speaking to the captured Michonne,

Samantha, and Greg: "Jonas and Zachary have the nicest room on the ship. The good doctor deserves it. Gosh, he just works so hard…" After making this remark, Randall's face indicates his facetiousness as he raises his eyebrows and pinches his mouth. The abuse continues as Randall turns his attention directly to Zachary: "What is it you do, Zachary? Besides fuck Jonas? […] You cower, and you whine because you don't have the balls to do things that need doing around here." This verbal assault eventually pushes Zachary to shoot Greg, at which point Randall blames Zachary by asking, "*Now* who's going too far?" and parodying Zachary's earlier attempts to keep Randall from beating Michonne. Making Zachary complicit in the mistreatment of Monroe's prisoners also seems to make Zachary more afraid to challenge Randall,[91] which was probably also Randall's goal: to force Zachary into more conformity with his perspective on the world.

Nevertheless, *Michonne* does not always use race as a way to critique the intolerance of White leadership. One of the more atypical conversations comes in "What We Deserve," as Michonne converses with the youngest Fairbanks boy, Alex. Players may choose a number of routes in this conversation, from telling the truth about his father's death to comforting him by promising to protect him from the zombies, but Alex is almost unique in *TWD* in offering an explanation for the monsters that now inhabit the world:

> Alex: "I know what those monsters out there are. Windigo. Grandma told me about them. It's what happens when someone…eats another person."
> Michonne: "Oh? [eyes narrow] I hadn't heard that one before."

No incarnation of *TWD* really explains the cause of the zombie outbreak; in fact, Kirkman disavows any real desire to explore or answer such questions at the end of Issues 50 and 54. Kirkman also influenced the television shows not to discuss the question, as *Cinema Blend*'s

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[91] If the player convinces Sam not to kill Zachary at the end of the episode, that is.

Jessica Rawden reported while commenting on spinoff *Fear the Walking Dead*. In fact, neither

television series seems likely to discuss the zombies' origins:

> [S]howrunner Dave Erickson revealed there's one thing the series won't show us: the origins of the outbreak. One of the sticking points with *The Walking Dead* franchise is that we've never known why zombies have become a thing in the modern world. But Erickson says the show tinkered with the possibility of revealing that piece of the mythology to fans and decided it didn't matter. (para. 1-2)

Alex's Windigo explanation in *Michonne* may not be canonical, exactly, but it is interesting to

see how a culture might explain the appearance of zombies on the earth and ascribe meaning to

them differently than others.[92]

The interactions between different groups in *Michonne* also hold some nuance: it is not

simply "Monroe's White tyranny is bad" and "non-Whites are good." More so than the other

games, *Michonne* presents the protagonist's group entering a conflict in which, to some extent,

there is no "right" side. The Fairbanks family *has* stolen from Monroe and endangered its people;

Sam admits as much in "Give No Shelter." However, the leaders of Monroe are brutally cruel

people and do not seem trustworthy, either. *Mashable's* Adam Rosenberg effectively discusses

these questions in his overview of the game's first episode, noting the possible points of tension

between the different characters:

> Randall's introduction raises a question: Is this guy really the evil prick that Samantha and Greg say he is, or is he just taking care to protect his people?
>   By the end of the episode, we know (or think we know) the truth: Randall is bad news. He's got no problem smashing in the face of a thieving teenager, and he's clever

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[92] Windigo (or Wendigo; the word has several English spellings) mythology has a number of interesting parallels to how zombies have been used in popular culture aside from the connections with eating people and transformation. Robert Brightman provides an effective definition that could almost as easily apply to zombies: "The noun *windigo* [Ojibwa *wintikö*, Cree *wihtiköw*] refers to one of a class of anthropophagous monsters, 'supernatural' from a non-Algonquian perspective, who exhibit grotesque physical and behavioral abnormalities and possess great spiritual and physical power. Either many or all windigos were once human beings, transformed, usually irreversibly, into their monstrous condition. In some cases the transition was conceived as rapid while in others the condition could be covert and volitionally disguised" (p. 337). Danette DiMarco takes a more rhetorical approach, arguing that the myth can "reveal western culture's unhealthy and systemic commitment to overconsumption. The belief that Wendigo stories, as disaster narratives, can be used to critique Euro-western materialism is a common thread" (p. 135).

enough to manipulate Zachary, an underling, into committing an unnecessary act of violence that leads to Greg's needless death.

Norma, Randall's sister, seems oblivious. She knows her brother is a hard man—she's a tough one herself—but where Randall gives every sign of having secret ulterior motives, Norma seems genuinely concerned for the community under her care.

Samantha is the wild card. Why was she on the Mobjack with Greg and a stolen bag of Norma's supplies? What did she do to fall out of favor with Norma and Randall? Samantha claims that the brother and sister are very bad people, but she also might be lying to get out of a desperate spot. It doesn't help that she seems to be hiding something.

Michonne is caught between all of these total strangers, left to decide who's full of crap and who isn't. Randall? Yeah, probably. Samantha? Something's not quite right there, either. Norma is the only reasonable one of the bunch — but so was the Governor when we first met him in the comics.

Can any of these people be trusted? Samantha claims that Norma and Randall are lying monsters, but Norma claims that Samantha is a brilliant teller of tales herself. (para. 11-17)

Putting the player into a conflict such as this forces some critical reflection, much as Telltale's other games have effected. To Telltale's credit, they provide what is likely a realistic approach in not forcing answers on the audience, either. According to Sam in "In Too Deep," the people of Monroe killed the occupants of *The Mobjack* to take their supplies, but Norma dismisses this claim, if Michonne asks about it, by saying that "It didn't go down that way!"[93] Her story is that Randall killed a group of violent scavengers who killed the ferry's original inhabitants, thus effectively saving the people of Monroe. Michonne can also bring up *The Mobjack* to Randall in "What We Deserve," if he is still alive, and Randall says that they came after the people of Monroe first. In contrast, while Sam's perspective may feel more sympathetic, she definitely lies to Michonne at least some of the time, initially claiming that her family had not stolen from Monroe. *Michonne* basically affirms that Randall killed some survivors who inhabited *The Mobjack*, but the game never definitively answers if these people were hostile, as Norma and Randall claim, or generally just peaceful survivors, as Sam says, and evidence exists for both sides.

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[93] Nonetheless, Norma's high-pitched tone indicates some defensiveness or nerves about the issue.

