

COMPULSION AND VOLITION: A GENEALOGY OF THE HIGH-SCHOOL  
DROPOUT (1918-2018)

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
with a Major in School Improvement  
May 2019

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This document is a manifestation of unseen things, and is dedicated to the eternal mystery of Us All. This manuscript is but an objectification of the innate unknown. Endless gratitude to Dr. Miguel Guajardo for being a deep well of knowledge, creativity, and inspiration. Eternal love and favor to my committee members, Dr. James Scheurich, Dr. Marialena Rivera, and Dr. Melissa Martinez. I am very grateful for all of your support and guidance. Thank you to Dr. Michelle Hamilton for preparing me for this doctoral experience, and for supporting my professional development. To all of my mentors from Texas State University and University of Oregon, I love you. Norma and Jose made me, and Reuben shaped me. Thank you. To my daughter Eliana, you are the living proof of my very salvation and strength. I have never met another human as beautiful and interesting as you. Be good, and always give your Mommy, Christa, lots of love. She is a good person, and a wonderful mother. I love you both forever.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to problematize the concept and category of the U.S. high-school dropout, by constructing a Foucauldian genealogy of the same, from 1918-2018. Using post-structuralist methodologies, critical discourse analysis and policy archaeology, this study problematizes the socio-political intersections that come to identify social problems, and normalize them as a technique toward social order, and the regeneration of the status-quo. In this case, the status-quo is symbolized by a white, European structure of empire assuming a socially dominating positionality, within a Nation as Family conceptual framework, and symbolized by a Strict Father governmental system. The public school, then, becomes a nursery for potential, assimilating student bodies. As a monotheistic solar framework gives way to a technological cloud deity in twenty-first U.S. schools, power processes are punitive responses are also problematized. The analysis of texts, records, archives, and documents are further problematized by a triangulation between qualitative data collected via autoethnographic and reflexive systems of analysis, and semi-structured, phenomenological interview data collected from former high-school dropouts. High-level findings are three: (1) Equity is primary: Give the most to the student who is most in need; (2) Equity is motion: Create schools where everyone can feel free and connected; and (3) Equity is examination: Create critical white studies early, to deconstruct empire and historical trauma. Educational leaders can benefit from reframing their understanding of their selves and their students

by implementing some of the methods and theoretical/conceptual frameworks presented here, toward school improvement.

## I. INTRODUCTION



*Figure 1. The Long Walk I, Begay (2002)*

### **Forced March**

You're crazy. You fall down, stand up and walk again,  
your ankles and your knees move pain that wanders around,  
but you start again as if you had wings.

The ditch calls you, but it's no use. You're afraid to stay,  
and if someone asks why, maybe you turn around and say that a woman and a sane death,  
a better death wait for you.

But you're crazy. For a long time now,  
only the burned wind spins above the houses at home,  
walls lie on their backs, plum trees are broken  
And the angry night is thick with fear.

Oh, if I could believe that everything valuable  
is not only inside me now, that there's still home to go back to.  
If only I were! And just as before bees drone peacefully  
on the cool veranda, plum preserves turn cold  
and over sleepy gardens quietly, the end of summer bathes in  
the sun.

Among the leaves, the fruit swing naked  
and in front of the rust-brown hedge blonde Fanny waits for me,  
the morning writes slow shadows—

All this could happen! The moon is so round today!  
Don't walk past me, friend. Yell, and I'll stand up again!

Miklos Radnoti  
(1944)

## Positionality

I direct community-based initiatives within a collective impact framework for a non-profit organization in Texas. He is currently in the dissertation stage of doctoral studies in education. I identify as a Chicano male, who was raised in California and Oregon. His professional career has been in community-based, educational initiatives, and he has an intimate experience with the collective work of generating a college-going culture. This experience has informed a perspective that goes beyond social symbols (e.g. Schools and scores), to bear witness, in an urgency for real conversations and relationships, as elemental to community.

My goal in scholarship is not to simply examine and analyze forms of suffering as related to equity and access in education, but to develop tools and systems along the way that can be used – innovated upon – by families needing to forge their own ways through repressive, arcane machinations of the educational industrial complex.

I employ linguistic analysis techniques—mainly conceptual metaphor recognition, word-level morphology, tagmemic/phonemic awareness, and syntactical concepts (e.g. Prosody, poetics) to help deconstruct human participation in public education. The very concepts of *In* and *Out* are called into question at the onset of considering the high-school *dropout* as a social reality, and a problem. These concepts are first at the physical, fleshly level, then at the linguistic level, and finally at the social level. Grammar and the mastery (i.e. Magick) of language are fundamental to an embodied, student-level determination of their own, eventual *Inness* or *Outness*. Thus, this statement of positionality is to put the reader on notice that I am a radical, post-colonial thinker, with a terrible irreverence for fragile white apologists and/or supremacists.

## The Survivor

The reference in the Radnoti poem invokes an image of a figure on the horizon—our respective transcendent self, who otherwise could have been dead, exalted, or any other imaginable fate. It is a mirror for each our own, unknown avatars, that we imagine as possible, yet our future interface with the same is ineffably distant. Somehow, we are all buried under heaps of desire. This distant other also represents a prototype for the dropout—the literal troop, who can no longer stay in step with the tribe, and who succumbs to her very inherent weakness—dropping from the line of progress, and eventually falling all of the way down, down to the bottom of some pit, and *there* emerge any imaginable near-zero probability scenarios to perpetuate a sudden up, up, up and away from it all.

The poem, *Forced March*, was in a little notebook found in Radnoti's back pocket, after he was shot and left for dead, in a ditch in Hungary. The poet had been among a fateful number of Hungarian Jewish soldiers, who were abandoned on the Ukrainian front, and force-marched into Serbian copper mines at the end of WWII. The symbol of a rising body, from up and out of a ditch becomes an onto-epistemological standard for western progress: Continuous improvement.

Zombie analogies seems trite at this point in time, under a Devosean educational Bishopric, where each student's body—the safety, sanity, and socio-emotional well-being—seems seen through a glass darkly. The participation of each student, and our expectations as parents and educational leaders shift too, in consideration of some new potential *symbol*—coming in from the front, and of whom we can't make any predictive

sense. What do the data say about redemption? Compulsion is less than volition; not equal to participation. The dropout abides.

### **Whiteness**

Modern, western man as cultural “dropout” bears a parasitic twin called *whiteness*—privilege, power, patriarchy, Christian empire, and all that—though a century of symbolic sovereignty has almost eaten itself away. A western push from European bodies—progressive, west-coast bodies, pushing too—is explicitly *white*. While white bodies determine the fate of non-white bodies in the *west*, even the staunch liberal has failed to produce practices or systems that last—ushering in a *turn* toward true equity. The white world is becoming smaller (living, numerical bodies) while the symbolism of whiteness in the West remains (i.e. Brown and black bodies disproportionately mistreated).

This is the very heart of the dropout—duality. He has neither won, nor lost. She is no more the genius than the grift, and the tricks of the world belong to the devil in Us All—the dropout knows this. Radnoti’s poem was materialized spirit, buried beneath tons of dirt, flesh, ash, bone, and trash, and somehow the words were resurrected—the wife retrieved Radnoti’s scraps of symbols, long after he was shot in the back, trounced in a pit, and covered in shit. These small words—names of our stories, for those of us who have survived the repressive machination of a schooling theology which places poor bodies/brown-black bodies at the bottom of a pit—speak to a principle of survival, as related to public schooling. The students in need are often buried deeply beneath neo-colonial ideologies, borne out of a twentieth-century white-fragility cum strategic social politicization, and commoditization of all public spaces and perceivable thought.

Who are we to compel bodies to do anything? Is education a great equalizer? We often hear a public mantra that goes something like this, *Students today are preparing for jobs that we don't even know exist yet*. That feels funny, like some kind of hyper-financialized vapor, perpetually animating each private thought and space—waiting to suck students' souls dry. In one sense, anything is possible. In another, there is nothing that can be done to prepare! Thus, predictive systems we *make*—ways to go, paths for students to march along in step. What will we do with those who fall? Let them read and code and march and deconstruct the lines we've laid in vain. That is, in vain we have attempted to maturate our own, respective significance as educational leaders, but whence the collective transcendental moment, and where are the radical poets in academia? Who dares to tear the bloody amulet from Columbia's neck?

## II. THE DROPOUT

Before the high-school dropout is known as a socio-political category, a compulsion-volition conundrum emerges among human bodies—families, tribes, clans, and nations, as related to basic participation. Said participation can be imagined as occurring at, even, the naming level (i.e. Naming children, things, spaces), whereas any given human that shares the same “name” with an identified, non-wanted adult (i.e. An outsider), then becomes, ostensibly, “outed”, and perhaps, quite literally, *ousted* from the group. That is, the beginnings of compulsory schooling are with basic compulsory human participation (e.g. *In* families, clans, tribes, nations). The family member who commits an offense, or who somehow breaks a familial rule—the child who runs away from home—could presumably become *outside* of said family. As the humans in families generate tribes, clans, nations, and any multitude of other social-group categories, there is an increased likelihood that any one of those humans will become an “outsider” to said, corresponding category. The high-school graduate is no different. A distinct socio-political category (HS graduate) maintains specific criteria in order for any given human to be considered *In*. Those who fall short of any one criterion, are likely deemed *Out*.

### **Concept**

There is a dropout. Here is a pre-knowledge positioning for even the earliest of conscious human bodies, wherein an unknown element is always already *othered*, whether or not it has yet been named. This is, at least, chaotic newness, affront Us All as living souls. This abstract concept attracts us to non-consciously identify the *self* as original.

Here is a dropout. At once, a star shooting across the black night *and* a human observer on earth. The cosmological implications are unknown to the ancient human, but at a visceral, life-source level, such a witness can acknowledge, and identify their own potential displacement from a given system. The shooting star is a cosmic prototype for an eventual human dropout. Although this thought is problematic too, as we might imagine some wandering star—unattached to a system—and, for whom is reserved the darkness of blackness forever. A shift in orbit for any planetary unit—retrograde motion, flying comets, and supernova—can signify a primal sense of *In*-ness and *Out*-ness. A conscious universe too, imagines invisibility *Out* there alone, without categorical value, and having no embodied properties of potentiality, yet.

There is a dropout. In pursuit of belonging to an *In*-ness—systemically included as one of the tribe—human subjects, inversely, near their own eventual invisibility. That is, to belong to a social group—a name, a house, a clan, a tribe, a nation, or the symbols that come to represent that nation, is to become hidden within a social dwelling of sorts. The human who can readily, successfully become hidden within a given socio-political group has respectfully dropped *out* of a free, eternal, ineffable sovereignty that is ever-present to a naked soul. When human bodies who have successfully hidden themselves within a group, then compel other—perhaps unwilling—human bodies to join said group—to become hidden, alike—then, human volition is brushed upon, pushed, and asked, “What are you doing?” “What can *you* do?”

Those same first humans would co-create a concept of time, due to their own motion on earth, and around the sun—through the cosmos. This invisible concept, then becomes a new, symbolic space-thing, occupying material reality as much as we let it. Time

becomes our most objectified, shared concept—a thing to which we preposition ourselves, to be either on (time) and *In* (time), before we are altogether *out* of time.

Here is a dropout. The runt of any animal litter—odddities, cast-offs, and inept offspring, as witnessed by the human subject, become frames for another type of social *In-ness/Out-ness*. Surely, there were lost sheep, abandoned baby turtles, and of course, the animals killed by other animals, and by humans.

There is a dropout. Original agrarian specialists were keen to the lived experience of ancient flora. A linguistic ability to establish a taxonomy of species, allowed the witness to identify pieces of plant matter that were flawed, unneeded, and expendable. The rowing of seed, lining of systems, and development of potential, are all agricultural sub-frames to the eventual, sociopolitical dropout category known by modern humans.

Here is a dropout. Emotional awareness in humanity—joy as pursuit, compassionate responses to individuals, collective suffering—arrives through an embodied trauma. The cosmo-physical interplay becomes real when prayer emerges as an institution toward healing from awful things; as a response to an out-of-body notion known through true horror. Concepts of power—higher powers—purpose, and regeneration emerge, with some humans gaining greater access than others do. This *In-ness/Out-ness* is elemental to a greater frame of human hierarchy.

There is a dropout. Out of trauma—the worst kind, human-to-human—come stories, people, pain, and exile. Out of exile come more stories of memories of people, places, and trauma—the migratory narrative is a line that intersects Us All. The stories lend to regret, revenge, and war. Out of war comes the march—loaded, forced, and death—where human compulsion and volition prototypically come head-to-head.

Here is a dropout. As war leads to war, the stories of names—houses, families, clans, tribes, nations—need to be remembered, and recorded. Distinct languages formed as lines away from some perpetual outsider class, to new nodes—modules of dominion, where stories became codes—symbols of transcendence, rebirth. Codification principles become more and more encrypted by topic, and come to resemble weapons, fortresses, walls of cultural themes, shared by distinct humans for good and bad, *In* and *Out*. This is America.

There is a dropout. Duality is ever-present in each sub-frame—unknown/chaotic, agricultural, labor, bloodlines, narratives, myths, war, religions, race, and imprisonment—as it is in an eventual concept of a “high-school dropout”.

## Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

In a compulsory schooling model, *care* is an afterthought. Compulsory schooling, for many students, leads to “boredom, frustration...”, and to stay “...at school longer than necessary is unthinkable...”, because this type of student has “...realized that conformity will bring them little reward” (OECD, 1983) (p.98). Such conformity would have to be somewhat predictive—by the student’s needs and actions—of substantive, say, emotional connection, cultural representation on campus, spaces for the student’s own reflection and production with staff and faculty members. The student who walks out of the classroom, down the hall, out the door, and off of the campus, has her mind set on a reward that comes by less restrictive, punitive, and discriminant means. There is often an intergenerational byproduct of a family member having “dropped out” of high school. Younger brothers and sisters can come to face the same district personnel who have determined that any member of said family is destined to fail. Hickman & Heinrich (2011) states that “students who have older siblings that drop out of high school tend to drop out at higher rates than students who do not have older siblings that drop out of high school” (p.5).

A commonality among the students who dropout is that, for whatever reason, the school building itself impeded on their sense of freedom. The roots of U.S. public schooling were germinated with imperialistic motives—spreading across the New World like corn seed, and home-growing hatred from within the classrooms. Black, brown, foreign, and poor students were always—collectively—already non-free in a way, and probably still are. Five-hundred years on, and the dependent student is the poor, African-American male: Public enemy number one. Cimballa & Miller (1999) illustrate how

tenuous this relationship has always been—showing the government’s move to control ex-slaves, in post-Civil War Georgia. “The attitudes of the Bureau agents toward the freedpeople provide a starting point for understanding this relationship...establishing schools for the freedpeople to move them out of the wake of slavery. Nevertheless, it was a concern that did not stop him from threatening to close those schools if the freedpeople did not make an effort to support them” (316).

Dropping out of high school is a political act. The student who gradually came to lag, to fall, and then to finally drop out of school and out of the p-16 pipeline, is stating publicly—probably non-consciously—and in real-time motion, the errs of society. A cradle-to-career pathway fails, yet, to acknowledge or know, the epistemology of the dropout.

### **Method**

This study utilizes Foucault discourse analysis, and policy archaeology to create a genealogy for the high school dropout in U.S. popular culture and public schooling. This framework attempts to situate phenomena within popular discourse as being latent constructs from common negotiations of power between individuals. The latent phenomenon becomes a discursive item, then, that generates its own power negotiations as part of its very existence. The so-called high school dropout, in this case, is not a powerless category or person. The dropout has his own social definition, personal story and voice, and—most importantly—a body. It should be noted, the genealogical component (i.e. Discourse analysis, policy archaeology) of this study is triangulated by other data. More specifically, my own autoethnographical data, and qualitative

participant respondent data gleaned from semi-structured interviews. A synthesis of these triangulated findings will be provided at end.

### **Power and Education**

McWhorter (2004) captures a Foucauldian analysis of power-negotiations within a high school context, showing how phenomena can be genealogically traced:

“Consider high school again. Various forces are at work there over time. Teachers and students try out different strategies. Agendas shift. However, an equilibrium usually emerges. A daily routine is established. Repeated events of power bring about a certain shape of things...One has only to consider the nerd...the juvenile delinquent...the retarded child...categories of human being that have been invented in institutionalized arrangements of power, including school systems and the psychological discourses that support them.” (p.43).

The high school dropout, in this regard, becomes a politicized agent. Her body may be on the *outside* of a particular school/school system, but her experiences in the negotiation of power relations between objects, people and events *inside* of the same school space, foster her agency. Foucault’s power is not a *thing*, but something that happens—an event, process, and/or confluence of inter-related phenomena. Most literature about school dropouts indicates a student’s likelihood of dropping out as derivative of 2 common contexts: (1) Early grade dropouts (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grades) who are characterized by “...substantial difficulty early on...marked by persistent and deteriorating levels of school performance”; and (2) Students who dropped out after 9<sup>th</sup> grade who are characterized by “...larger declines than graduates in their average grades following...transition to both middle school in the sixth grade and to high school in the

ninth grade...” and by their “...average attendance [declining] significantly from the sixth to the eighth grade.” (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Roderick, 1993).

Within a Foucauldian discourse analysis framework, a genealogy for each type of dropout is perceivable. In this sense, each type of dropout would negotiate the power arrangements with respect to their chronological point, and social manner of articulating with the school. That is, the content that constitutes each context of power negotiations between the student—his body—and the school/school system, bears an opportunity for the dropout’s agentic development. Any student’s physical body—their mind too, though this is harder to predictably control—within a public context of compulsory schooling, becomes a type of conduit for their respective school’s organizational approach, structural functions, human capital, and political paradigm (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

A student who becomes a dropout, then, has processed those same institutional elements, with respect to the *type* of dropout they are (e.g. Early grade, late dropout) and as an epistemic identification of their own self-worth. The body of the student has been informed by the context(s) of their home(s), the content mastered by their immediate teachers/guardians, and any political agency embodied—lack thereof—by those same people. Once the student’s physical body is within the school structure, the agency of both bodies (i.e. Student, school) will interface in a negotiation of power, leading to a place for phenomena to become identified, and maybe forgotten, lost, abandoned, or developed and shared publicly, and popularly. This place is called discourse.

## Discourse Analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis arises out of a need to “construct an analytics of power that no longer takes law as a model and a code” (Foucault, 1978) (p.90). The “law” in this sense, comes to represent the epitome of arcane minutiae designed to immobilize the bodies of humans; to codify their institutionalization—controlling their movement. In a schooling sense, this would represent the power disparity between educated, middle-class and white, teachers and administrators, and poor, uneducated parents of students. The flow of beauraucratic content (e.g. Policy changes, programmatic documentation) rushing toward the parent, makes academic success for their child less knowable, and less discursive. A primary, embodied power for humans is speech. Foucault (1954) stated that “To recount, or more simply, to speak, or in a still more elementary fashion, to issue an order, is not a simple matter wither; first it involves a reference to an event or an order of things, or to a world to which I have no access myself but to which others may have access in my place; I have to recognize, therefore, the point of view of others and integrate it into my own” (p.22)

Foucault highlighted speech in this regard, as part of his analysis on what constituted “difficult behavior”, as related to mental illness and evolution. He states that, “simple actions as attention to the present, the account of previous action, speech, all involve a certain duality that is fundamentally the duality to be found in all social behavior” (Foucault, 1954)(p.23). This is in no way to align a so-called high school dropout with a human diagnosed as being mental ill, but to illuminate this primary level of discourse: Self-advocacy. Thus, Foucault’s “duality” becomes *discourse* at an elemental level, as the student and her family negotiate for power over their own bodies,

as related to the school's need to negotiate for their own, institutionally embodied power. Discourse then becomes "texts such as speech, written materials, visual images, clothing, buildings, practices..." (Ritenburg, 2010).

Dropping out of high school, through the lens of Foucauldian discourse analysis, is merely a technology of educational participation, establishing a "principle" between the "humanization" of the Educational Industrial Complex and the "knowledge" of Us All (p.23). The genealogy is neither specifically historical (e.g. Connecting stories to support norms), nor subversive (e.g. Debunking, or revealing truths), but is both and critical in relation to the context of the content studied—the discourse itself (e.g. Speech, text, records, etc.). A genealogy of the high school dropout problematizes the spaces of negotiation between, mostly, poor students and families, and the schools they attend. Those spaces include layers systems: "microsystems", such as singular and immediate, familial systems, "macrosystems" that include culture, customs, laws, and government, and the spaces in between—workplaces, organizations, schools, peer groups, etc. (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011). Each layer of social systematization calls for another negotiation of power for the student, with respect to Foucault's "four general rules". Thus the narrative lines of each student—dropouts included—are myriad: Familial bloodlines, spiritual consciousness, political standpoint, institutional participation, subaltern narratives, historical and mythological awareness, geographical lines, architectural and systems exposure, social participation, and more hidden and unknown narrative lines. These lines are neither, necessarily, forward or backward-leftward or rightward-up or down, nor are they *In* or *Out*. The lines do come to intersect at the spaces of negotiation

for power—primarily bodily, and subsequently in any subject-object manifestation within the discourse.

Steinberg (2016) states that Foucault does not “theorize the origins of power: rather, his intellectual mission was to explain how it worked” (p.477). In this sense, power becomes a shared process; a “specific technique...that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault, 1977) (p.170). The technology of dropping out, from a student’s perspective, could presumably be individuating their former high school as type of tool toward their own epistemology. The school—its staff, faculty, funding, and policies—serve as an instrument for the dropout’s coming to know their own embodied power. The school/school system is only one subject within an ecology of private and public systems with which an individual comes to interface. Qualities of *Inness* and *Outness* become small things when considering the vast layers of social systems, and the myriad “instruments” that connect individuals to individuals, and individuals to groups, and so on. How many more instruments then come to disconnect those same bodies again?

A Foucauldian genealogy selects texts to analyze in “multiple unrelated contexts” (Ritenburg, 2010) (p.74). These “texts” can include audio and/or orthographical recordings, articles and products produced by private and public groups, photos and videos, legislative bills and documents, and essentially any textual content that has something to say about, in the case of this study, students who drop out of school and schools they attended. In this study, the texts analyzed will sustain the problematization of schooling as related to the so-called dropout. As federally funded public institutions, a Foucauldian genealogy is well suited to approach the dropout subject. Kempa (2010)

states that this conceptual framework can “reveal...the entire domain of what the government does, in terms of exercising all the forms of its power, to ensure (its understandings) of the polity and the...people) (p.275). Bell (2011) states that a Foucauldian genealogy can make it “difficult to discover whether there is an instigating agent in the circulation of power/knowledge throughout society” (p.107). In a negotiation of power from a discourse analysis point of view, each agent—the object, too—has a bid in the power game.

Surely, a secondary student has agentic potential to move her own body about the spaces of a school—out the door and on her way home. Likewise, the school/school system possesses obvious technologies of power with which they negotiate their own bids with higher bodies of power (e.g. Federal government), and whence said negotiation is not necessarily determinable by either agent. However, it seems that well-funded, state institutions tend to gain an upper hand on would-be, redeemed native sons, daughters, and otherwise. Herein is where Foucault emphasizes not just the semblance of a supposed “power”, which is “everywhere and cannot be escaped whatever type of society is developed, but an increased awareness of power relations creates the possibility for resistance” Goodlad (2007) (p.108). The so-called dropout is able to resist the systematization of the schooling institution, due to her own revelation of text—voice, content-created, lived experience, products, records, and *all* negotiations with *all* texts, other than the student herself. In this sense of a student becoming a “dropout” as a necessary, embodied resistance, the following questions will be posed to the subject of the high school dropout in general; the lived *Testimonios* of identified dropouts; my own testimony as dropout. Discourse analysis, throughout this text, is not designed to be so

discernible as to be seen—explicated in an obvious way, and laid out with logical inputs and outputs—rather, the method is similar to a small brush in the hand of the archaeologist. This is the researcher’s eye-to-mind through the historical texts, and Foucault’s archaeology writ large, becomes the people, places, things, and processes encountered by the researcher (i.e. Archaeologist) in their movement from the past to the present. A genealogy, then, emerges not as a directly linear and structured pathway from then to now, but as simply broader views with which to view the unit of analysis. In this case, we brush our way through the texts, in analysis of their processes of power, and make visible a genealogy for the U.S. high-school dropout from 1918-2018.

### **Policy Archaeology**

This study also utilizes policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) as a method of analyzing the regularities of a society, which help constitute and define social problems and their potential solutions. This method is born out of a post-structuralist approach to analyzing the intersections of human and social practice cum policy designed to reconstitute and maintain social order. Policy archaeology is based on 4 Arenas, as adapted here to fit this analysis of the high-school dropout (Scheurich, 1994):

- **Arena 1:** The education/social problem arena: the study of the social construction of the high-school dropout” (as a problem).
- **Arena 2:** The social regularities arena: the identification of the network of social regularities across education and “high-school dropouts”
- **Arena 3:** The policy solution arena: the study of the social construction of the range of acceptable policy solutions (in response to dropouts).

- **Arena 4:** The policy studies arena: the study of the social functions of policy studies itself (critically, as social-order instruments)

In this approach, the high-school dropout emerges as a social problem from the social regularities within a society, wherein particular grids of regularities emerge as waves from the collective social participatory consciousness regularities—curling upward to crest as novel technologies cum social identities, categories, and problems. This is how the high-school dropout emerged from a cresting wave of specific, local grids (e.g. Compulsory schooling mandates, rural versus urban needs), in time and space, and due to the cultural characteristics, organizational resources, individual assets, and the collective consciousness (i.e. Social regularities) of any given event. The deep, heaving undercurrent of social regularities have held schooling as a central concern, along with the school’s genetic relatives, the church, courts, the state, streets, homes, and any conceivable human dwelling since time immemorial. These are all the hiding places for the body, and in the body lives an eternal consciousness of which none can be cast out.

### **Genealogy**

Foucault (1977) states that an analysis of the manifestations with regard to the subject(s) and subsequent discourse, in this case the school, the dropout, and their negotiation for bodily power, conceptualizes the subject in the following ways:

1. The high school dropout as a “social complex function”, situated as a “consequence” of “a whole series of possible positive effects” (p.23). These “series” are the educational mechanisms.

2. A high school dropout is its own “technique possessing its own specificity...exercising power”. The so-called dropout has agency, and dropping out is a “political tactic” (p.23).
3. A dropout is not treated as some “disturbing or useful effect” of a “series” of histories (e.g. Educational law, Social sciences), but may derive from a “common matrix”, or a “single process of epistemologico-judicial formation”. The dropout is an organic “technology of power”, and is the “very principle” of the analysis (p.23).
4. The dropout’s “body itself is invested by power relations”. There is an “entry of the soul on the scene of [educational] systematicity”, and the dropout’s body becomes a “political technology...in which might be read a common history of power relations and object relations” (p.24).

### **Questions**

The research questions guiding this analysis will be considered through a Foucauldian discourse analysis approach to analyzing texts. In the generation of the genealogy itself, Scheurich’s (1994) “four arenas” of policy archaeology will be employed to examine the social underpinnings of historical problems, in this case the dropout. The questions will not only serve to frame the problematization of the dropout concept itself, but will eventually serve the same function to my own autoethnographical collection of reflective, and recovered data. The data from my autoethnography will become Foucault’s “text”, both including internal, reflective concepts of the self and the lived experience as a high school dropout cum redeemed scholar, and advanced degree recipient. This type of reflective text will be analyzed for the feasibility of interfacing

Foucauldian genealogy triangulated with some physical, archival recovery from previous schools and institutions I attended along my way to, eventually, dropping out of high school in my senior year.

- What is a/the common source for the dropout?
- What are the social regularities that help to identify the dropout as a social problem?
- What are the political implications that are manifest as a result of the dropout?
- What are the myriad lines of influence that created the complex of the dropout?
- What is the body of a dropout?

Foucault (1978) wrote, “By power, I do not mean...analysis, made [to]...assume the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination [as]...given”(p.92). He continues, “Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (p.92). This is the space which births the fabric of Scheurich’s (1994) “grid of regularities” (p.308), these emerging moments of political production—processes of power connecting human regularities within social institutions.

### III. Onto-Epistemology

#### Lázaro

As a boy, I watched  
my old man  
dictate a plan  
to my mother,  
who lacked  
rich knowledge  
and classes of life,  
houses of light,  
and he betray her.  
He spoke of bread,  
money,  
and of men,  
of taking  
every thing  
from the king.  
We traded and laid,  
brawled and drank,  
and he smiled.  
He taught us the snake,  
to turn man 'round,  
to trap and take.  
We crossed town  
finding those  
whom riches  
had slowed in full  
fat homes. As we crept,  
they rose,  
and we split  
in a sprint, and laughed,  
cast off, apart,  
each hart in search  
to quench thirst  
through an arid land.  
He went away  
for good, the man.  
Should you find  
a way by the snake,  
to use this day,  
to wit, do this:  
Eat.

## Psychosomatic Semantics

This study seeks to add, as a self-reflective, qualitative inquiry methodology and conceptual framework, to an emerging body of autoethnographic accounts from former high-school dropouts cum postsecondary academic scholars, and in capturing their respective, lived experiences. This analysis uses “feces/shit” as a conceptual framework toward an onto-epistemological basis for the high-school dropout as co-creative, meaning maker. The dropout here becomes a radical rascal who survives by his wits. She learns to know social institutions at least as well as they know her—their innate corruptness-fierce burn to turn student subjects into objectified machines. The dropout calls the very purpose of the school into question. This includes the building, the people, the curriculum, the desks, and the chairs. The dropout is not found in her chair, her desk, in the classroom, in the school building, or under the order of all of those things.