Regardless of the "truth" there, it would be easy to construct a theoretical series of events in which both sides' perspectives would at least be understandable, so what *Michonne* does is leave players with only the rhetoric of the two sides and asks them to respond appropriately. I imagine Burke would be proud of Telltale's work here: players must construct and react to "reality" based on what they have been given, and there is no possibility of knowing more. As Burke asks in his *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, "[J]ust how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by 'reality' has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems?" (5).

Although *Michonne* has its good points, it is, for me, the weakest of the games by far. The biggest problem can be seen in how its claim to canonicity burdens the game itself. The game's official description says that it "explores Michonne's absence between issues #126 and #139," and so in a sense it should be "canon" to *TWD* comic series. However, this influenced my playthrough in two major ways: I tried to act as I felt Michonne would act, rather than having more freedom with the less established characters of Lee and Clementine, and I made choices that I felt were not really choices. By virtue of knowing Michonne's future, there were certain things that I knew could not happen, and this awareness destroyed the illusion of choice that for me had held up fairly well in the previous two games.

Feeling compelled to act as Michonne restricted some of my choices in the game as I frequently compared, not the possible outcomes of my decisions, but "Which decision feels more true to the character?" Rosenberg also discusses this feeling to some extent in his own recap of *Michonne's* first episode:

> But Michonne always gonna Michonne. Just like in Rick's group, she's the unapproachable outsider.
> *The Walking Dead: Michonne* lets players assume an identity that's already been well-established in the comics. We might not know much of Michonne's history, but

we've seen her warrior reflexes at work, her tough facade. We've also seen her let that facade crack, if only occasionally.

       The choices you face in Michonne's first episode, "In Too Deep," are largely built around deciding what kind of Michonne you want to be. Do you smile? Do you joke? Are you cold and silent at all times? You get to spend some time living inside the brain of *The Walking Dead*'s most enigmatic character. (para. 6-8)

While both Rosenberg and *Michonne* allow for some interpretation of Michonne's character, my experiences did not bear out this reality. As an example, one of the choices players receive in the first episode after being captured by Randall is whether they want to attack him when he comes to collect Michonne for a meeting with Norma. Instead of asking myself which decision made more sense, I thought back to Michonne's captivity in Woodbury and reasoned that she is too practical to take such a dangerous risk, especially without talking to Norma first.

The difference may seem subtle, but it is an important one. By treating decisions as Michonne's rather than my own, I lost much of the agency that Stang argues "can entice players" and has made the series so successful (23). Although this feeling of "What would Michonne do?" may have been simply my personal response, it was one that I did not encounter in Telltale's other games. Lee and Clementine have not existed in other supposedly canon media as part of a shared intertextual universe, so I never made decisions for them feeling that an option was just obviously what they would do. Playing Lee and Clementine gave me a sense of control over their narratives and their character, but playing as Michonne kept reminding me that I had definite ideas about who she was already and felt that I should act in a way congruent with her character.[94] *Last Token Gaming*'s Terry Randolph suggested he took a similar approach in considering his decisions within the game:

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[94] Arguably, featuring an existing character would also influence how game developers would write her, as she must be true to her canon self and so the range of choices would be even more limited than how a writer could approach the more open-ended Lee or Clementine.

The Walking Dead: Michonne Mini-Series is a heartbreaking experience, one that leaves you in a space that offers little to no comfort. It's a story that weaves together past and present to flesh out who Michonne is and what she's been through. […] I've found myself having to purposefully break out of the experience and take some time to think on the choices I had to make. Most of the time, I'd barely made a choice before the timer ran out. And the ending…without giving too much away, it left me wondering if I'd made the right choice. Not the right choice for me, but for Michonne as a character. (para. 3)

Although Randolph claims engagement with the game, breaking "out of the experience" suggests that he approached decisions from a different perspective, and he seems to have a consciousness of considering how Michonne would approach these decisions. Again, this approach might not be a universal experience, but asking about what a character would do almost treats the decisions as pre-determined, further breaking down the illusion of choice Telltale tries to provide players.

The other major problem with Michonne and canon is closely related: taking place in the "past" of the comics' canon even further destroyed this illusion of choice because we know within a certain range of possibilities how events must happen. This problem can be seen even in the game's first major decision. At the beginning of the "In Too Deep," Michonne is by herself, hallucinating she is in her old apartment and seeing her dead daughters Elodie and Colette. After fighting off some zombies, she sinks to the ground and puts her gun to her head in despair. The first choice players make is whether to pull the trigger or put the gun down, but she obviously cannot be successful in shooting herself if she must survive the events of the game. If the player does attempt this, Pete appears almost out of nowhere and knocks the gun away before Michonne can kill herself. Because the outcome is effectively known, this choice seems much more muddled than, say, whether Lee chooses to save Doug or Carley and not know what repercussions that act might have. What kind of reflection does Telltale intend for such a weighty

decision that players also know cannot be carried out?[95] Removing the power to act on a decision would seem to undermine the decision itself.

This shattered illusion extended to other characters and decisions about their fates. In the third episode "What We Deserve," Norma offers Michonne an exchange of prisoners: the crew from Michonne's boat for her sadistic brother Randall. While there are some slight differences in how the negotiations play out depending on the choices made, one piece of information broke the illusion in this scene for me. I knew that Siddiq, one of the captured crewmembers, appears in the comics,[96] so I knew that his fate was already decided. Norma would let him go, and he would survive what I assumed would be a firefight when negotiations broke down.[97] I also reasoned that one of the other crew members was guaranteed to die, so I did not feel very upset when Berto was shot as Norma's group took a hostile turn. Oak, the last captured crew member, is the only one whose fate actually depends on the negotiations involved; not trusting Norma entirely, I did end up getting him killed, though I also think demanding that the prisoner exchange happen simultaneously is a perfectly sensible requirement and should not count as refusing the trade. Part of me felt bad for Oak, yes, but during the negotiation I did not feel tension, immersion, or responsibility: instead, I was telling myself that most of my decisions in that conversation probably did not matter, and I planned to look up the details of different ways the encounter could go after I finished it to confirm my suspicions.

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[95] To be fair, there is a potential alternative that I kind of hoped Telltale had used before I knew the outcome of the suicide option: I supposed that it could have been a "trap" choice with Michonne actually shooting herself and giving a "game over," ending the game before play even really started.

[96] Pete does, too, but I forgot about his presence in the comics. Had I remembered, I probably would have treated an earlier decision differently, in which Pete offers to stay behind in Monroe to give Michonne and Sam a better chance of escape, by assuming that it, too, did not matter. (And it really does not; Norma lets him go in "What We Deserve" if he stayed behind.)

[97] This is *The Walking Dead*. Negotiations were going to break down.

After finishing this game, I also had little excitement about what it might mean in the future as it pertains to the comics. The game, just as Telltale's other offerings, features a number of choices players can make. While I think it unlikely that the game's events ever see reference in the comics, how could Kirkman possibly make decisions about what actually happened to Michonne without in some sense taking away from the choice offered to players of the game? Each choice that is made is mutually exclusive with a different one; a few even involve whether people live or die. In short, while the comics could offer *one* of the game's potential paths as canon—that is, it actually "happened" in the comics' universe—such an approach would both exclude players who made different choices and undermine the game's claim to canonicity, if only certain decisions made in the game's narrative are actually canon.

This problem contrasts with how Telltale handled *TWD: S1*, where the events that filled out both the Greenes' and Glenn's backstory were not affected by Lee's choices. In *S1*, the game explains what happened to Hershel's son Shawn, who dies in a zombie attack and cannot be saved no matter what Lee tries. Glenn's narrative in the episode is also largely unaffected by the player's choices. In this way, Ecenbarger explains, "[t]he game plays an important role in explaining the background of important events which have gone untouched otherwise, as well as expanding upon the history of certain characters" and "makes a unique contribution to The Walking Dead transmedia experience" (39), but *Michonne* does not have that luxury. The potentially expanded history here might result in Michonne getting an extra crew member or one of the Fairbanks children killed, or it might not.

None of this is to say that *Michonne* does a poor job in handling the theme of diversity or that it reinforces the White masculinity of the comics. Rather, these problems may muddle the game's rhetorical message or interfere with a player's consideration of what choices to make in response to the empathetic position they occupy. Instead of thinking about the emotional impact

of suicide and its potential justifications, such an obviously false choice brought me out of the game and made me think, "Well, *that*'s not going to happen." The same thing happened with Siddiq in the prisoner negotiation that again brought me out of the game's reality. When players begin thinking about the "behind-the-scenes" components of a game, they are engaged more with the development of the game and not its actual rhetoric (or its entertainment value). In a similar way, my assumption that Kirkman will never be able to reference the game in a particularly detailed manner made its events seem less important and less "real" in some way. Despite *Michonne* continuing the theme of expanded diversity in Telltale's games and offering the Windigo as an alternative perspective on the zombie apocalypse, its flaws take the focus too much off of these messages.

The Power of Actions over Observation

In conclusion, Telltale's video game series deals with themes similar to those seen in both the comics and television series. Where Kirkman's literary series draws on racial stereotypes (though it has improved considerably) and fears of miscegenation, Telltale creates a much more complex African-American character in Lee Everett who shows intelligence and emotional depth, despite his status as a convicted murderer. Kirkman's focus on Rick Grimes upholds a cowboy masculinity, but Telltale focuses more on family and therefore interrogates patriarchal masculinity as a construct. As the television series, Telltale also rejects the White masculinity that different characters in *TWD* media see as salvational and incorporates more diverse perspectives in its survivor groups. Some missteps happened in this series, but no company can be perfect all the time. *Michonne* especially finds itself weakened by the conflicting needs of asserting the comics' canonicity and maintaining a respect for players' choices, but it does try to represent diversity in its episodes. Overall, this series upholds diversity

as a societal value and gives players a chance to experience non-White characters' interactions directly.

Telltale furthers these arguments by creating narrative-focused games that connect to and resonate with players. Based on Tyndale's research, agency over characters and consequences of decisions as seen in Telltale's games drive player investment, and Telltale's writing created empathy with the characters, which also increases player investment (31-32). While likely not all players feel that their choices in *TWD* games matter, mine did, even if "Lee will never save the world from its fate" (Stang 23). Writing and creating such games is easier said than done, but games that want to discuss such important societal topics should think about how they can create complex characters that foster empathy from players.

In asking players to make choices in the games, Telltale forces players to challenge racism more directly than other media and makes good use of the unique properties of its form. As Custer explains, these games "confront the player with the role of race and racism in this world, and force them to make a choice about how they perceive it simultaneously" (para. 4). Such perceptions require some sort of response, though Telltale gives players options. A player may fail to believe that racism is present, may feel it but not want to discuss it, or may confront it directly. Even trying to take no action—in this case, staying silent—is noticed by the game and usually evokes a response. If, for example, the player refuses to tell Mark anything about why Larry hates Lee, the game displays a sentence at the top of the screen that says, "Mark noticed your silence."

Games such as Telltale's *TWD* series seem uniquely suited to addressing such deep and difficult questions. Custer provides an effective summary of how he as a player responded to *TWD: S1* and expanded his perspective on race that I think is representative of many players' experiences:

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> The Walking Dead sets these moments [of choice] up as crescendos where players controlling Lee have the agency to decide how they wish to enact race. Through the choices set up by Telltale Games, players can define Lee's response to the racism he encounters how they see fit, be it forgiving or vengeful. In my first playthrough, I found Larry's abrasive attitude towards Lee (and me by extension as The Walking Dead welcomes players to embody this role) overbearing and chose to enact revenge on him when the opportunity arose. I did not, however, reflect on how this action shaped Lee as a black male, his surrogate father role with Clementine, or how the rest of the group might respond to him afterward. Upon replaying the first season […] and picking up on the subtleties of the racism projected by Larry and Kenny, I became conscious of how Lee's actions shaped a young girl under his care, as well as shaping how the other white members of the group he travels with might perceive him and his race through these actions. While being black is not Lee's main character trait, it is still a vital part of how players experience this world, and serves as a tension players must wrestle with as they play The Walking Dead, consciously or not. (para. 6)

While other media have some possibilities for interaction, such as sending the letters Kirkman answers at the end of *The Walking Dead* comics or engaging with the television show through Twitter or other social media, as seen on the live after-show *AMC Talking Dead*, video games remain uniquely equipped to provide players this kind of immersive, interactive experience. Telltale's series has made a strong rhetorical impact on its players and is still going strong in 2017.

CHAPTER 6

CONSTRUCTING MYTHIC MASCULINITIES THROUGH MULTIPLE MEDIA

Examination of these three *TWD* media has revealed a clear trend in how the later and more interactive media display an increased sensitivity to problems of diversity, representation, and inclusiveness. While *TWD* comics, at least initially, uphold a fairly monochromatic view of society, the television series has managed to transcend that perspective and reject the cowboy and father myths that guide comics!Rick Grimes. As an additional counterpoint, Telltale's video games suggest that merely rejecting these myths does not go far enough and go even further to dissect these myths and to highlight their problems in greater detail. Telltale does not simply *tell* players how these myths are destructive; it shows their weaknesses and asks players to respond appropriately.