The physical structures, though, must also be viewed as symbols of each student’s potential transcendence of the same. That is, a growing, learning body and mind must necessarily attract new objects as new symbols toward new beginnings—as the growing U.S. school system has worked to attract new bodies as symbols of the system’s legitimacy. The systems fill with schools, schools with classrooms, classrooms with seats, and seats with students. The seat itself is where the human body rests—is at rest, and ready to learn. This *sitting* becomes meta-migratory, then, as the student’s mind travels beyond space and time, as the body becomes *informed*—written upon in new coded potentiality for any given student. The meaning being made, as elemental to a student’s sociopolitical identity, is psychosomatic—relating to the human’s mind-body interplay—and, is made functional, here, by an exterior intervention: Compulsory

schooling. The student can see their self in the process—the student becomes *subject* and *object*, and any emerging semantic understanding of changed identity, thus becomes associated with a given seat (room, building, system), and said student's *sitting* in said *seat*. In this study, I will be scan my own body, in what I am coining as a *Body Autograph*, for memories of events and people related to school and schooling, that helped to shape my eventual identity of “high-school dropout” (table 1). The chair now takes on an altered significance, with neither perfectly realized physicality of an invisible realm of *chair-ness*, nor qualitative finality becoming possible for any given *ass* in any given seat.

The dropout is not in her seat. He is in another setting, elsewhere, perhaps in a bed, on her feet, in a seat on a bus, in the street, on his way. She represents a principle for social critique by refusing to participate; allow her body to be ordered, numbered, and judged. He is the boy who was pushed out of the window, and fell backward into a pen of muck; who sat in class, smelly and stiff. He is intimate with the shit. It is his mouth as he sits there—his eyes watching the letters, numbers, and his mind writing, editing, remembering—dry, and grinding. The dropout feels formless—invisible—within the chairs, rooms, and buildings, but learns to build mounds-mountains of possibility, by dealing with the magic between embodiment and transcendence: *Prima materia*. She is nothing and everything at once; a snake eating his own tail.

The dropout lives in the episodically assembled, epistemological shit, and is not—as might be the ordered, seated bodies—imitations of some etheric form, or concept of the “successful student”. There are no deep structures or forms—no one perfect way to be, or to become. The dropout, too, is not some instantiation of an eternal rebel spirit. The

dropout is a body. He is a physically real student in a chair, desk, and classroom. He leaves his seat, the class, and walks out into the real hallways that lead out of the school building, and out into the real world, where his otherness is afforded broader possibilities for both similarity and difference among subjects and objects. Here is where the dropout’s body becomes agentic—on the outside of the school—suspended between the educational industrial complex and the humanization of Us All.

Table 1

*Body Autograph*

Body Part	Symbol	Memories, Events	People	Prototypes
<b>Cabeza</b>	Trauma	Falling; Bat 1; 2x4; Bat 2;	RG;TH; Lucas;DH;PA; Crips;Hubbards;Combat	Dimensionality
<b>Mente</b>	Psychedelia	Random, Peer-based	RG; Peers	Irreverence
<b>Boca</b>	Introductions	Gift of gab	Lesser thieves	Imposter
<b>Corazon</b>	Heartache	Victimhood;	Family; unknown; friends	Reservation
<b>Pansa</b>	Home	Broken-ness	Family	House
<b>Viento</b>	Love; Sex	Unknown; Rejection	Girlfriends	Arts
<b>Piernas</b>	Walking	Experience	Society	Cunning
<b>Compas</b>	Community	Invisible	Us All	Hauntology

#### IV. Autoethnography

Nutbrown (2011) used a piece of furniture with nine drawers as a data-collecting tool in her reflexive, autoethnographic process. The drawers were used to collect a “box of childhood” and to “give some access to the small secret stuff of childhood” (p.233). Nutbrown (2011) was using the process to examine her beginnings as a teacher, and how her sense of self as an educator was informed by her childhood experiences—bearing, “...connection to [her] beliefs and practices and ethos in education today” (p.233). This paper will use a similar method, replacing Nutbrown’s furniture of “drawers” with chairs/seats/places to sit as symbols of my experience in a U.S. public schooling system, and my eventual dropping out of the same system (Table 2).

*Chairs* hearken to ancient models of semantic philosophy, but come to hold a newly symbolic space for a high-school dropout’s development of mind, emergence as politicized body, migratory/meta-migratory potentiality, and as indicators of *Inness* and *Outness*. That is, as a student progresses through an institution, which seats is he or she sitting in? How can those chairs/seats/places to sit, point to any given student’s capacity and likelihood to become or stay *In*, versus becoming and/or staying *Out*?

Table 2

*Chairs/Seats/Places to Sit*

<b>Seat</b>	<b>Memory</b>	<b>Motion</b>	<b>Axiology</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Prototypes</b>
<b>Van Floor</b>	Fleeing	Geography	Escapist	Border-crossing	Dimensionality
<b>Principal's Chair</b>	Consistent	Reputation	Truth	Discipline	Irreverence
<b>ISS Chair</b>	Secrets	Isolation	Volition	Pedagogy	Imposter
<b>Shotgun Seat</b>	Heat	Violence	Nihilist	Deconstruction	Reservation
<b>Court Stand</b>	Fog	Lying	Irreverence	Systems	House
<b>Jail Boat</b>	Clarity	Confinement	Humility	Philology	Arts
<b>Permanent Desk</b>	Meditation	Interior	Diligence	Semiology	Cunning
<b>Folding Chairs</b>	Redemption	Exterior	Service	Emancipation	Hauntology

Nutbrown (2011) created her boxes as strategies in reflexive growth as an educator, asking herself pointed questions about her childhood and how she became who she is: *What do I think? Where did it come from? What are my values? How were they*

*nurtured? Why do I teach how I teach? What do I teach? Why I research what I research?* (pp.233-234). These questions will be relevant, and revisited throughout this autoethnography, but I will also be looking at each seat's relation to events of *movement/motion*, to be interpreted as concepts of *migration/meta-migration*, along with each "chair's" relation to my emerging, theoretical prototypes: The Picaro's Stool & The Prayer Rug (Figure 2). These prototypes are held as symbols for the dropout's experience in school as a *body* (stool), and a *soul* (rug). This conceptualization is based on Michel Foucault's genealogical framework, and a critical discourse approach toward power relations.

Foucault is truly concerned with the soul, as it is born of our collective, social awareness of one another, and the negotiations of our human bodies in a post-posts age, and in discourses of power (St. Pierre, 2015). The *soul*—as the shit—is a collective constant, a hidden field of which our embodied meaning inevitably becomes assembled. We get to the soul through the body—the body sits, makes things (poetry, feces), in an entanglement of time and space, and the mind ponders the self. The *self* of the high-school dropout—my self, at least—is symbolized here by an interiority (*soul-rug*) and an exteriority (*body-stool*), in order to build out an emerging theory of social participation (*Picaro's Theory*-explained later).



Figure 2. Prototypes: Picaro's Stool, Prayer Rug

## The Self

My older brother dropped out before me, as our missing father did before him. I felt something burning inside of me—an emptiness—early in my schooling experience. Much of that emptiness was generated in the home by family dynamics, but there was something unique happening at the actual schoolhouse. There was a type of *in-filling* that was expected to occur there, and I never fully got it. Not only were my young mind and body expected to become trained and tested by the curricula, teachers, and administration, but also an invisible allegiance to the system itself was compelled by means of discipline and punishment. I was of a class and type of student that received the most punishment in the school system. Most of my schooling was in predominately middle-class, white suburban schools. I never had too much difficulty with the provided lessons or content, but I always had problems with the punitive and hierarchical structuring of students and their learning. I never felt white enough, clean enough, or of enough wealth to feel like I fully belonged at any of the schools, communities.

I realized early on that I fit in best with the kids who were, kind of, social outcasts. I fit in with the poor kids, because I was poor. I fit in with the students of color, because I was a student of color. I fit in with the kids who were willing to be daring, and break the rules, because I was willing to do almost anything. I sat in shit—*prima materia*—upon a three-legged stool. My crude, three-legged way of knowing, always had a little wobble in it, but the non-conscious act cum matured, theoretical underpinning is the intentional push toward transcending embodiment. Recognizing early on that my body smelled funky compared to most, I pushed and pulled at my concepts of self—mixed-race bastard, bad boy, potential leader, from a shitty family in the apartments at

the end of the street—negotiating between integrity and survival, volition and remembering, while searching to discover a resting place for my soul.

## The Seats

*Van Floor.* My mother, Norma, left Los Angeles in the late 70's, in a dirty brown van. She had two bastard babies with her (Brother Reuben and Me), and the van belonged to Tom. Tom had two school-aged children (David and Michelle), and we all arrived in Eugene, Oregon as a "family", some days later. I was probably three and Reuben about 5 years old. The story that I was always told—being the youngest, my mind was, perhaps, the most easily perverted—was that my and Reuben's father (Jose), as well as the mother of David and Michelle (?), were both drug addicts, and Norma and Tom fled California, looking for a new start. After forty years of piecing the story together, with input from other family members who were there at the time, I can now see a broader stroke, painting my past. Jose and the mother of my stepsiblings may well have been addicts, but the legality of our (me, Reuben, David, Michelle) removal from California in migration to Oregon, is now in question. "The feds were after Tom," said my Aunt Lily, in a recent phone call from California. "Nobody in your family knew this guy. Your mom just left to Oregon with you two boys, and apparently Tom was *wanted* by the Feds," Lily said.

My heart still aches for Jose and my step-siblings' mother, and for the years—their entire adult lives—spent alone, perhaps, wondering what ever became of the bodies of light that came from their respective bodies...

When I was in kindergarten, my stepsiblings were "kidnapped from our elementary school in Eugene. Apparently, their mother and her boyfriend drove up from California, located the school, picked up David and Michelle, and drove them back to L.A. That same day, Tom and Norma loaded Reuben and me into the brown van, and we drove back to L.A. to get David and Michelle. I can remember lying on the dirty carpet of

the van, peeling back the corners, and locating the eroded holes on the metal floor. Reuben and I would flatten our faces to the floor of the van, and push our eyes through the holes—staring at the passing pavement below, in the night. I remember arriving in Los Angeles, going to the courthouse, and vomiting on the front steps. We eventually returned to Eugene with David and Michelle. The dirty van had a driver’s seat, a passenger seat, an empty, carpeted floor, and a twin sized bed in the far back. I slept in the back with Michelle for much of the trip home. I had my favorite blue, stuffed elephant to play with, and I would ring the little bell on the end of his trunk for attention. Reuben and David found all of the holes on the floor, by pulling up the thin, purple carpet. The story that I was always told, was that they were kidnapped, and at some point along the way, my stepsister was raped. I never asked her about this story, but I think I tried. Our “family” was never the same.

Four decades removed, and after having finally met my father, Jose—now deceased—I wonder if Reuben and I were equally “kidnapped” from him in California. The meaning making done to my body and soul in those years with Tom and his kids (~1978-1986) are critical to the coming frames of my life. All of those years can be marked by the floor of the dirty brown van. The van took us from California to Eugene, before Tom bought a new white station wagon in 1986. The station wagon was cool, because it had two seats in the far back, which faced backward. Reuben and I claimed those seats, and we migrated to Portland that same year—two half-brown bastards, staring backwards down Interstate-5, a road home, of sorts, while hate-playing/love-fighting into the future—we battered boys from dirt roads and shitty lies.

I do not know what ever happened to the brown van, but Tom and his kids split from Norma and us, shortly after our arrival to Portland. I guess they tried to make it work, but at some point the lies people are telling themselves, one another, and their children reach a breaking point. Perhaps this is more real in a two-parent home. The accountability required for peace and love to build upon one another, cannot bear historical, genetic plagiarism, name changes, and/or tax evasion. Eventually the feds find you, and the pressure becomes too much. Then family unit crumbles. Violence, infidelity, and discord are the themes from these early, crucial years in which I became a student, athlete, socio-political body.

Norma moved Reuben and me into a two-bedroom townhouse in Beaverton, Oregon in 1986. I can see now that we were *suburb-poor*. That is, we lived in white suburban America, in the flat land area of said suburb, near a strip-mall, dollar store, in a single-parent home, where we survived check-to-check (Figure 3). Homemade clothes, cheap clothes, big, stupid shoes from the dollar store with too many Velcro straps, and an unengaged mother. She did what she could. Reuben and I felt like immediate outsiders in the community, and at the school, Terra Linda elementary. The school is listed as having 26% of their students enrolled in a free and reduced lunch program in 2018, and 69% of their students are white. We were mixed-race Chicanos from California, and we always received free lunch. Those of us who received free lunch were required to sign up for cafeteria duty on the first day of each month, in our homeroom class, in front of all of our peers. Cafeteria duty included preparing the tables in the cafeteria, helping the cooks with whatever, and then washing dishes after lunch. I would often be finishing my dishes while the other kids were being released to recess. When I was released to the

playground, I pounced on whatever the highest-staked game was being played—football, basketball, baseball, tetherball... I wonder now, how much anger did I carry outside with me? People wanted me on their team, yet it seems that I was forever fighting with some other suburb-poor boy on that playground—usually the same 2-3 boys. Many of those same boys would become trusted underworld allies later in our teenage years.



*Figure 3.* Reuben, Norma, Isaac (1985).

In returning to Terra Linda in 2018, as part of the data collection for this project, I walked through my old classrooms, and sat in the seats. I always felt confident in executing the class work, and perhaps this ability—including my presence in the gym, on the playground—excused my being mixed-race, my cheap clothes, and/or my whole family. Most of the time, I felt naked and I wanted to hide.

**Principal’s Chair.** My first memories of being sent to the principal’s office are from Crest Elementary (K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade), in Eugene, OR. All of us—Michelle, David, Reuben, and I—attended Crest, which was a short, ten-minute walk from our house on Crest Dr. The school was rural, hippy-ish, and I started getting into fights there. One fellow rascal in particular, Lucas, was my chief nemesis. Mr. Carbajal was the principal, and I earned an early reputation with him and his staff for being trouble. In second grade, around Valentine’s Day, I slickly unlocked the classroom window before recess, with my

mind fixed on a bag of chocolate hearts in the teacher's desk. Just before lunch, I had seen Mrs. Rice take the bag from her purse, and place it in her top, right desk drawer. I was determined to get it. Why? Was I already, as one might say, a *bad kid*? Moreover, can I build a framework—a grounded theory around this type of experience?

During recess, amid the chaotic blacktop of rubber balls bouncing and children running and falling, I made my way to the classroom window. I pulled it open, climbed into the dark classroom, ran to the teacher's desk, and snatched the bag of chocolates (Figure 4). I must have looked like a little heathen when I later fell behind the baseball backstop and shoved every dark heart into my mouth, before burying the trash in the sawdust. Between my emerging habits of stealing, fighting, and lying, I found myself in Mr. Carbajal's office more and more. I remember him being firm, but warm. He must have shed pity on me, knowing of my family's multiple issues. Maybe he saw the indigenous blood in me, and wanted to extend some love. We lived walking distance, so we were always at the school playing, with no supervision. We had some t-shirts from a school in California that David and Michelle had attended. The shirts had tigers on the front. We cut them into half-shirts and started a "gang" at Crest Elementary. We were the *Tigers*. We used to climb on top of the roof of the school and yell out, "Tigers!"

Returning to the school for data collection, I noticed that they have erected a metal gate of sorts, which blocks the route to the roof (i.e. Up the access-ramp bannister; Chin-up from the gutter; Foot on the fence, and you are up). The big, new gate blocks you from putting your foot on the fence; a needed step. It is easier if you have two or three people with you. It was always David, Reuben, and me climbing up and acting as if we were some obscure gang from the 1979 film, *The Warriors*. Looking back, I can see

that whatever *soul* that may have been formed in Norma and Tom’s union—their plans for us kids—was dissolving, dying. That death started to manifest in my actions in and around school, mostly in mischievous and sometimes violent ways.