In short, as *TWD* media have developed, they have moved away from the tropes of how the zombie "is synonymous with a kind of barbaric racial blackness" (McAlister 461) and how the zombie apocalypse permits "re-founding civilization according to reanimated paternalist ideas" (Trimble 295). By making this move, they have arrived at the point Elizabeth McAlister argues in "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies." McAlister notes that contemporary zombie media represent an inversion of the zombie's traditional association with blackness: "Most zombies now are figured as racially white, and most of the films that portray them are set in the US. As an American horror film genre character, the zombie has come to make certain statements about whiteness in America" (460-1).

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This trend would mark more recent zombie portrayals as implicit critiques of white America. McAlister makes the link explicit in this way:

> Romero and post-Romero zombies are cannibals, and white people and zombies are both insatiably destructive consumers. […] Eating and consumption are also what make zombies reproductive and monstrous. Allegorically, excessive, rampant consumption is what makes white people white and dead. (479-80)

We can see this same trend in *TWD* taken as a whole, as cannibal groups exist across all three incarnations: the "Hunters" of the comics' Volume 11, Gareth and Terminus in the television series, and the St. Johns of the first video game. All of these groups feature primarily or exclusively White antagonists, and the villains of the different series in general are overwhelmingly White. This over-consumption is mirrored in *TWD* by the Governor's takeover of the area around Woodbury as well as Negan's extortive dictatorship over the communities around Washington, D.C.

A reinforcement of this argument can be seen with non-White heroes triumphing over the zombie horde, an observation McAlister also makes in her analysis of several more modern zombie films, including Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*:

> What can we make of the interesting trend that establishes zombies as the monsters black men are to vanquish? […] More than the whites in these films, black men are exemplars of moral personhood. They all work cooperatively with the survivors, they fight capably and ethically, and they are nice to the women. Unlike the trend in action films where the black characters are among the first to be killed, these black men survive by virtue of their own character strengths to see a fragile post-apocalyptic future. (478)

To a point, this is what we get from Telltale's game series, which features non-White protagonists and, in two of them, women as leads. However, the video games temper this more optimistic approach to their protagonists with depictions of racism and interpersonal conflict that more realistically ground their zombie apocalypse. In essence, where previous works such as *Night of the Living Dead* or Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* left race relations as subtext, Telltale's *TWD* games move this conversation into the realm of actual text (in the sense of being directly

discussed within the game's environment). This move not only encourages players to consider

how to respond to racism personally but also avoids a potential problem associated with making

non-White heroes too powerful: the trope of the "Magical Negro," which exoticizes and

fetishizes Blackness in the service of solving White problems.[98]

However, as noted at the end of the third chapter, this trend toward greater diversity is not

confined to the television series and Telltale's video games; *TWD* comics have also exhibited

more inclusiveness as their run has continued, and Robert Kirkman has shown that greater

diversity in the comics is one of his authorial goals. In answer to a reader letter, published in

April 2017, asking if the series will ever have a lesbian character, he responded:

> Jeez…has there never been an official lesbian in this comic? Sorry, that's a huge
> oversight on my part. […] I'll never be able to escape the fact that I'm a dumb white
> male writer. I do try to represent as many pieces of the diversity that make our world as
> great as possible in all my work, but I guess this is a big blind spot. Yuck. This will be
> remedied soon. Look at that, letters column progress. (Issue 166).

True to Kirkman's word, Issue 170 reveals a sexual relationship between Magna and Yumiko,

two characters introduced in a group who found Alexandria in Issue 127.[99] This does not erase

Kirkman's portrayal and privilege of the mythic cowboy and father figures in his series, but it

does show Kirkman's awareness of the problems of limiting the representation of different

people, his limited individual perspective, and a seemingly sincere desire to include more diverse

characters.

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[98] McAlister comments on this danger as it pertains to zombie cinema: "It is possible to read the black messiah as an exaggeration of the Magical Negro, insofar as in zombie films, blackness is figured as a personified antidote to the problem of whiteness; and black individuals are the planet's remediator, rectifier, and redeemer. Yet, arguably, the black male messiah zombie killer is more fully human than the Magical Negro. These black zombie-killers are not magical, but are ordinary, imperfect, and just as interested in saving themselves as in assisting their white compatriots" (481). Essentially, Black heroes as portrayed in these more contemporary zombie works are more nuanced and should be seen as accessibly human characters.

[99] Interestingly, the letter writer in Issue 166 said that she viewed Yumiko (and Sophia) as a lesbian but would like some official confirmation of her sexuality. Given Yumiko's lack of focus in the story, I am unsure of what the anonymous reader perceived as indicators of this.

In summary, *TWD* media, as McAlister says of other contemporary zombie works, ultimately "point to a post-apocalyptic future that is multiracial. Such a future may not bring us new bodies free of disease and death, as in the Christian story. But the future society will consist of non-white and multi-raced bodies and, presumably, culture" (482). By deconstructing more traditional approaches to society, *TWD*, especially Telltale's video games, encourages cooperation and the embrace of non-hegemonic approaches to life while at the same time recognizing the transformation society must undergo to reach this point. Consumers of these media should also recognize this argument and similarly be able to embrace a multiracial future. Even as the United States struggles with its own difficulties on this issue, the country's pop culture suggests a path forward for us.

Future Directions

Fans have found a lot of depth in different *TWD* media, and mythic masculinity is just one theme for rhetorical analysis. The rhetorical tradition embraces the concept of popular art forms as didactic, not merely entertainment. This study offers insight into how myths associated with hegemonic White masculinity may be developed to embrace or diminish diversity, but there is ample ground for future study. In light of my rhetorical approach in this study, I would offer three observations for future scholars to consider: the advantages of producing adaptations, of expanding interactivity into other media, and of investigating audiences' continuing hunger for zombies.

What this comparison across *TWD* media has shown is that adaptations into different media forms do not have to be constrained by the myths found in the original series. While the television series carries over many of the comics' characters and focuses on similar cowboy and patriarchal themes, the way the television series handles these myths results in a very different argument than the source material. It has updated the comics' storylines in such a way that, while

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the episodes feel recognizably similar, they transcend some of the representational problems found in Kirkman's series. Even more effectively, Telltale incorporated an argument opened by the television series—that of a post-racial apocalypse—and refuted it by showing how racism might continue to manifest itself and even flourish after the end of society as we know it.

The different adaptations also highlight the flexibility of the myths on which they are built. Many paths can lead to rugged individualism, as seen in a comparison of Rick, Shane, Merle, and Daryl, and many avenues of good fatherhood exist. The cowboy myth can be critiqued on its own or used to construct an opposing figure of the educated professor. Both mythic themes can also be set against perspectives that they ignore or omit and therefore highlight those who might be left out of these societal discourses.

Another trend in media of all kinds is a growing push for interactivity. "Letters to the Editor" have been a part of comics for years, and *The Walking Dead* is no exception, but increased access to technology has provoked content producers to find additional ways to engage their consumers. One of the biggest trends in television watching in particular is the idea of second screen viewing. James Blake describes this practice in his *Television and the Second Screen: Interactive TV in the Age of Social Participation*:

> Television is changing almost beyond recognition. Smart phones and tablet computers have become rivals to the traditional TV set in the battle for consumers. However, audiences and producers are also embracing social media sites and mobile platforms to enhance TV viewing itself. This book examines the emerging phenomenon of the second screen: where users are increasingly engaging with content on two screens concurrently. The practice is transforming television into an interactive, participatory and social experience. (inside cover)

This particular approach makes television more like a video game in that viewers can be asked for direct responses. In "Relationships Between Social TV and Enjoyment: A Content Analysis of *The Walking Dead*'s Story Sync Experience," Lauren A. Auverset and Andrew C. Billings examine one type of second-screen experience used specifically by AMC for *The*

Walking Dead. This service, called *Story Sync*, allows "viewers to synchronize their commentary

with others watching the program—even if people are consuming the program on different days

and times," thereby creating at least the perception of a group viewing (1). According to

Auverset and Billings, their study "documents a rapt interest from an established cadre of fans,"

highlighting at least some demand for this kind of participatory experience in television viewing

(10). If nothing else, these platforms suggest that viewers want to discuss the show with other

people, sharing or constructing meaning from the media they consume. Additionally, AMC's

inclusion of its "first live after-show," *AMC Talking Dead*, fields viewer comments and

questions from social media and therefore highlights the demand for audience participation

("Talking Dead").

      Finally and perhaps most impressively, the comics, television series, and Telltale's series

have all been commercially and critically successful—one might think at least one of them

should fall flat.[100] This success, more than anything else about these media, speaks to how well

the zombie myth seems applicable to consumers. In a question and answer session on Baylor

University's website, Professor Greg Garrett speaks about the importance of zombies in

contemporary culture:

> My argument […] —and other critics and thinkers have made it for a decade or more—is
> that zombies represent the perfect menace for us in the post-9/11 West. They can stand in
> for terrorism, or pandemics, or political unrest, or economic chaos or whatever it is that
> keeps us up at night. […] In my work as cultural critic, I'm always asking why certain
> stories or artists are particularly popular at a given time, and it tends to be because the
> stories, music or art that appeals to people both entertains them and serves as a way of
> understanding or reconciling some things about the world and about our lives in the
> stories and cultural artifacts we consume. (para. 7)

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[100] To be fair, there have been some missteps in the larger franchise. For example, *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct* video game was commercially and critically unsuccessful.

Perhaps some of the differences in these media artifacts can be traced to the time in which they were developed. The original comics, for example, came relatively shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the American invasion of Iraq, in 2003, events which can be linked to a distrust of and hostility toward "outsiders." By the time the television series began, seven years later, the United States had seen the election of President Barack Obama and therefore greater diversity in the country's highest political office. AMC's more diverse apocalypse may reflect some of that same national spirit. Nevertheless, the country electing an African-American man as president does not mean that problems of racism go away, and perhaps Telltale's game serves as a reminder of a similar reality to continue being aware of and discussing such problems.

TWD media have done an effective job in connecting with contemporary popular culture with traditional mythic themes. In the comics, we see a group of people trying to rebuild society in a mythic frontier, negotiating the cowboy and patriarchal constructs of the pre-apocalypse. In the television series, we see people coming together to negotiate diverse perspectives in the collapse of the old social order. In the comics, we see a world that has not left behind its past failures—and these past failures are often the things ruining relationships in the present.

Rushing's "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth" discusses how the mythic cowboy has gone through several distinct patterns, each era focusing on a different aspect of the myth (17-18). Carpenter's revisitation of Rushing's study argues that the cowboy myth was still applicable twenty years after its publication with the presidency of George W. Bush (180). Another decade later, cowboys are still cropping up in popular culture.[101] Perhaps zombies are no different: we may see them continue to shamble around even if the significance of their

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[101] For example, Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* in 2015, and Antoine Fuqua's remake of *The Magnificent Seven* in 2016

presence may change. Perhaps speaking of the "mythic zombie" will make sense one day, given the contemporary prominence of the image in popular culture.

Whatever the discursive longevity of zombies, *The Walking Dead*'s success in all of its media forms is not primarily due to a focus on the zombies as representations of our fears. Rather, fans of the franchise enjoy seeing how the living characters drive these stories. Looking at these characters, therefore, simply makes more sense for these series. As *Vanity Fair*'s Joanna Robinson says in criticizing *TWD* show's most recent season, "[Y]ou can't make a satisfying series out of listless human drama that's occasionally punctuated by visually experimental zombie action" ("What's Gone Wrong" para. 10). The true strength of *The Walking Dead* is and will continue to be in the characters, not in the corpses.

In various ways, this study should serve as foundational, rather than definitive, given its inherent limitations. I see four useful directions for future study based on the conclusions reached here. First, despite my attempt to account for a large number of artifacts, this study has chosen to focus mostly on early issues, episodes, and games. Giving better attention to more recent comic issues, television seasons, or *ANF* would uncover additional ways in which these media franchises handle the mythic themes identified in this study. Second, I have not devoted much time to exploring authorial intent for the different media, except in the case of *S1*. Given contemporary culture, it is certainly possible to find commentary about different aspects of the comics, television series, and video games, and future research could examine how the authors themselves perceive these themes. Third, more attention to the precise dates of publication and production could highlight better how the different media are products of their time. While I have perhaps hinted as this concept, society has changed over the years, even since 2003, when the comics began. Perhaps we should not be so surprised that the television show and video games are more progressive, given that they started several years later. Fourth, I would suggest

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that future studies could give even more attention to the multimodal discourse on display in these artifacts. While including occasional nonverbal features, I have for the most part focused on the narratives and simple text of these artifacts. More attention given to areas such as visuals, cinematography, or gameplay procedures could likely uncover interesting conclusions about constructing media artifacts.