*Figure 4.* Author re-enacting event in actual school window.

It was in my Portland/Beaverton schooling experiences where I truly earned a reputation for causing trouble, for terrorizing the staff, and for being too aggressive. Terra Linda was my elementary school, and it was there where I first learned of a “Talented And Gifted (TAG)” class of students. I noticed that every so often, they would come calling for the “TAG” kids, and I always felt cheated. *I should be on that TAG bus*, I thought. *Why am I not a TAG student?* One thing I knew—I was good at making an impression on my peers, and sometimes adults. This understanding was crucial. At times, I was a bully. Other times, I was some kind of hero. On my first day to Terra Linda, in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I picked a fight with the biggest kid on the playground, George K. I landed in the principal’s office, and met who would become my chief nemesis for the next four years, “Principal N.A.” I would sit in the chair outside of Principal N.A.’s office, before entering, and I would engage all types of people and conversation. I came to know the administrative assistants, the hall monitors, counselors, janitors, cooks, etc.

I am reminded, now, of the biblical story of Nehemiah, and how he was a foreign servant to the Persian King Artaxerxes—bringing the wine, while being privy to inner-workings of the state institution. I imagined that I actually had some kind of special privilege, because I was pulled out of class, and I experienced the school in ways that most kids did not and could not. My position—within the school, a sociopolitical environment—was privileged in a way. As perverted as that sounds, it is true. I presumed agency, because I was having discourse with adults—the same adults whom I had actually tricked (e.g. Forgeries, lies, etc.) in the past—and, there was this consistent talk about me potentially “being a leader”. Now, looking back, I can imagine just how much they probably despised my presence—all the trouble I caused. During my data collection homecoming, I posed a notion to the two women working in the front office, Can administrators hate kids; mistreat students? Their calloused response was casual, “Things are different now...we aren’t as harsh as we once were...a good thing and a bad thing.”

Principal N.A. would always scold me, and tell me how disappointed she was in me; how if I really wanted to—if I could just *not* act out—I could be a “leader” (Figure 5). I can recall having the thought back then, *Lead whom?* Perhaps that was Principal N.A.’s *soulical* role in my journey, to urge me to beckon this same question back upon the public schooling institution, *Whom are you leading?* Principal N.A., *were you my leader?*



*Figure 5.* Author re-enacting events with principal in actual office, chair.

King Artaxerxes—Achaemenid Empire (465-424 BC)—granted Nehemiah a type of empowerment, in letters and resources, sending the cup bearer back home, to help rebuild his community. Principal N.A. did half as much for me, as I transitioned to middle school, at Meadow Park Intermediate—not that I ever blessed her with wine, or redemption for any matter. I saw Principal N.A. one day driving to Terra Linda—I still lived within walking distance, and would ride my bike around the neighborhood—and, I felt compelled to throw a big stick at her car. It was a Lexus, and back then, that was an impressive automobile. I missed, after all. Principal N.A. sent the word up to Meadow Park Intermediate School, and I was called into the principal’s office, and promptly sent to ISS: In School Suspension. During my data collection trip in 2018, I walked the halls of Terra Linda, and I noticed they had a nice, framed picture of Principal N.A. in the main hallway, honoring her life and legacy. Her mark on that school and beyond, are much larger than my short time under her guidance. Looking at her picture, I wondered how many poor little souls she kicked around in her tenure.

**In-School-Suspension Chair.** I spent a full day in the In School Suspension room, at Meadow Park, at least three times each of the 3 years I attended there (e.g. 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grades). I came to know the counselor in charge, Mrs. Fishback, quite personally. She was a very sweet woman, probably in her 60’s, and she always wore a grey baby afro. On

my trip back in 2018, the administrative assistant working the front office desk confirmed my memories of Mrs. Fishback, saying, “Oh yes, she was indeed a good person. She hasn’t worked here for many years”. There were the regulars to ISS as well: Sina, Kyle, Silvestre, Roy, Chad and his sister. It was a familiar space for me in the school—hidden away from the people, the faces, and the pressure of their successes, my failures.

Middle school provided some new challenges for me as well. I was big for my age, and being in the younger grades, I would be tested by older boys. My brother Reuben was already two years ahead of me, but he was not a fighter—his cunning lied in his wit, his planning and plotting. Although he is a scrappy survivor, he has always been all knees and elbows, so he could not protect me from bigger dudes I got into it with, and I adapted to this knowing. Reuben also stopped playing sports by middle school, as I continued on, thus my path crossed with muscle-bound knuckleheads more often. I somehow always found myself in some kind of public contest of masculine measure, and sometimes I won. Most of the time—now I can see, thankfully—I made a fool out of myself, and sometimes I got my ass kicked. I was always being reported to the office for something.

In School Suspension is kind of like kid-jail. You report to Mrs. Fishback as soon as you arrive on campus. The little room she occupied was unmarked from the outside, with dark construction paper blocking the narrow rectangular window on the door (Figure 6). On my data collection trek back to Meadow Park for this analysis, I noticed the room is labelled “Counseling 1”, and there is no paper on the window. I knelt down to peer into the room, and I imagined the desks arranged as they were back then. I could see each one of us *picaros* with our heads down, tucked into the little cubbies, faking as if we were

doing our work. The point for *us* was to keep one stream of jokes and communication flowing throughout the entire day. If we got too out of line, Mrs. Fishback would get upset. I can imagine her little eyes now, focused behind her bifocals, and I can almost hear her high-pitched admonishments firing at me, or Chad, or whomever was guilty. I can remember her sometimes smirking at one of our cracks, and that let us all know that we weren't so bad, and there was some hope in our respective causes—if, only in some jailhouse somewhere someday. Mrs. Fishback had a conversation with us—we usual suspects. That is all. She was able to connect with us, by allowing us to breathe, and to feel safe in our rascality.



*Figure 6.* Outside of actual ISS rooms from Meadow Park Intermediate School.

In high school, ISS was stricter. There was not a nice, older woman with a baby afro, rather a white, male disciplinarian. ISS was not going to be a comfortable hideout for me at either of the high schools I attended, Sunset and Merlo Station. In fact, I was made aware by the end of my sophomore year, that if I did not stop skipping my classes and turn myself around, I was going to be kicked off the football team, and perhaps expelled from school.

The punitive realities of my high schools' structures, initiated in me, probably, my first deep reflexive processing of an embodied existence, in and out of schools and

schooling—remembering what happened, who I thought I was, and who I had become. I was in a man’s body by sixteen, and I was just starting to fumble with simple, social fundamentals: Being kind to others; Sharing; Communicating clearly; Taking time to do a good job. I reflected how elementary school was pacifying, and there was still a sense of potential. It seems that back then, if just a couple of things had gone differently, my future prospects could have been as high and bright as any of my peers. What worth did I once have? When did it become devalued, and how? I always felt poor and fat. By the time I was in high school, I was a big, loco fool. Forget ISS, the entire school system was becoming increasingly incompatible with my lifestyle.

In returning to collect data, I felt a sense of industrialized sadness with respect to the aesthetics of both my middle, and high school’s architecture. Upon walking the halls, the quasi-comfortable possibility present at the elementary school, was gone. An abrupt, more adult feel to the building itself, the décor, and the use of space, felt decidedly distant, indifferent. The building seemed to be saying to me, *You’re free to go. I don’t mind, go ‘head.*

Norma, Reuben, and Isaac always lived in the flat lands of Beaverton, and I have wondered about those low-income students who do live nearby schools, and the ease with which they might feel to simply slip on—in and out of—sliding from campus, at their leisure. That was my experience. By junior year, I decided to quit all sports, and lead a more hidden life, in the shadows, with a multitude of *tricksters* from the general area. The Beaverton School District simply had nothing left to offer me. My brother had already dropped out, and was in and out of jail. I preferred a more exciting life than the high school could readily provide.

**Shotgun Seat.** Denzil moved into my apartment complex when I was thirteen. We were the same age, and the same size – by then, tall and husky. He had a little brother who was a nerd, a mom who drove a bus for the city, and his dad, Sam, was maybe a former Black Panther who rarely left the apartment. Denzil was the first person to teach me about Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and Hannibal who conquered Italy on elephants. We started to hang out on a daily basis. We rode the bus together, getting on and off at the same stop. One day we went to Safeway after school. Denzil was shocked at how casually I picked up a bottle of Coke, opened it, drank from it, and put it back on the shelf. *“Isaac, you’re crazy!”* He could barely contain his excitement, smiling and jumping and slapping my back. We turned another aisle and he suggested I grab a stick of beef jerky. I grabbed the entire plastic tub, stuffed it in my backpack, and we promptly left the store. That day we became partners in crime, and our friendship continued to grow, up into high school.

In Denzil, I had found the brains to my brawn. While I was a fearless, smash-and-grab type, Denzil filled the gap left by my brother’s absence: Cunning strategist. Although Denzil was my peer, he was mature in a way that I was not. He had been trained by his dad to be discerning, suspicious, and opportunistic. I had no foresight at the time, only reactions. Denzil was hungry and smart.

When we were fourteen, we stole a car. Not so much car, but more a shuttle for transporting, probably, elderly passengers. The vehicle had been parked across the street from our apartments, aside the garage of a Chevron gas station. I was walking by one day and decided to look in the window. The keys were hanging from the ignition. I pried the doors open, crawled up the stairs, and snatched them. When I hooked up with Denzil

later, we decided that I would spend the night at his place. We would wait until Sam was drunk and passed out, then we would sneak out and go joy riding.

When we were sure that Sam was snoring loud enough, Denzil and I made our move. His little brother urged us not to go. Denzil told him to shut up and go back to sleep. We moved like ghosts through the dark apartment, over the watchman, and out the door. The large shuttle started right up, and we were on our way. I was driving at first. We cruised our own neighborhood, trading off every few minutes. Denzil wanted to drive to another neighborhood to see a girl. In order to get there, we had to traverse the city streets, and on our way passing by the dark high school, vacant parking lot, and quiet football field, we noticed a truck following us. When we reached the girl's neighborhood, the truck began flashing its lights and getting close to our bumper. Denzil tried to lose him by slamming the long pedal to the floor. The shuttle started to lean—swerving and bouncing through the suburb as we fled. We almost clipped a parked station wagon, and we clean took out a huge section of shrubbery near the exit of the neighborhood. We decided that we would park the bus back at the Chevron, get out, and simply walk away. If our pursuer wanted to ask questions, we would say that we were test-driving the shuttle for the mechanic. It did not work out quite like that. We did as planned, left the keys in the shuttle, and tried to walk away. However, before we could cross the street and get to the apartment, three cop cars materialized—sirens squawking—and we were cooked. We sat there on the curb in handcuffs, with the lights of three cruisers flashing, and we could see his dad in a shadow on the stoop smoking a cigarette. I pitied Denzil. My mom was going to discipline me, but I knew it would be nothing compared to what he would face. My mom



\$60.00. I still suspect Denzil set me up, as we went to buy a pound of dirt weed from these guys—walking down *this alley-no wait this one*, and finally the 40 oz. bottles over my head. I got out of the moment mostly unscathed, save the sometimes-residual post-traumatic flashbacks from that, and other similar episodes in high school. Denzil claimed later that they put a gun to his head after I fled. I don't know, and no longer care.

The next year, though, Denzil, his little brother (the former nerd), and some other close associates were arrested. They had been robbing people at ATM's throughout the city. They each spent about five years in prison. My past started to catch up with me too, and everything seemed to come crashing ashore after I was out of school: Assaulting a peer; selling weed; tagging a wall; perjuring myself in a jury-trial. I never made it to the penitentiary, but I acquired two felonies – both, coincidentally, in different capers with Denzil – and spent the better part of five years on probation, with a few visits to county jail along the way.

My hajj back to the scenes of many of my and Denzil's most memorable episodes of daring, danger, tragedy, and triumph, as part of my data collection, invoked the memory of myriad faces, names, and pain from my past that I had simply forgot. How many of those poor little bastards that I used to run with are still poor? Did any of them elevate their status—break chains of intergenerational poverty and criminality? I eventually did change my ways and my life—still waiting on the financial piece—but, those first years after dropping out of high school were brutal to my body and soul. I was only hired to do physical labor, yet I had the same chip on my shoulder that I had in elementary school when they called for the TAG kids. I always felt like there was more for me to be and do—there was no way that I would relent to a life of back-breaking

labor, earning peanuts for my soul-body toil. Whatever ideations I had of my potential future worlds would have to assemble slowly, as some past demons came to reckon with me and mine during this same time.

**Court Stand.** In 1995, I was subpoenaed to appear in court as a witness in a jury trial for one of my high-school friends, Neville. In the previous year, after I had taken the steps to technically dropout of high school, Neville, myself, Denzil, and his little brother got into an altercation with some other young men in front of a liquor store. One of the guys in the other group was seriously injured, and Neville was being tried for multiple violent felonies. Between the time of the fight in front of the liquor store and my court date, Neville, Denzil, and Denzil's little brother had all been locked up for their crime spree throughout Portland. I hadn't seen Neville in almost a year, and when I arrived at the courthouse, I knew I was greatly unprepared for sociopolitical implications being negotiated. I naively assumed it would be all about Neville, the kid who was knocked unconscious, and I would walk free.

The courtroom was packed—mostly filled with Neville's huge Polynesian family. Neville and I met playing football, and along with Denzil and some lesser thieves, we had formed a formidable clique of big, young men of color. Still, I did not know Neville the way I knew Denzil. He lived in a different section of Portland, and I never got to know his family members very well. What I would come to know later—after my court date—was that Neville was the youngest brother of the formerly slain Original Gangster from the Woodlawn Park Bloods in Northeast Portland. His family constituted a multitude throughout Portland and Beaverton, and Neville and I just happened to be very similar, thus we were friends. We were both *locos*.

Before I entered the courtroom, I was harassed by the District Attorney prosecuting the State's case against Neville. He must have noticed that I was alone, unkempt, and probably unaware of the gravity at hand. He pushed me into the corner, and poked his finger into my chest. His main point was to try to get me to help the State's case against Neville, by stating that Neville acted alone, and that none of us knew why Neville did what he did. He expected me to turn State's witness, relinquish all of the bonding that had occurred organically between young men like me and Neville. The emptiness that had been burning in my belly since I was a child—the chip on my shoulder regarding talented and giftedness, anger from being poor, disregard for authority—burned there, outside of the courtroom. I carried that fire with me to the stand when they called my name.

At the time in my life, I was couch surfing with friends and working at a gas station; a high-school dropout, who spent most of his time in the shadows with scoundrels. I had long, curly hair, and I quickly filled the courtroom with my irreverent disposition. When the D.A. served up his softball questions, which he expected me to answer appropriately—sealing the State's case against Neville, and sending him away even longer than his existing five-year sentence for the strong-arm robberies at the ATM's in Portland—I balked, and lied with a straight face. I stared the D.A. in his eyes, and when the Judge tried to intervene—urging me to remember the oath I took, and the penalty under law line—I mocked her, and lied again. Straight face.