Inarguably, *The Walking Dead* has been wildly successful across different media. Despite the failure of the occasional entry, the franchise has proven remarkably resilient, at least as of 2017. Kirkman has drawn on intriguing mythic themes in his comics and created a juggernaut of popular culture, given how vastly the franchise has spread. While no one can be sure of how long these different media will run, we can enjoy *TWD*'s different incarnations as long as they keep rising.

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APPENDIX: CAST OF CHARACTERS

The Walking Dead Comic Series[102]

Atlanta Camp Survivors

Rick Grimes (Issue 1–present): former sheriff and protagonist of the series. White adult male.

Lori Grimes (Issues 2–48): Rick's wife. White adult female.

Carl Grimes (Issue 2–present): young son of Rick and Lori. White male child.

Shane (Issues 1–6): former sheriff's deputy and Rick's best friend. White adult male. His affair with Lori after the start of the apocalypse forms the central conflict of the series' first volume *Days Gone By*.

Glenn (Issue 2–100): supply runner and scout for the group. Asian-American adult male. Eventually marries Maggie Greene.

Andrea (Issues 2–167): sister to Amy, who dies in Issue 5. White adult female. After Amy's death, she forms a relationship with Dale. The group's sharpshooter, she becomes after Lori's death Rick's girlfriend and eventually second wife.

Dale (Issues 2–66): lookout and RV owner. White adult male. Becomes Andrea's boyfriend and also with her adopts Allen and Donna's children Billy and Ben.

Carol (Issues 3–42): widowed mother of Sophia, a young girl who is Carl's friend and playmate throughout the early issues. White adult female. Becomes Tyreese's girlfriend but deals with a great deal of emotional and mental trauma, eventually committing suicide by zombie.

Allen (Issues 2–23), Donna (Issues 3–9), Billy (Issues 2–61), and Ben (Issues 2–61): a nuclear family who seem ill-suited for surviving the apocalypse. White ethnicity.

Jim (Issues 2–6): a former mechanic who saw his family eaten by zombies. White adult male. Fatally bitten when zombies attack the camp in Issue 5 and kill Amy.

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[102] While the cast list could be much longer, I have focused on the earliest important survivors in the series, who highlight the representations seen in this study.

Other Early Survivors

Morgan (Issue 1, Issues 58–82): a father encountered by Rick after waking from his coma who informs the sheriff about the zombie apocalypse. Black adult male. Rick later finds him again after the prison is overrun, and Morgan chooses to travel with them.

Tyreese (Issues 7–46): a father and former professional football player encountered by Rick's group after they leave the outskirts of Atlanta. Black adult male. Tyreese proves one of the strongest and most capable survivors until his death at the hands of the Governor.

Julie (Issues 7–14): Tyreese's daughter. Black teen female. She and Chris agree to have sexual intercourse and kill each other to be together forever.

Chris (Issues 7–15): Julie's boyfriend. White teen male. He convinces Julie to go through with their suicide pact after having sexual intercourse for the first time.

Hershel Greene (Issues 10–48): farm owner and Greene patriarch. White adult male. He briefly offers Rick's group shelter at his farm, though after they release the zombies Hershel kept in his barn and cause the deaths of his two oldest children, he kicks them out. Rick later offers Hershel and the rest of his family sanctuary in the prison, but his children other than Maggie keep dying.

Maggie Greene (Issue 10–present): Hershel's daughter. White adult female. Maggie becomes Glenn's girlfriend and one of the most dependable members of the group. After Glenn's death, she takes over the leadership of the Hilltop community near Alexandria.

Prison Survivors

Dexter (Issues 13–19): imprisoned murderer and leader of the convicts. Black adult male. Tries to kick Rick out of the prison but is shot by him when zombies attack the group.

Andrew (Issues 13–19): imprisoned drug dealer and Dexter's sexual partner. Black adult male. Flees the prison after Dexter's death and never reappears.

Thomas Richards (Issues 13–18): imprisoned misogynistic serial killer. White adult male. Initially seems trustworthy, but kills Hershel's daughters Susie and Rachel and attempts to kill Andrea and Patricia.

Axel (Issues 13–47): imprisoned robber. White adult male. Becomes the only convict to really incorporate within the group.

Michonne (Issue 19–present): wandering survivor and former lawyer. Black adult female. She is probably the most skillful of the group at killing zombies thanks to her katana proficiency.

The Walking Dead Television Series[103]

Season 1 (Atlanta Camp) Survivors

Rick Grimes (S1E1–present)[104]: former sheriff and protagonist of the series. White adult male.

Lori Grimes (S1E1–S3E4): Rick's wife. White adult female. Dies giving birth to her daughter, whom Carl names Judith.

Carl Grimes (S1E1–present): young son of Rick and Lori. White male child.

Shane Walsh (S1E1–S2E12): former sheriff's deputy and Rick's best friend. White adult male. His affair with Lori after the start of the apocalypse forms the central conflict of the series' second season as he tries to reclaim his relationship with her.

Glenn Rhee (S1E1–S7E1): supply runner and scout for the group. Asian-American adult male. Eventually marries Maggie Greene.

Andrea (S1E2–S3E16): sister to Amy, who dies in S1E4. White adult female. After Amy's death, she nearly commits suicide in the first season's finale before Dale convinces her otherwise. She eventually becomes a citizen at Woodbury and paramour of the Governor.

Dale Horvath (S1E1–S2E11): lookout and RV owner. White adult male. Bonds with Glenn as a paternal figure and irritates Andrea with his overprotectiveness. He dies at the hands of a zombie Carl accidentally frees from some mud, causing the boy some guilt.

Ed (S1E3–S1E4), Sophia (S1E3-S2E1), and Carol Peletier (S1E3–present): a family consisting of abusive husband Ed, shy daughter Sophia, and initially demure Carol. White ethnicity. After her daughter's death, Carol eventually becomes a more hardened survivor and strikes up a close friendship with Daryl Dixon.

Theodore "T-Dog" Douglas (S1E2–S3E4): former football player and church van driver. Black adult male. Bitten while sealing a gate inside the prison before giving his life to protect Carol's.