When the D.A. and Judge realized that they were not going to get me to budge, they tried to humiliate me. I can almost hear the Judge's voice now, "Mr. Torres, you come in here looking messy, with a chip on your shoulder, and think that you can bully

us the same way you bullied the victim. I am going to give you one more chance to tell us exactly what happened that day.” I lied again. The D.A. jumped up and said, “Your honor, I would like to bring immediate indictments against Mr. Torres for perjuring himself in this court of law, and for his role in the assault that took place last year” (Figure 8). Thus, I was subsequently charge with Perjury (Class A felony) and Assault III (Class C felony), and I would have to face the fire, for not playing ball with the State, in alliance against my friend.



*Figure 8.* Author re-enacting event at actual scene of crime.

I left the courtroom that day, and would come back in some months to deal with the very serious charges levelled against me. I was totally lost. My home had dissolved by then—my mother had broken up with her fiancée, and I had elected to move in with my girlfriend and her family. Reuben was in prison. I had no real resources, and I was a high-school dropout charged with two felonies. Many of my closest friends were already in prison, and in their letters home, they would tell me, *Isaac, they want you in here too. Watch your steps!* In a years’ time I would be forced to take the State’s plea bargain—dropping the Perjury charge, if I pled guilty to the Assault III—and I officially became a convicted felon.

My lying—my passive-aggressive irreverence, my naïveté—did not help Neville or me. We were both found guilty, and we were sentenced accordingly. I was locked up in the Washington County jailhouse in Hillsboro, Oregon for ninety days, and then I spent another thirty days in the restitution center where I could go out and look for a job. I had to pay thousands of dollars in restitution to the victim, attend anger management classes, complete one-hundred hours of community service, and I had to be on probation for 3 years. Including Neville’s sentence from the ATM robberies, he ended up doing 7 years total, in prisons all over the west and southwest. In one of his letters home to me in 1996, Neville wrote, *I never got to tell you thanks about that trial shit. All the time you were trying to help me, even putting yourself at risk, putting yourself under the spotlight. Even though I still got found guilty of that shit. You are a real true homeboy. Right on Isaac!* My strategy of lying—attempting mind tricks while sitting on the stand, in the courts of the land—failed, but I earned a new status of respect from Neville, his family, and an extended network of thugs and thieves, for not allowing the State to turn my mind.

In my return to Oregon, I simply drove by the Washington County courthouse, electing not to go in to the building, and find the exact chair-stand and courtroom where Neville’s trial took place. Neville is a free body—a man living in Portland with his wife, and his extended family. We were unable to connect for this project, but he sent me a picture on social media one day of the same courthouse where we were both convicted. The migration—meta-migration—that has occurred since then—twenty-three years removed, now—is unquantifiable. I can only imagine the movement, motion, and transcendence that has processed for Neville—Reuben, Denzil, his little brother, and others—as they had to negotiate with their own interiority and exteriority.

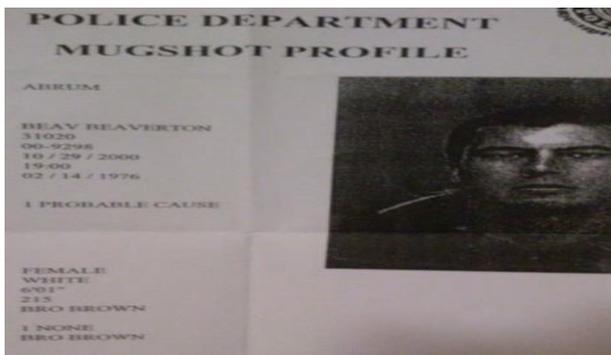
**Jail Boat.** In county jail, one is first processed and placed in a holding tank. In the tank, the jailors take your belt, shoelaces, jewelry, and any other potentially dangerous contraband. One can sleep sitting up, or nestled on the ground under the bench, and only hardcore dudes can shit in the metal commode there. Once you are processed, they bring you to your corresponding cell, door, or whatever. I was placed in a large overcrowded dorm, and there were not enough beds. In the event that the jail is overcrowded—it always is—inmates are given plastic “boats” that look like the bottom half of coffins. I took my boat, pushed it into a corner, and lied down in it. The *boat* has always been a symbolic structure—a vessel that can carry fleshly bodies in the face of extinction level events, and imagined crafts that can carry our souls across the stars after our bodies have died. The jail boat is not comfortable, and it is too small for most bodies. Luckily, I was not in a boat long, and eventually got my own bunk.

My resting places within the county jail provided me an opportunity to reflect, and to read. It was there, lying in my boat and on my bunk that I first started to read again. Since the end of middle school, when I began to disengage, I had not really cared to read for pleasure. In jail, there was nothing to do. I could not allow myself to sit there watching TV all day, talking endless bullshit with the other men detained. I needed to eat—the hunger in me that had been burning since my childhood was alive in fire. My soul has craving something substantial. There was not a large variety of reading material in jail, so I thumbed through the Alcoholics Anonymous “Big Book”, the King James Version Holy Bible, and then I came across a tattered copy of the Autobiography of Malcolm X. I read that book in a matter of days—one, because it was a popular item, and was in demand, and two, because the content was feeding my soul. In episodic meta-

migration as a function of literacy, I turned the pages of Malcolm and Alex Haley's work, being transported to different times and spaces from the hard, cold discomfort of a jail boat.

The work I had to do to claw my way back to legitimate citizen status has been dogged. I completed all of my sentencing requirements, and returned to the world of physical labor. I eventually landed a position as a baker at a premier French bakery in Portland. It was the highest-paying job that I had had at the time, \$9.45/hour. Not bad for a high-school dropout convicted of a violent crime. When Denzil got out of prison, we got together to smoke a joint and reminisce. We lived on separate sides of town then, so we decided to meet in the middle. The point we agreed on, fatefully, was behind an old mall we used to jack. We met up, lit up, and within five minutes, a cop rolled up and stopped behind my parked Buick. The cop smartly asked about aroma, how much did we have, and can you please, driver, step out of the vehicle. Some routine questions, but the large, white cop was more interested in Denzil. Denzil was built like a mountain, and the cop asked him to step out as well. He turned Denzil across the hood, patted him down, and then asked what Denzil had in his pockets. When he reached in Denzil's back pocket, Denzil ran. The rookie gave chase. I grabbed my satchel from the car and ran in the opposite direction through the parking lot, across a busy street, with passersby stopping and pointing. After an hour or so of running and hiding, I was caught. Denzil got away. The cops wanted me to identify him, but I refused. They were happy enough to have caught one of us I suppose. I broke down on that hard back seat of the cop car, and thought two things: 1. *I am too old for this shit.* 2. *Will I go to prison?*

I spent a couple of nights in jail, got out, and started professing to anyone that would listen that I was going to change my ways (Figure 9). I did not want to transform just to benefit the situation—I was not only sorry because I was caught. I had gradually reached a breaking point. My mind was made up. If I were able to quench the burning inside my soul, then I would not go back to the well of lawlessness, and ignorance. I was convicted of another felony for this incident—Distribution of a Controlled Substance (cannabis) for Consideration—and I would spend the next 2 years on probation again, paying fines, peeing in cups, and completing intensive outpatient therapy.



*Figure 9.* Author’s mugshot one year before obtaining G.E.D.

At the urging of a friend, I tested for and received my G.E.D. from Portland Community College. My score made me eligible for the University of Oregon, so again my friend helped me to apply. She even wrote a letter of recommendation for me. After passing most of my life feeding on my peers and others, I was moved that someone would selflessly give to me without expecting anything in return. I learned humility and the empowering cycle of service, and inclusion. Six months later, I got my acceptance letter in the mail, and I was convinced that UO had made a mistake. It felt as though someone had opened up a back door, urged me to run inside, and when I did, they let the door fall shut. I accepted the gift, and walked into a new world, as all of my old ways—

scheming, stealing and cheating—fell away like long worn weights from some small sunken treasure in a sea, allowing a small shine, to come and glimmer at the surface of the water. The vessel I needed was me—my body, leading to my soul—and, the university seemed to provide the content and forms I needed to shape myself anew.

**Permanent Desk.** It was surreal to be on campus, to go to class, and to be accountable. I could not steal or strong-arm my way to a degree. I was eight years behind my corresponding secondary school cohort, and my peers were probably working professionals, already with families and homes. I was only starting to build something for myself, for the first time. Lessons from Malcolm X, about using the “master’s language” against him were starting to surface. A newly empowered Chicano identity—I remember my own father using the word when I met him at sixteen—was surfacing too. I started to volunteer my time tutoring and mentoring underserved kids. I had been instantly inversed, and I threw out all of my intuitive presumptions. My transformation was due to my having gone from being a full-time, blue-collar bread baker, to being a full time, twenty-five year old university freshman.

The immediate, mass consumption of new information was intense, challenging, and it flexed an old muscle that I had forgotten I had—a love for words, for writing and for knowledge. I remembered Malcolm saying that the only place he could have studied as intensely as he had during his imprisonment, was a university—the schoolhouse and the jailhouse, parasitic twins born from the same perverse, empirical womb. Malcolm also said that if he could have gone to university, he would have studied Philology. University of Oregon did not have a major in that subject, but I picked the closest subject to it, linguistics. I honestly imagined myself as a kind of soulical son to Malcolm X, and I

committed my entire self to the work, coupled with an absolute abandonment of past ways, and most people. I had been given a second chance, and it was time to show and prove. I grinded day in and out within the university system—laboring late into evenings-early in the morning, to comprehend novel concepts, the seminal works related to my study interests, and to pass the several remedial courses in which I had been placed. I trained myself to sit in tiny study room, with permanent desks built into the walls, and to read, write, talk, and listen as if I was as valid and valued as a valedictorian was.

I felt like quitting every so often, but I would remind myself of my brother Reuben, and how he never did well in school-was mostly tracked out, and who was never really accepted into traditional systems of society. Reuben was/is a survivor, a testament to the strength of contemporary underdogs everywhere. The marginalization and exclusion that he experienced growing up—no father or advocate to encourage him to participate-to succeed—fed my angst, drove my desire to learn, and to break through any supposed barriers. I used to hate Reuben, out of my own perverse self-image and for some of the cruel things he did to me as children, but I owed him after all. He taught me just about everything, and he saved me multiple times. He chased Cuban Rudy after Rudy had pulled me from the cherry tree branch—dragging my chest across the rough, dark bark, and thumping to the earth, in a bleeding lump. He chased the Sheehan brothers down the street with an axe handle, eventually breaking David’s arm with the club, because they destroyed my snow fort. He let me make out with his girlfriend Shannon in the back seat of her car, when we were drunk one night after a football game. His every nuance of character and coolness lived within me—my walk, voice, living epistemology. Because I

had been the son offered such a portal of transformation—leading to the transcendent world of knowledge, discipline, and community—it was my duty to succeed.

Because, perhaps, I had the cognitive wherewithal, I owed Reuben and my friends more than what I had given to date. I even owed David and Michelle, Denzil and Neville, and all of the people I screwed over along the way. I owed answers, rationale for the destruction. My own victimhood simply would not suffice. My competency as a student, I thought, would validate my journey, and would make sense of all of the wasted time, and the missed opportunities. I thought those long, cold nights I spent lying in plastic boats at the county jailhouse. I vowed to attain at least as many degrees as I had felonies, and I worked pen, pencil, and paper into oblivion, there in the Knight Library for 5 years, committing to that vow. However, after I graduated a double major in Speech Pathology and Spanish, I still believed that one day I would receive a letter in the mail, stating that the system had erred, and that my degree was no good – that I never really changed. Now, after having completed two advanced degrees, I feel redeemed. I have paid my dues, and I continue to pass it on.

In my data collection trip to Oregon, I stopped by UO and walked the campus. It was summer break, and the campus was quiet. I was mostly alone as I walked, reflecting on when I first walked onto campus to attend my first classes. My general embodied sense back then was one of pure freedom. In my visit back, the campus was equally as beautiful, but that overwhelming sense of liberation and possibility were distinctly missing. I suppose that I know too much now—the *me* from back then was contextualizing this *new* world in terms of my previous, embodied despair, and the contrast was undeniably profound. Now, I am a published scholar, having traversed an

illuminated threshold of higher education, and having learned of the depth of the institutionalized empiricism of white manifest destiny frameworks have penetrated, even, the small bodies of suburb-poor children who are burning in psychosomatic meaning-making, somewhere out there across the land.

**Folding Chair.** In the summer of 2011, I launched a creative linguistic and writing intervention at a juvenile detention center in San Marcos, Texas. I had move to Texas in 2010, to attend Texas State University and work on my MFA in creative writing. I was granted authority and access due to my educational achievements, and to my employment at Texas State, working on educational initiatives. My criminal history simply never came up. One tactic of the sociopolitical body—learned by the picaresque student—is to *not* offer up self-incriminating information, under any circumstances. I implemented the intervention for five consecutive summers (2011-2016), and instructed well over one-hundred incarcerated children, who had been shipped to San Marcos from all over Texas.

The curricula was strategically designed to train Texas' most in-need students (incarcerated males of color, aged 12-17 years) in critical reflection, effective communication, and ethnographic writing. I was attempting to make the spirit of Malcolm X proud—my self-claimed surrogate father of philosophy and resistance. Malcolm even visited me in a dream once when I was still a teenager. He called me to my bedroom window, and then led me on a night flight into the sky, where he showed me the significance of the Christian church, and how it had been purposefully designed to enslave non-white bodies, and that I had to work against said instrument of western manifest destiny. I attempted to share that spirit of education and activism with my

students in the detention center, as it was embedded in the readings and assignments. This objective was not always wanted, welcomed, or effective in its implementation.

I can recall one particularly poignant and revelatory episode in which I—redeemed loser, first-generation college graduate, radically minded community activist—regressed to *deficit thinking* in an attempt to resolve a classroom conflict.

The scenario involved my student D (pseudonym), a 15-year-old African-American girl who regularly displayed a technical, academic acumen beyond what her peers seemed capable to access. D thought with more profundity, and was more creative in her linguistic framing of difficult and novel topics. D had also grown up in foster care, was a self-described addict, and she was a survivor of multiple abuses. Her criminal convictions had involved violence and drugs. Intriguingly, there appeared to be no logical reason (according to D) as to why she could perform at such an advanced level compared to her peers. More importantly, there was no logical reason why I should have provided D with special treatment, but I did. In other words, I usurped the democracy of the classroom. I placed an invisible ceiling over the rest of the students, disarmed my own methodology, and potentially enabled an acute self-concept issue within D.

My progressive-minded reflex had manifested in a praise of her abilities, a superficial understanding of who D actually was, and a support of almost any thoughts she chose to share with the class. One day D had a meltdown (The other students “stank”; Poetry “is stupid”; I was a fake; A notebook was hurled). I had to make a leadership decision regarding what I perceived as potentially harmful behavior. I focused on visible qualities without consideration for the invisible, unknown aspects of D’s story. I chose to view D as the problem—deserving of her coming consequence. Instead of being

pluralistic in my approach, I became frustrated at my inability to maintain control. I had presumed an entitlement because I was the leader. Though my lesson plan was steeped in radical black feminism, and urged cultural responsiveness with each text, I—educational leader—had failed to abandon a subtractive, deficit belief: Intelligent, at-risk students should share my sense of hunger for academic, scholastic transcendence, and thus be like me. I raised my voice, urging D to sit down and participate with the rest of the class. D told me that I don't really care about her or any of the students, and at that point I asked her to leave—to be escorted back to her dorm. I failed D and the other students that day. I had expected D's immediate assimilation, and I failed everyone in the room.

I now see just how my professional practice was flawed: 1. I assumed D's academic ability and successes to be indicators of and validation for my pedagogical ability. 2. I believed that I was culturally responsive because of my past success in teaching similar students. 3. I possessed a perspective that assumed a shared understanding with the incarcerated students due to my own similar experiences as a youth. 4. I did not develop a comprehensive profile of my students as informed by their histories within the educational industrial complex, or the criminal justice system at large. In retrospect, my scenario with D could have been avoided. If I had acted in a way that sought to use the moment as an opportunity—to discuss or write about the frustrations of sharing space with people we don't know, of the importance of poetry and art education, or to explore the meaning of authority and who can be an author—I would have possibly turned an episode of frustration into a moment of transformation.

If I explore my deficit thinking from this scenario, I can see that I was inhibited by a personal belief that I then held: I understand the lives and minds of incarcerated

students. I had based this belief on my own ways of knowing, which are often alike those of these students. However, this flawed perspective ensured that I would limit the possibilities of the students' potential academic productivity, and that I would inadvertently discredit their respective epistemologies as potentially informing their classroom potential. I had believed that regardless of each student's independent, real life experiences, we had all shared an invisible culture—one of low-income, at-risk, societal underdog-ness. I was wrong.

The five years I spent instructing incarcerated students effective communication and creative writing in the detention center, fed my soulful emptiness in a new and profound way. I was affirmed in my belief that it is no longer about me and my walk toward redemption, but about relationships with other living souls, and working together to free real, physical bodies from mistreatment and harm. Education has something to say about this work, but that does not mean that the U.S. public school house/system is capable of liberating any repressed or oppressed bodies. The healing of said bodies, and freeing of said souls, is tricky and evasive—calling on interdimensional tricksters everywhere to come and partake in this collective, social alchemy toward singular peace.

## Prototypes

### The Prayer Rug

The soul of the high-school dropout in this study is represented by another type of resting place: The prayer rug. This rug is not respective of any one religion, or any group of people. However, the item—seat, chair, resting place, symbol of migration/meta-migration—is an ancient symbol, tightly woven and finely made. The rug actually becomes both stronger and more comforting for the possessor over time. This is the hidden, symbolic place of *principle* within the dropout’s bosom. The soul of the dropout is not at rest. In fact, it is likely that there is consistent chaos brewing in their hidden places. Thus, there is a seeking that takes place within the dropout. In fact, this secret unrest is the push *from* time and space, people and ideas *into* the dropout’s invisible self—framed by anticipatory symbols and concepts: Ineffable, infinite, transcendent, darkness, yin.

I turn to literature, again, as a grand semiological variable in co-creating the symbology of the high-school dropout as seeking, if non-consciously, transcendence. In Tomas Rivera’s “Y no se lo trago la tierra/And the earth did not swallow him”, the protagonist, Marcos, endures many hardships in his development as a son within a migrant farmworker family. Marcos exemplifies the ineffable interface, from a dualistic frame, as he ends up calling on and cursing, both the Devil and God. Marcos is cursing spiritual domains due to the realities of his body—his family’s survivability, or lack thereof—as they always seem to have to sacrifice a bit of integrity, in order to sustain among deceitful people in corrupt systems. Marcos cannot see that his hidden self—an inverse to the *shit* of his bodily life—is being affirmed and wizened. The three emergent

themes in Rivera's novel, and for the boy, Marcos, are *discovery, remembering, and volition*.

Marcos and his family are always seeking—following the harvests—thus, *discovery* is a constant in their lives. Rivera (1975) states, "...we search for the abstract form which represents this complete person...humanly total, but also distinctly Chicano..." (p. 301). These three components—*discovery, remembering, and volition*—constitute the ever-completing, hidden prayer rug. Within the woven rug concept, the pieces of the weaving thread are represented here, whereas the fixed, vertical thread (warp) is symbolized by the fixed seeking and discovery of the subject. The symbolization of the weaving horizontal thread (weft) is the ever-moving memory of the subject, as they piece together their seeking with wisdom from their past—strengthening their self along the journey. Volition, then, comes to symbolize the emerging strength of the conceptual prayer rug. As previous experiences frame new ones, the subject's body and soul persist and are made whole in their resilience.

The dropout *seeks* something other than what is found in *that* chair, under *that* instruction. My conceptualization of self within the public schools I attended, included my *seeking* a kind of cultural completion—reckoning with racism, wrestling with misrepresentation, and reconciling with my own white privilege—being a light-skinned Chicano myself, and radically-minded among a mostly white, suburban community. Being caught-up in the currents of survival, Marcos also learns to *remember*. This timeless concept of mind and body invokes thoughts of ancestors—spirits among us, yet invisible to our eyes—and, helps us keep track of our wins and losses, achievements and setbacks, where we've been and where we're going. The two components, discovery and

remembering, frame a generating of *volition* within the body and in the soul of the subject, in this case Marcos. He learns to survive and persist, in the face of loss, death, betrayal, and quashed hopes. If the dropout is prototypically a surviving trickster figure, then volition becomes his resolve in the face of terror, suffering, hunger, and hatred. Volition, for the high-school dropout, is the fire that burns inside of their ever-emptying bosom—urging the body’s mind to remember what happened last time; to seek enough food and knowledge to survive the wiles of another wicked day. Olivares (1990) states, in reference to Rivera’s work, “...the search itself is a figure...its fragmented structure resembles a labyrinth...is itself a duplication of the mind...external form...to the chaos of his experience and unresolved identity.” Here, the dropout’s hidden soul is, too, a “fragmented...labyrinth...a duplication...” of her lived experience and search for completion. The *Prayer Rug* (the soul) is only made real by a function of another type of seat/resting place: *The Picaro’s Stool* (the body). Here, an emerging theoretical framework for social participation comes into focus via the picaro’s three-legged stool.

### **The Picaro’s Stool**

My grounded theoretical emergence as redeemed student cum academic scholar, I can see now, was both a symbol of novel survival, and archetypal trickery. After I attained my GED at twenty-five years old, and began coursework at the University of Oregon, I started searching for similar symbols of irreverence, rascality, and survival. In the currents of coursework, and in and among the stacks of books, words, thoughts, names, and concepts, I found the *pícaro*.

Lazarillo de Tormes was my guy-felt like my gut, or my brother. I searched further, finding Guzman de Alfarache, Estebanillo Gonzalez, and Don Quixote. I was

enchanted with the world of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish literature. The intersection of race, class, gender, history, embodied pain, and corrupt social institutions, filled-*in* something missing from my experience in the public elementary, and secondary systems. I became validated in the stories of survival, and I was no longer so ashamed of smelling like shit. My way of knowing was real.

The epistemology of the *pícaro* denotes a hunger-based engagement with the world, and perhaps his own identity. El pícaro's movement through life comes via episodes of survival—accessing of, participating in, and perhaps succeeding from dynamic, if temporary, placements and appointments in systems-with agents of mainstream institutions. For reasons often socioeconomic and familial, the pícaro finds that there is an emptiness pushing him from the inside *out*. The pícaro knows that he must set out in order to eat (e.g. Real food, Knowledge as metaphor for hidden sustenance). The pícaro must also employ non-traditional methods and means to some higher end-to a potential place in society that connotes freedom and equality. This internal drive is the impetus for a pícaro's storied decades of negotiating borders—seen and unseen-real and imagined—as he is once *In*-then suddenly *Out*; marginalized, at birth perhaps, but at last, somehow, re-centered as an invented self—again and again and again (i.e. Becoming). Internal, ineffable source domains (i.e. Picaresque emptiness) become the potential, preemptive resonance of desired targets-objects to be treated as purpose, destiny (i.e. Socio-political objects).

A grammar of nurturance was broken somewhere in the pícaro's development: An affirmation-mantra of security and assurance; the pícaro has been muttering in cryptic shapes ever since. A type of syntax arises in the development of all children, assuming

they survive through adolescence. That is, there are significant moments and memories of beginnings and endings, and shared turns of experience, both material and imaginary and where meanings come to be assigned. Yet for a *picara*, though her life seems to be structured through repressive systems of language, and deceptive relationships, there was a grammatical rule that became disrupted, perhaps by someone/somebody, and probably involved an important lesson regarding some meaning/idea of body-soul interplay.

For the *picaro*, *truth* is the great trickster—able to shift in a blink, and leave him questioning his own logic, his own mind. Logic for the *picaro* is as malleable as any concept of truth, and ultimately his way of knowing (i.e. Motion toward sustenance as food, knowledge) comes to implicate the same ties that have the proud, patriarchal gatekeepers bound to empty bellies, families of pain, and historical systems of empire.

An onto-epistemological reality simmers beneath the episodes in a picaresque narrative, and is unable to deny its own becoming-ness. There is no one line, no one way, and all is alive. That is, there never were any sure things for the *picaro*. All was/is in flux and flight. He or she is a hybrid reflection of her surrounding social contexts, her personal situations, and her family circumstances. The *picara* comes to eat. Often her ever-emptying identity—waiting to be re-filled—resonates in reflection of broken beginnings. The belly/*pansa* is symbolic as the emotional center for human beginnings—a home for life, food, and *familia*-pride. A *picaro* lives in a space of, and she eats of bread (i.e. Knowledge) discriminately. Only *bread* will sate the *picaro*'s epistemic palate—one that furthers his urge, that feeds her empty belly, while acknowledging their soulical emptiness.

## Picaro Theory

The literary line drawn from this, proposed contemporary theory of picaresque participation and survival, follows deep into the past, traverses the earth, and calls on the knowledge of international underdogs as witnesses to society's great class-dance. The picaresque literary tradition holds many examples of the daring presented by varying picaro's throughout time, though this theory is mostly adhering to a first-phase, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish picaresque representation. Sieber (1977) describes these first generation qualities of the *picaro*:

“He began as the dishonorable offspring of thieves and prostitutes. His parents were descended from questionably ancestry, often from conversos. He was generally required to abandon home at an early age because of poverty and hunger in order to improve his situation. His goal was to serve himself, although he ended up serving others, and eventually to associate with people of means and honour. His knowledge of right and wrong was acquired through his experiences in the world and invariably it was defined in terms of his own profit.” (p. 59).

Widely recognized as the first picaresque novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes* was written anonymously in 1554. Alberto Martino (2003) extracts this fact to become a lens through which he views the picaresque subject, who is “a character in search of an author-*un personaggio in cerca di autore*” (p. 106). This missing agent of author/parent/mentor/God leads the picara to become ingenious, to write a novel narrative about participation and survival—drawing new lines, rules, and pathways toward food/knowledge. The picaro manifests this “searching” in his attempts at public

conformity, chiefly when engaging with episodes of “pain, hunger, fear of death, and universally corrupt models of behavior”, (Bjornson, 1977). The picaresque, as Bjornson (1977) suggests, is unable to supersede his socioeconomic position until he “assimilates the modes of survival and avoidance acceptable to his society”.

Although a picaresque story starts in low places, there are also emerging, transcendent figures made there, what Miller (1967) calls the “anticipatory symbol” and “social cause” of an “inner chaos”, driving the picaresque’s narrative. From those deathly beginnings, perhaps middles and ends too (Lewis, 1959), comes the picaresque student, quickly enveloped in accidents and setbacks, fortune and luck—stacked life lessons, rhythmically bounding her along, at a picaresque’s click (Miller, 1967). A young picaresque student sets out into the world at a young age, naïve and brave, and she is soon seasoned by the loveless trickery of would-be leaders and predatory institutions, yet is never able to “fully master the trickery of the world by his own trickery”, (Miller, 1967).

This type of fumbling toward equity frames the lives of many high-school dropouts, their hidden epistemologies—becoming layered in richness and complexity. A picaresque theory of participation and survival is forever incomplete, while a multitude of living geniuses remain locked-up, hidden, or forgotten. When light shines upon these missing stories—bringing empowerment to cold corners in old institutions, alternative spaces for learning everywhere, and ingenious methods in public pedagogy, the trickster that is truth begins to run in and out from behind the walls of the school. The dropout embodies testimonial truths of underdog participation and survival, and telling those truths allows a picaresque to witness a kind of “harmony” that flows along with every “chaotic experience” in their unfortunate, natural world (Bjornson, 1977).

The surfacing of this real harmony necessitates the picaro to come and sit in reflection, of moments minute and grand, upon a stool of her making. Crude, three-legged stools are the work of the picaro in real time; decisions are made quickly when survival is necessary. The rapid shaping-wronging-reshaping episodic way of the la picara, is conceptualized in the image of a crude, three-legged stool. They are neither the prettiest, nor the sturdiest, but they stand—wobbling with the ever-adjusting pace of picaresque life, giving it here-taking it there—one can sit and reflect, but not for long.

For the picaro to achieve said seat, she must negotiate the legs upon which this long wondered, and squandered, platform of beginnings rests. One leg signifies the *People* and public, from whom a picaresque student cannot escape. That is, in order for the picaro to pursue his bread, he must engage with real people. The other two legs are lines of negotiation. One stands for *Integrity*, and the other for *Survival*. This negotiation keeps la picara's platform for personal, critical, even metaphysical reflection in a constant wobble. The picaro cannot fully have both Integrity and Survival, for one is always being shortened a bit, and the other lengthened (Bjornson, 1977). Community engagement is inevitable, and the community, at large, is corrupt. El picaro can only negotiate, for a time, upon a crude, three-legged stool by assimilating with, at least some, similar corruption. Ultimately, the Picaro's Stool (student's body) is a function of the development and strengthening of the Prayer Rug (student's soul), and the crude ways of knowing and making should become more refined, and hidden as the student transcends the punitive limits of our society and schools.

## Autoethnography and Reflexivity

Following the lead of Nuttbrown (2011), I will raise her same question in discussion, *What is autoethnography?* For me, it is three things, which may proceed in any particular order: 1. Questions of one's self and the world; 2. Scenarios that inform one's body; 3. A story about one's soul through time and space. This study aims to neither subjugate, nor vindicate the concept of a dropout, but to problematize the discourse around high-school dropouts in particular, and their coming to be categorized as such. This autoethnography is part of a larger study creating a genealogy of the high-school dropout from 1918-2018, while problematizing the theory and practice of compulsory education in the United States in general. As a function of this reflexive process, a general thematic context is provided in the form of questions that fall under one of two categories: The *story* and the *scenarios*.

The frame for applying these two categories comes from my experience taking a graduate course on memoir writing. The instructor, Tom Grimes (2011), discovered these two categories while writing his best-selling memoir, *Mentor*. Grimes' big question for his *story* was, *Am I a failure?* Following that question, as he wrote, he encountered innumerable questions for each episodic *scenario* that contributed to the larger *story*. I referenced my old class notes to confirm what I had remembered about Grimes' process, but for further confirmation for this project, I reached out to him in an email, asking for clarification. Here is his response:

Hi Isaac, good to hear from you. You seem to be doing interesting work. What you discover in a memoir, in my experience, you discover as you write, not beforehand. When I began, I had no idea what I would write about, other

than my friendship with Frank. The theme of failure arose from examining that relationship. The *critical* theme of the book, however, is often missed. I am not a failure. My *perception of myself as a failure* is the story. What did I expect, why were my standards so high? My sense of being a failure is interior, not exterior. That is what I ultimately discovered, and that was the story that mattered. I would suggest that if you start with the premise or question, are we failures, you will find your *story* and the answer to your question in what you write.