Merle (S1E2–S3E15) and Daryl Dixon (S1E3–present): two "redneck" brothers who planned on robbing the camp before Merle was trapped in Atlanta ("Home"). White adult men. Merle disappears from the series for all of Season 2 before reappearing as a citizen of Woodbury, while Daryl becomes Rick's right-hand man and confidant.

Jacqui (S1E2–S1E6): a former city planner. Black adult female. Dies during the CDC's self-destruct sequence in the first season's finale.

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[103] Characters in this section are grouped by the season in which they first appeared. Given how much this study focuses on the first four seasons, I have elected to cover only the major characters from those parts of the show's run (through Season 4's "Too Far Gone").

[104] Rather than using episode titles, I have opted to identify these characters by the season and episode sequence in which they appear to convey a better feel for how long individual survivors had been on the show.

Morales (S1E2–S1E5): father of a family of four and known only by his last name. Hispanic adult male. He and his family part ways with the other survivors, who want to reach the CDC in Atlanta.

Jim (S1E2–S1E5): a former mechanic who saw his family eaten by zombies. White adult male. Fatally bitten when zombies attack the camp in the show's fourth episode and kill Amy.

Season 2 (Greene Farm) Survivors

Hershel Greene (S2E2–S4E8): Greene patriarch, farm owner, and veterinarian. White adult male. Deeply religious, he welcomes Rick's group to the farm, though with some reservations, and eventually becomes a source of wisdom and guidance for all of the survivors. He additionally leads the prison council seen in Season 4.

Maggie Rhee née Greene (S2E2–present): Hershel's older daughter. White adult female. Maggie becomes Glenn's girlfriend and later wife and is one of the longest-lasting members of the group.

Beth Greene (S2E2–S5E8): Hershel's younger daughter. White teenage female. Beth does not feature much during Season 2 aside from her unsuccessful suicide attempt, but she eventually becomes Judith's apparent caretaker after Lori's death in childbirth.

Otis (S2E2–S2E3): Hershel's farmhand and former volunteer emergency medical technician. White adult male. After accidentally shooting Carl, Otis goes with Shane to retrieve medical supplies from a nearby school, but Shane shoots him in the leg, leaving him to die and successfully using him as zombie bait.

Patricia (S2E2–S2E13): Otis's wife and Hershel's veterinary assistant. White adult female. Helps take care of the farm and seems very welcoming of the newcomers.

Jimmy (S2E2–S2E13): Beth's boyfriend. White teenage male. Saves Rick and Carl from the burning barn with Dale's RV but is surrounded by zombies and eaten for his heroism.

Michonne (S2E13–present): lone survivor who finds Andrea fleeing the Greene farm. Black adult female. Eventually unites with Rick's group after they have taken the prison and becomes Rick's girlfriend in Season 6.

Seasons 3 and 4 (Woodbury and Prison) Survivors

Tomas (S3E1–S3E2): leader of the convicts and willing to use violence to drive out Rick's group. Hispanic adult male. He pushes a zombie onto Rick, after which Rick kills him with a machete.

Andrew (S3E1–S3E4): convict who is loyal to Tomas. Black adult male. After escaping Rick ("Sick"), he lures a herd of walkers to the prison, causing the deaths of Lori and T-Dog.

Oscar (S3E1–S3E8): convict serving time for breaking and entering. Black adult male. He likes slippers ("Hounded").

Axel (S3E1–S3E10): convict serving time for robbery. White adult male. He pleads with Rick to let him and Oscar into their wing of the prison but dies being sniped by the Governor.

Philip "The Governor" Blake (S3E3–S4E8): leader of the town of Woodbury. White adult male. His obsession with power causes him to kill anyone outside his community, and he twice leads an improvised army against the prison community.

Milton Mamet (S3E3–S3E16): the Governor's primary zombie researcher and friend. White adult male. Milton eventually turns against the Governor with Andrea, but Blake fatally stabs him and locks him in a room with Andrea to ensure her death as well.

Sasha (S3E8–S7E16) and Tyreese Williams (S3E8–S5E9): brother-sister duo who come across the prison in their travels. Black adult female and male. Rick's hostility drives them to Woodbury, but they eventually become part of Rick's group when the Governor vanishes after his first failed attack on the prison. Sasha even becomes a member of the prison council.

Karen (S3E9–S4E2): resident of Woodbury who moves to the prison after surviving the Governor's massacre of his own army ("Welcome to the Tombs"). White adult female. She becomes Tyreese's girlfriend in the time-skip shortly before her death.

Caleb Subramanian (S4E1–S4E5): a doctor who arrives at the prison between Seasons 3 and 4. Indian-American adult male. He dies after catching an infectious flu that spreads amongst the prison survivors.

Bob Stookey (S4E1–S5E3): a former army medic and sole survivor of two separate groups before reaching the prison. Black adult male.

The Walking Dead Telltale Video Game Series

Season 1

Lee Everett: former history professor and convicted murderer. Black adult male. The game's protagonist and surrogate father to Clementine.

Clementine: child Lee finds abandoned in a treehouse and of whom he takes custody. Black female child.[105] Clem eventually becomes the protagonist of *S2* and a supporting character in *ANF*.

Kenny, Katjaa, and Kenny "Duck" Jr.: a family from Florida consisting of a fisherman, veterinarian, and their young son. White ethnicity. Kenny survives to become an important character in *S2*.

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[105] In their GDC speech, Vanaman and Rodman mention that Clementine is biracial, but players have the opportunity to see a picture of Clem's parents, and they both look African-American to me. As far as I am aware, there is no point in any of the games themselves that comments on this, and I have chosen to identify what seems to me the natural conclusion from the games. Admittedly, this highlights some of the difficulties in using race as a classification system, but given my emphasis in this study, this seems to be an unavoidable necessity.

Hershel and Shawn Greene: the farm owner and veterinarian from the comics and his adult son, whose death is shown in this game. White ethnicity. Hershel forces Lee, Clem, and Kenny and his family off his farm after Shawn's death.

Larry: retired army serviceman and "racist old asshole." White adult male. Larry knows about Lee's conviction and holds it against him, being Lee's chief adversary within the group itself until his death in the second episode.

Lilly: former USAF administrative officer and Larry's daughter. White adult female. She is nominally in charge of supplies for the group, but her paranoia leads her to killing either Carley or Doug (depending on which one is still alive) and abandoning the group.

Carley: former news reporter who knows of Lee's crime and becomes a possible love interest. White adult female. The end of *S1*'s first episode involves a choice to save either Carley or Doug, so she potentially features fairly little in the game.[106]

Doug: former IT technician who determinately becomes a kind of "mechanic" for the group. White adult male. The end of *S1*'s first episode involves a choice to save either Carley or Doug, so he potentially features fairly little in the game.