Events/incidents/scenes — and recollections above all. Question what you remember and why you remember it. Following events leads you to your story, and your story is the meaning and answer you have searched for. Make sense? I hope this helps. Good luck with the project. And be well, Tom.

For this paper, I take Grimes' framework for memoir writing, and apply it to the autoethnographic process. My big question is similar to Tom's: *Am I a liar?* I could tease that question out further, to help contextualize my "story": *Will I always feel like an imposter? Did I ever really change?* Whereas Grimes was exploring his development and success as a writer, and whether or not he failed at relationships and in leveraging professional opportunities, I am wondering if the schooling scenarios written in my mind and body, are telling the true story of my soul. That is, I have always felt like an outsider, and I was often told, throughout my public schooling experience, that I was bad, troubled, at-risk, a liar who was on his way to prison, but who also possessed leadership qualities. Are these qualities really mine? Was I once all of those things, before I transcended them? Was I once all of those things, and am I still those things?

For me, becoming a high-school dropout was a natural progression for my body, and aligned with my psycho-emotional experience of being/feeling victimized, excluded, and sequestered off, away from others, and in rooms with other “bad kids”. Yet, as a farmer can turn waste into fertilizer to feed vibrant food crops, I turned both socio-political and psycho-emotional *shit* into sustenance for my own, emerging theory of social participation, and my own academic success.

## Synthesis

### Domains

In examining the concept of these prototypical seats, an organic alignment emerges. Rivera's (1971) tripartite framework, *discovery-remembering-volition*, aligns well with the conglomerated tripartite framework derived from picaresque literature and the concept of the picaro, *people-integrity-survival*. Both of these frames require the subject to participate (discovery/people), to reflect and refine (remembering/integrity), and to learn how to live (volition/survival). Although these dual tripartite frameworks can sensibly represent the seat prototypes (stool, rug), as they can perceivably contextualize a hypothetical high-school dropout's movement out/away from schooling-toward/into a personal transcendence from the embodiment of social order and western empire, each still has unique thresholds through which the subject (dropout) must pass. However, as the body and soul are inextricable concepts within this study, we frame the two corresponding seats (e.g. Stool, Rug) as being superimposed on one another, in an endless, *reflexive domain*. That is, if we visualize these concepts as representative of the dropout's true lived experience (body and soul), we would find a rug-patterned stool within a rug-patterned stool; stool-shaped rug within a stool-shaped rug; an objectified domain of reflexivity.

**Bread.** Before considering the symbolic thresholds, it must be clarified exactly what is being pursued by the subject. In my analysis—based on my own autoethnographic meaning making—the desired object of the dropout becomes *bread*. Bread, here, is both real and not. It is the actual *pan* consumed by the dropout's body, and it is the epistemic *bread* being fed to the dropout's soul. The

pursuit of actual food (i.e. Resources, sustenance) is represented by the body (stool). The pursuit of spiritual food (i.e. Revelation, transcendence) is represented by the soul (rug). As those are the objectified goals, each corresponds to a different, real threshold with which the dropout comes to negotiate.

**Doors.** Doors provide elementary symbols for a human body embarking upon change. When a body passes through a door, they are probably passed into a new space, state—with new potentiality and purpose connoted there. In my experience, my personal transcendence from wild rascal to refined academic included my passing across many doors leading to strange and diverse rooms. The doors that become significant symbols for the developing subject, can be private and personal structures that lead to hidden moments of meaning.

However, doors are better framed as those thresholds which are public and political, and which lead into the corrupt souls of institutions (e.g. Courts, schools). The symbolic door that emerges as profoundly transformational for me is that which allowed me to pass from common laborer to university student. Although it may seem that this “door” is less tangible—edible—and, that it corresponds to hidden bread more than actual food, I will be forthright in stating that at the time I received my acceptance letter and financial aid package to attend the University of Oregon, my immediate needs were resource based.

Yes, I was surviving in Portland, making \$9.45/hour at the bakery, but I was very hungry. I was a twice-convicted felon and a high-school dropout, and migrating from Portland to Eugene, was not just an opportunity to study, but it was a kind of meal ticket for me. The five years I spent at UO completing two Bachelor of Arts

degrees represented the first time in my life that I was able to live at ease—in the comfort of a full-time student’s life, reading and writing all day every day.

I could extend this thought to include doors that followed my undergraduate experience at UO—employment opportunities, graduate school, and all of the lesser doors through which I passed in my early years (e.g. Dope houses, girlfriend’s home). The door represents the seen transcendence of the dropout’s body, and their experiences with *people* in *discovery* of the world, and the self.

**Books.** Books become the symbolic threshold for an entryway to a body’s soul—in this case, a dropout is agentic in selecting the content (i.e. Books) that she needs to pass through her mind, into her body, and perhaps into her soul. The epistemic bread here is new knowledge acquired in democratic, revolutionary ways. That is, a literate body/mind becomes revolutionary as it engages with texts—able to clarify the significance of the text and the body, and possibly redefine both.

I can reflect back to the county jailhouse, and how *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* moved through my mind, into my body, and attached to my soul. This text still rests in my bosom, feeding my urgency to pass on what I know about the wickedness of men and their institutions. Other texts that were instrumental to my development as a redeemed soul, and academic scholar, include Forche’s (1993) *Against Forgetting: 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry of witness*, and Lakoff & Johnson’s (1999) *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*. These texts also inform this autoethnography, in that Forche (1993) centers her framework squarely on an ancient thought: Who will give voice to the voiceless? Further, who will bear witness for those who cannot bear witness for themselves?

The thought is, what happened to you? Where were you when you were traumatized? In addition, how can telling the story/poem/thing both help heal the embodied soul, and possibly liberate real bodies?

Lakoff & Johnson (1999) are crucial as well, as their work on conceptual metaphor, specifically with respect to the axiological implications of prepositional dimensions in language, and thus cognition. That is, they argue that our minds generate meaning through the motion of our bodies, and one of the most primary lessons learned by children corresponds to values as related to time and space, and the prepositional language which describes said relation. Thus, for Lakoff & Johnson, Up is Good and Down is Bad. This seems sensible enough, and serves as a launching point for the question that initially sparked this study: Is In better than Out?

*Philosophy in the Flesh* picks up where *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) left off. However, the more recent text includes newly found evidence from cognitive science that indicate that our subconscious and non-conscious selves are aware, perceive, interpret, and systematize information from stimuli automatically and indirectly. Older post-positivist, humanist approaches imply that epistemic experience has to do with an intending agent, fixed on gaining a specific datum or two (i.e. This thing happens, then that thing, then that, then that). The authors extrapolate the learning and knowing of our assembled brains, bodies, and worlds, to our personal paradigms, and our ideas of causation (binary vs. systemic), in order to justify a better way to be human-to treat one another. All of these texts represented Rivera's *discovery* component for me, and as I passed their respective thresholds, I

entered mansions within mansions of thought and understanding. However, my thoughts are not only mine, and if I am honest with myself, I will note that others are in need of a compensatory revelation. Here, mutual suspects come to bear witness to this thought.

For the person who becomes the first person in their family—multi-generationally—to attain a higher education, succeed, and perhaps even esteem their self to the doctoral level, there are complex emotional patterns of connecting—disconnecting, reconnecting, and disconnecting again. The child who finds their self coming to know socio-political power dynamics differently than their parents—a higher level of awareness and deeper level of understanding—as a result of education will likely feel torn—pushed and pulled—and, they must find the others. Thoughts of being an imposter prevail, and this same student needs some methodological tools in their personal kit. Seen through a picaro’s eyes, interfacing with real people is fundamental to survival and success. The first-generation student needs to embrace this fact. They also need to realize that life should feel a bit wobbly, for them. That is, their survival-based, epistemological underpinnings will forever be negotiated with a sense of integrity, or lack thereof, depending on what they are willing to give and/or take. Furthermore, Rivera’s (1971) *discovery-remembering-volition* framework provides a base for the picaro to slowly become whole, wherein a conscious reflexivity moves the soul closer toward transcendence.

## V. WITNESSES

### Interviews

The participants in this study include five males and four females, six of whom self-identified as former high-school “dropouts”. The other three participants self-identified as being ambiguously tied to their former public schooling system—they were not sure if they technically graduated or not, and they always kind of felt like outsiders. Together, they provide a diverse, nuanced narrative of what public schooling in the U.S. feels like. The participants were chosen via convenience sampling, whereas they were already associated with me in some capacity, or they were found close in proximity to my work in the public education sphere. That is, in working with many organizations that serve high-school dropouts for my profession, I was able to solicit participation rather easily from some of these same colleagues. Those interviews then led to other participant interviews, via snowball sampling, whereas two participants suggested two of their friends, who then participated.

The participants in this study all identify as high-school dropouts. These include the two types of school dropouts referenced in the literature, *early leavers* and *late leavers*. In this study, eight of the nine participants are identified as “late leavers” (i.e. Left school after 9<sup>th</sup> grade). Only one participant, Hank, left school before that (9<sup>th</sup> grade), and is on the cusp of being early-late leaving (i.e. Early leavers dropout before 9<sup>th</sup> grade). There is a third space held for the student who could simply never be *In*. This space reserved as witness to the destructive, repressive history of white/western empire and society, and the schools it used to mistreat bodies.

Primarily, this third space is held for brown and black bodies—the darker the skin, the less likely the body is to be *included* to the access, participation, persistence, and success of an instrument of empire, such as the free, U.S. public grammar school. The colorism code of value placed on human bodies is common and known, if subconsciously, and is global in its systemic deification of non-Brown bodies. The darker the body, the lower on the color-coded scale of human value said body resides. This point is crucially relevant if we are to consider the U.S. public schooling system as an intricate, arcane device of empire. Somehow, the concept of modern, Western man/world logic, and its inevitable fight against nature and her myriad lifeforms, became lost in the progress of said empire. Somehow, many of *Us All* came to think of our own bodies as being sovereign and empowered, as if we were the rapists themselves—pushing across the plains, and murdering anything non-white. Even among, we, first-generation college graduates, those who think they have finally made it *in*, and can now look back and down at their family and community, thinking, *I am unlike them, and they me. I have things now, and they have nothing. They have chosen their poverty because they are undisciplined, and immoral. I am not like them. I read those books, wrote those papers, and passed those tests. They have not! Those academic tasks withstood greater discipline and morality than my family seems to possess in their own lived experiences to do achieve what I have. I am different.*

In efforts to problematize the qualitative interview protocol process, I have incorporated Podcasting as a method toward recording auditory phenomena. Five of the participants agreed to have their respective audio files published online, as a quasi-public pedagogical technique. The philosophical implications around the *private* and the *public*

become newly unknown, with emerging technology such as podcasting. In a 21<sup>st</sup> century socio-digital landscape, the implementation of podcasting as an interviewing method did not seem to be intrusive for most of the participants.

## **Podcasting**

A compound of the words “*broadcast* and” Apple Inc.’s “*iPod*”, *podcasting* is better understood with the “POD” signifying its intended meaning, ‘personal on demand’, when considering access and availability to the emerging technology (Descy, 2005). Part of said personalization and accessibility infers a need for communication, a technological curiosity, and a practice in language and listening (Keliher, 2005). Podcasting is a relatively inexpensive medium for sharing creative, instructional, and social content in a convenient, flexible way (Center for Instructional Technology, 2005). The first podcasts were used as audio blogs—sharing political content between friends (Doyle, 2005), but the medium has long made its way into the public classroom.

As an educational technology, podcasting has mostly been used in higher education settings, as McGarr (2009) states, for one of three typical uses:

*Substitutional/Coursecasting* (e.g. A recorded and shared lecture or tutorial),

*Supplementary podcasting* (e.g. Additional recordings shared to help deepen learning

about specific content), and *Creative podcasting* (e.g. Student-created content to develop understanding of specific concepts. The production of podcasting for more than just

academic lectures – to include entertainment, art, and political commentary – has grown in popularity over the past ten years. Limits exist, still, for low-income families who do

not access broadband connectivity, or who live in areas that are not in service

(Wasserman, 2005). The motivating academic and social effects of creating an

independent podcast can seem bound by connectivity issues, or by technical troubleshooting delays, but ultimately the process can enhance outcomes in learning—demonstrating a mastery of concepts, and initiating a changed disposition as students may begin to reconceive their perceptions of self, (Forbes, 2011).

Acosta & Garza (2011) indicate podcasting “evidence-based strategies” that are fit for PreK-12 settings, too, and that align with a national vision of classrooms becoming integrated with technologies (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, 2010). Waxman, Lin, and Michko (2003) studied how technology could affect student outcomes over a 6-year period, and found that significant and positive effects were found when comparing students who engaged with technology and those who did not. Rüdell (2007) proposes four distinct podcasts types: (a) traditional course content, such as lectures, (b) additional content, providing enhanced, specific material, (c) extra content, not weighted toward grade, and (d) content created by students, for peers or instructors. Simonson (2015) prescribes a specific formula for “effective” podcasting but also suggests the medium be renamed. Forbes (2011) states that students like podcasting because of its “break...from text-based study”, while Greenfield (2010) says that for educators “podcasts are simple to produce and publish”, and that for learners “podcasts are effortless to access”. Acosta & Garza (2011) cite the positive impact podcasting has had on student engagement via (Coutinho & Mota, 2011; Shihab, 2009), and performance via (Checho, 2007; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010), but also state that students “need direction for using podcasting...production can be time-consuming, and...technical skills are necessary” (Acosta & Garza, 2011). Creative podcasting has been used to promote deep learning, collaboration, and reflective processes of learning—asking students and

teachers to engage in a “two-way” exchange of classroom content (Pegrum, Bartle & Longnecker, 2015).

An allure of online media and digital technologies is the supposed, social democratization accessible via new devices and their functions, though the presumed outcomes are “less easy to identify” (Selwyn, 2016). As Beucher (2016) notes, new technologies and their uses in the classroom only “open the door” to necessary conversations and processes, and that ultimately the work belongs to “all community members”. Ng’ambi & Lombe (2012) suggested that instructors tie podcasting tightly with their “pedagogy”, and that the digital “technologies” be “ubiquitous”, to lessen student anxiety around accessibility. However, Lazzari (2008) found that podcasting can become “pedagogically neutral” if students are not creatively engaged with the technology full-time. Expanding notions of time and space as related to technology and curriculum, Smythe & Neufeld (2010) found students creating a “third space” for pedagogy (Gutierrez et al., 1999) when creating podcasts, whereas their designated “podcast time” became an empowered “shift in the usual composition of the classroom”. Podcasting is part of a “pioneering” “new media” (Rifkin et al., 2012), allowing students to go deeper than just “surface learning”.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. This was followed by inductive, open coding—identifying commonalities in the participants’ stories, especially as related to schooling and the self. These themes become the significant constructs derived from any given phenomenon, and were common among the students. This resulted in three themes being identified as significant to the study: *The*

*Unknown/Misconceptions about Education (THUMB), Fit and Connectivity Education (FACE), Drama and Trauma (DATA).*

## **Themes**

### **The Unknown/Misconceptions About Education (THUMB)**

The first theme that emerged from the open-coding process was participants, in this case dropouts, cognize misconceptions about education. These misconceptions could also be framed as representing the unknown of scholastic success and achievement for these participants. That is, many participants expressed not knowing how to succeed, and even why they maybe *should* learn how to succeed in school. This unknown element could be considered with respect to concepts of both success and failure. For example, Joy dropped out of high school when she was a junior, due to mostly external “environmental factors”. Part of Joy’s misconception of education, and her relation to it, was due to her own awareness of being cognitively capable of completing the actual work. “I would have graduated. I was smart. I didn’t have an issue with passing tests, or doing any of my homework”. This awareness of self, then, becomes critically relevant, as the capable student drops out of school altogether. “You know, I take blame for it, but it does affect your self-worth...it makes you feel like you are not good enough...especially when you have the ability, but then you’re not allowed [back] in the school”.