Glenn: former pizza delivery boy and eventual supply runner in the comics. Asian-American adult male. He helps the group fuel their vehicles to escape Macon before continuing to Atlanta.

Mark: former USAF serviceman. White adult male. He is maimed and eaten by cannibals, though they do (attempt to) share some of his leg meat with the group.

Ben Paul: a former high-school student. White teenage male. Ben tends to easily panic, and every decision he makes goes poorly.

Christa: stern woman who Lee and company encounter near a traffic pile-up on their way to Savannah. Black adult female. After Lee's death, she and Omid become Clementine's new guardians. Pregnant during *S1* and the prologue of *S2*, she apparently loses the child sometime during the time-skip after Omid's death.

Omid: light-hearted man who likes Civil War history. Middle-Eastern-American adult male. He injures himself during his introductory episode and spends much of *S1* incapacitated. He and Christa become Clementine's guardians after Lee's death. During the prologue of *S2*, he is shot and killed by a girl who was trying to steal from Clementine.

The Stranger: a man who loses his family to zombies after Kenny leads the group in stealing supplies from his car. White adult male. He keeps his zombified wife's head in a bag and eventually kidnaps Clementine to form a new family unit and "save" her from Lee.

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[106] I saved Doug, partly because I did not realize Carley had run out of ammo in the climactic scene, so I did not see much of her on my playthrough.

Tavia: the protagonist of the framing story in *400 Days*, the downloadable content that bridged the time between *S1* and *S2*. Black adult female. She seeks to gather survivors into a community, though the group proves hostile to Clementine and her new friends in *S2*.

Season 2

Peter "Pete" Joseph Randall: older member of a group of survivors Clementine finds in S2's first episode. White adult male. He dies due to zombie injuries either near the end of *S2*'s first episode or the beginning of the second.

Nick: Pete's nephew and surrogate son. White adult male. He makes rash, aggressive decisions but is generally well-intentioned, wanting to protect his group.

Carlos: a former doctor, leader of the "cabin survivors" Clementine finds, and Sarah's father. Hispanic adult male. He initially distrusts Clementine and forces her quarantine after a dog bites her, thinking it may have been a zombie bite.[107]

Sarah: Carlos's daughter and a girl near Clementine's age. Hispanic teenage female. Sarah seems to have some sort of anxiety or other mental disorder, as she shuts down on occasion in dangerous situations, and her father tries to shelter her from the reality of the apocalypse.

Alvin: kindly man who sticks up for Clementine and Rebecca's husband. Black adult male. Killed by Carver, who slept with Rebecca and might be the father of her child.

Rebecca: a pregnant woman who initially seems hostile to Clementine but softens over the course of the game. Black adult female. She worries about the paternity of her child, whether he is Alvin's or Carver's. She dies shortly after childbirth.

Walter: a former teacher who, with his lover Matthew, has fortified the Moonstar ski lodge and welcomes all. White adult male. He welcomes the cabin survivors, which reunites Clementine and Kenny, but is executed when Carter attacks the lodge to reclaim Rebecca.

Sarita: Kenny's new girlfriend in *S2*. Indian-American adult female. She is fatally wounded by zombies when the group escapes Carver's community, though the precise circumstances of her death depend on whether the player hacks off her hand or not immediately after she is bitten.

William "Bill" Carver: a former engineer and ruthless leader reminiscent of the Governor (in both comics and television incarnations). White adult male. He believes Rebecca's child is his and relentlessly tracks the cabin survivors because of it. Kenny eventually kills him as the group escapes his community.

Jane: a lone survivor taken in by Carver's group who escapes with the cabin survivors after Carver's death. White adult female. She seems to see herself as a surrogate sister and mentor to Clementine.

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[107] I am not a medical doctor, but this seems to make him a bad doctor, if you ask me.

Alvin "AJ" Junior: son of Rebecca and either Alvin or Bill Carver. Black / potentially biracial male infant. He becomes effectively Clementine's surrogate son. He later spurs Clementine's actions in *ANF* because of her desire to protect and feed him.

Michonne

Michonne: survivor from the comics and crew member aboard Pete's ship *The Companion*. Black adult female. She is the protagonist of the game, and much of her background immediately after the zombie outbreak is seen in flashbacks.

Pete: captain of *The Companion* and minor comics character. Black adult male. He thinks the best of people, seeking peaceful solutions to conflict.

Berto: *The Companion* crew member. Hispanic-American adult male. He is killed by one of the Monroe survivors in retaliation for what Michonne and the Fairbanks family did while fleeing Monroe.

Siddiq: *The Companion* crew member and minor comics character. Arab-American adult male. He survives the prisoner exchange near the end of the game.

Oak: *The Companion* crew member. White adult male. Oak is the only crew member whose fate in this episode depends on player choices.

Norma: leader of the seaside community of Monroe and sister to Randall. White adult female. Although she claims to be fair-minded and to welcome outsiders, she will do anything to protect her brother or the interests of her community.

Randall: Monroe's sadistic enforcer and scout. White adult male. Randall loves violence and cruelly mocking others, even other citizens of Monroe, and his sister's power helps him get away with whatever he does.

Zachary: one of the guards and scouts for Monroe. Asian-American adult male. Zachary is somewhat sensitive to others, sticking up for Michonne during interrogation. Michonne can choose to convince Samantha not to kill him after her brother's death or let her shoot him.

Jonas: Monroe's doctor and Zachary's boyfriend. Black adult male. If Zachary dies at Samantha's hands, he kills Berto in retaliation, which causes Pete to kill him in return.

Samantha "Sam" Fairbanks: young woman who has stolen from Monroe to feed her family when Michonne meets her. Amerindian adult female. Michonne serves as a kind of mentor to her throughout the game,

Greg Fairbanks: Samantha's brother who helps her steal from Monroe. Amerindian teenage male. He is accidentally shot and killed by Zachary.

John Fairbanks: former lawyer and the Fairbanks patriarch. Amerindian adult male. Randall kills him as he talks to Michonne about his family's hardships.

Alex Fairbanks: the youngest son of the Fairbanks family. Amerindian male child. He hides in his closest, which his father told him would always be safe from danger, and this nearly gets him killed when the Fairbanks house goes up in flames.

Paige: Fairbanks family friend and house lookout. White adult female. She seems to harbor a crush on Samantha, though the game never seems to show whether it is reciprocated or not.