For Saul, early childhood education was all make believe, “When I was a kid, it was all fantasy. I wanted to be a millionaire ninja, rock star...and somewhere in the back of my mind, I still want that. I could be one of those people in one of those Peter Pan syndrome, you know...where you had so much fun as a boy, you want to stay, you want to do it as long as you can, when everything around you is saying, This is not what you’re

supposed to be doing. And then, one day you get it, you know, you look in the mirror, and you...you know...it was not until I was an adult that I could see the value or potential value of the school system.” Saul’s experience validates concepts like reflexivity and seeking, as the body moves through time and space—remembering discovering as it goes.

Heidi, 23, reflected on her transition to high school, where she felt “lost, and kind of scared to make a move...when it came to anything”. She stated that her sense of apathy and “mild depression” were attributable to her parents getting divorced while she was in middle school, “Before ninth grade, when they got divorced, I was focused in school and I did well...in high school everything started to change”. Key to Heidi’s eventual disconnection, and dropping out her junior year was what she calls her “culture shock in high school” where she “struggled to make friends...I didn’t know why I was taking certain classes, or like what my purpose for being there was”.

The sense of feeling connected to people and groups is crucial to students, perhaps more so when there are built-in rewards such as an expanded knowledge base, increased skills capacity, public acknowledgements, and systematic socio-political development for all participants. Ideally, this is what a school would/could do, but each student arrives on campus bearing their own capital, in all of its forms. The dropout is here, steeped in misconceptions about the unknown purpose and/or implications of an educational pipeline.

### **Fit and Connectivity Education (FACE)**

The second theme is what I am coining here as Fit and Connectivity Education (FACE). FACE emerges out of the participants’ responses to questions such as, *What is*

*the body of a dropout? How did you experience your body in school? Do you remember how you felt in school?* These questions emerge from Foucault's focus on the body of the subject, and how the body is intersected by myriad power negotiations. Power, then, becomes a process, defined by said negotiations, and just how the body then becomes ordered, numbered, disciplined, and punished as necessary functions of a, kind of, mad machination of human capital. FACE, then, is defined by qualitative student data that reflect how the student experienced the school building itself, the people with whom they connected/did not connect, and specific experiences defined by their body.

For example, I was once on a field trip in fifth grade, and we about fifty of us were out in nature somewhere in Oregon. We walked up and down trails through the woods, and studied the life science of the area. At some point after lunch, before we were to head back to school, I got away from the group, to urinate in the woods. When I did this, I accidentally peed on my baseball cap that I was holding in my hand. I finished my deed, and climbed down to a small creek and washed my cap off in the water. I thought that I did a good job washing the hat, but in reality, I probably also had some piss drying on my pants. On the bus ride back to school, there was horseplay, flirting, and at some point, many of the girls were wearing the baseball caps of the boys. One girl, Marcia, who was sitting behind me, asked if she could wear my hat. I was stuck. I did not want to say no, but I was also afraid of my hat being wet and smelling of urine. I gave Marcia my cap. I tried to sense her response to my hat, as she put it on her head, and along the ride home. At some point, I saw her kind of touching the hat, and whispering to her seatmate, and then she took the hat off, smelled it, and gave it back to me. Perhaps it was only the three of us that ultimately knew that Isaac peed on his hat, but I internalized it as

everyone knew. It affected the way I experienced my body in and around school, and how I negotiated my emerging identity as agentic among my peers.

Joel dropped out of high school his junior year, and spent much of his adult life in and around the criminal justice system—having served almost three years in Oregon county jails, and state prisons, while being an obviously ingenious thinker and speaker. His responses to the questions informing FACE, reflect his body being put aside, in a special-education class. “I remember in first or second grade, you know in reading class, and I was in one of the reading programs where you get more help, and you use smaller words, with bigger words, and simplified pictures, and you know I just wasn’t really into it...I wasn’t interested...you know, but I kind of know my personality, and if I am given time with something, and I am kind of led to something, I am more inclined to wrap my mind around it and have a certain comfort level with it. So I think from an early age, I was kind of turned off from reading and math, in that sense you know...well I don’t want to read these funny books, you know. I don’t want to be in this room with these 7 other kids, you know, reading these books, it wasn’t exciting to me, and I don’t think I put myself forward, in accomplishing the tasks in that class.”

Joel’s experience in the reading class allowed his embodied epistemology an opportunity to emerge. Even from an early age, Joel pulled an iota of agency from his soul, and allowed it to bloom beyond his body—into the special-education classroom, curriculum, instructors, etc. This is not valued as good or bad, but as an example of *discourse* in Foucault’s (1977) “technology of power” (p.23), whereas Joel was able to initiate a bit of *volition* affront an epistemologico-judicial *compulsion* put forth by the state.

Nigel had to finish high school in an adult, night school setting in order to walk across the stage with his graduating class. Although Nigel walked, he claims that he never received a diploma, and that he does not remember completing the night-school coursework. “I was horrible in school. I had no work ethic, and I hated to do the work. I always felt so awkward, and I did not want to go. I hated it.” Nigel learned to use resources and people around him to his advantage, in and outside of the school. “If I could get someone else to do my work I would. I would cheat on the tests, or stay up all night trying to cram for the test instead doing it in a measured way”. Nigel alluded to this sense of fit or connectivity with the schools he attended, as being directly connected to his home, and his being of a low socio-economic status. “I always found shortcuts. I could see my father’s failures, his never-ending cycles of losing jobs...and, constantly not seeing—seeing somebody constantly disgusted...and saying, even at a young age, seeing *that* as being pathetic...saying, whether it’s him, whether it’s anybody else, I don’t want to feel like anybody is looking at me like I am being pathetic”.

Nigel admits that his being suburb poor, was still afforded a safety net by one wealthy grandfather, whom Nigel learned to trick in subtle, survival-based ways over the years. These techniques are honed in the home, the street, the school, and other places. They are organic technologies of the student’s body, as becoming public and political discursive text. They are the thoughts and strategies in relation to the student’s body and its connectivity (lack thereof) to the school/school system. This includes the student’s interface with buildings, rooms, chairs, people, curricula, and complex industries. Nigel did not express any guilt or shame from his former scholastic survival tactics, and it does not seem like he sacrificed much, if any, of his integrity or sense of identity.

Noel, an 18-year old pipefitter apprentice, expressed a similar disconnect to Nigel's, and a similar experience in using others to help him get by in school. Although Noel left school in his senior year, he proclaimed, "Oh I'm smart. I can't write good or anything...but when it comes down to something I can think it out, you know. I do what I gotta' do...I do my work sometimes, or you know just give it to my friends to do it. I really didn't do nothing. I just sat there in the back of the class, just watch everybody, wait 'til the bell rings, go to the next class and do the same thing. I mean sometimes I would try, but I don't know. Something changed me when my dad got locked up. I don't know what happened. I just started doing stupid shit, and dropped out." Noel dropped out in his senior year, before entering the criminal justice system too.

At the heart of this emerging framework for analyzing students' experiences in school, FACE, is *care*. A student, especially the most vulnerable one, needs to feel cared for. Where there is no care, there is no cost-no burden to bear for teachers, counselors, or administrators toward the dropout.. Where there is no cost, any price will do, and a student's well-being is easily traded for almost anything. The administration, then, becomes *free* in a way, to seek punishment upon the body of a student. When considering an expression of *care* for, say, one student, we consider a human community that acknowledges, "Body, mind, and culture are deeply codependent," (Shusterman, 2012). *Care*, though contemporarily agreed to mean something like 'support, compassion', is based in a Proto-Indo-European gloss signifying 'to cry out, to scream'. That is, to compassionately support any one student or group is simply a more measured expression of a signified 'crying' or 'screaming'.

Angela Valenzuela (1999) clarifies a definition of *caring* in her treatment of the climate at a low-income high school in Texas, called *Seguin*. Valenzuela pointed to the “subtractive elements” practiced there. Firstly, Mexican students at Seguin are viewed as deficient due to the differences in their definitions of education, whereas they see the process as inclusive of family, culture, and traditions undervalued by a, mostly Anglo, educational system. This *educación* also implies a certain kind of relating between teacher and student—one that affirms community, and which ties learning to morality. Secondly, this type of subtractive schooling regresses to a line of thought that views the social capital of a Mexican student as something that is worthless, and powerless.

Problematizing the topic of cultural assimilation with regard to academics, is the reality that Mexican immigrants “are much more likely to evoke teachers’ approval”, and seem to “accept their teachers’ aesthetic definition of caring” more than their second and third generation Mexican peers (p.22). The challenges surrounding the students at Seguin HS are systemically assembled, and subtractive approaches continue to mark each student as potential subjects with the power to initiate their own agency, by resisting such hurtful approaches. Changing systems is an ambiguous, and often unsustainable task.

Dorn (1996) points to how change in schools is not suffered easily, and that “every decade, cynics questioned the propriety of broader high school attendance”. Students who feel connected to their schools will likely be there, in their seat ready to learn-become empowered. If the culture of the school is not intentionally equitable, toward its most in-need students, those same student can likely be subjected to, “exclusionary practices—dismissal, suspension, or expulsion,” (Morris, 2016). With respect to an “equitable school climate”, Ross (2013) suggests “high expectations and

support”, “safety”, “caring relationships”, and “participation” as qualities upon which a school can create a culture of care. In Seguin HS’s case, these were qualities that were historically missing. Perhaps the line that draws straight through each of these qualities is a shared sense of community. That is, when Seguin transitioned from an all-White student body to an all-Brown one, yet the faculty remained all White, not only did safety and care become troubled, but expectations and support waned, and meaningful engagement for personal development became clouded in “invidious *we-they* distinctions,” (Valenzuela, 1999).

The othering continued in the communities and schools feeding Seguin HS, when in 1970, following the desegregation ruling of *Ross v. Eckels*, African-American children and Mexican children were coupled in great numbers. This ploy to prevent White children from having to integrate with Black and Brown children, was detrimental to all—Mexican children coming to be seen as “white for desegregation purposes”, and being deficiently defined at once.

This subtraction of culture and identity has far-reaching effects on a young student—the one who was already on her way out. Without an authentic voice to share, and being forced to assimilate into a whitewashed worldview, this same student becomes defeated in the self. The student that trades his cultural identity and history for academic and professional success may very well be talented, but he also must come to reckon with the bodies—Brown and Black backs and shoulders—of those upon which he rests. The division that may occur within a child’s mind, regarding assimilation and resistance, is the first victory toward a divided society. Spring (2010) suggests this division is, historically, fear-based, “there was a hysterical fear by European Americans during the

common-school period that Africans and Indians would contaminate white blood”.

Contrariwise, if a brave student is confident in her non-White identity, culture, and history, she may very well persist and succeed—having to, most likely, look for resources outside of the school in order to validate her family’s worth.

To make good on Ross’ (2013) four qualities of an equitable school climate, a teacher should be intently – sincerely – engaged with her students’ stories, cultures, and identities. There must be a negotiation between caring and control in the classroom. For a teacher that holds firm to a positivist paradigm of direct causality and representational logic, there is little room to negotiate. Wilson (2016) suggests, “It is through action and hope that we work on our own incompleteness”, though our own whole self still needs, some, belonging. Valenzuela (1999) concluded her thoughts on Seguin HS, by emphasizing that the “politics of caring” must “search for connection” with the “other” (p.255), and that this “search” is “an extremely challenging goal within the context of unfriendly institutional structures”. Ultimately, the onus is ours, educators, to assimilate. To date, adults have collectively failed Brown and Black children nationwide, and the high school dropout is no different. A definition of *caring* must be “provided by the students themselves,” Valenzuela (1999 (p.263) as ours is still too limited, and subtractive, due to—perhaps—our own institutionalized otherness.

### **Drama and Trauma (DATA)**

The third theme that emerged from coding the interview data represents episodes of *drama* and *trauma*, either experienced outside of the school, or in and around schools. *Drama* refers to events and experiences that were burdensome for the participant, and which caused some type of loss, or setback for the participant. These events are different

from trauma, in that they are experienced at a kind of popular, social level, and there are no real lasting psycho-emotional deficits as a result. *Trauma*, on the other hand, represents episodes or events that had a deeply troubling impact on the participant, and which were perhaps violent or abusive in nature.

Hank, 46, left school when he was in the ninth grade. He spent most of his childhood in foster care, where he was moved from home to home “all the time”, he says. Hank “never really fit in anywhere”, and “just couldn’t get it...couldn’t concentrate” in school. Hank is the type of student who could have benefitted from some genuine love and care within a school setting, but he feels as if it simply was “not meant to be”. Many of the participants in this study shared moments and scenarios where some type of physical or emotional survival came to trump their immediate schooling needs and/or their participation in/at school. Hank shared one such scenario, and it speaks to his comment about never really fitting in, “...CPS called my Grandma and asked her if she wanted us, and my Grandma was looking for us but she couldn’t find me and my sister. We’re twins, and uh, they couldn’t find us or anything, and when they found us I was almost dead and my sister...my sister was...they wanted to keep my sister but not me, they didn’t want no boys just girls.” Traumatic life events like this can have lasting effects on students, and Hank’s near-death scenario that he experienced as a toddler stays with him. He does still believe in himself, “I mean, as I get older, I kinda learned a little more about myself, you know. I learned how to deal with people more. I can concentrate now, read”.

While Saul, Nigel, and Noel negotiated their ways of knowing in organic and novel ways, Noel alluded to something of which he had no control—his dad being

imprisoned—and, how the exteriority of our lives can impact the interiority. In Noel’s case, the exterior realities of his dad going to prison caused his interior self to shut down, and “give up” when it came to school. “It’s just...he kept messing up and stuff like that, not just him but most of family members...violence, drugs, and that’s really all they know.” For Noel, the trauma induced from these events is real, lasting, and affected his future in many ways. “I went down a bad path for a couple of years...juvenile detention woke me up, and I saw something in me that I didn’t like...coldness”.

Frida experienced traumatic episodes inside of her all-girls Catholic school that she feels “shattered” her trust of teachers, and the schooling system itself. “I think you really don’t know when you are being abused as a kid, but I was scared to death of some of the teachers in the schools...they would come around with the ruler, and whack-whack, you know...What did I tell you about that? You know, are you stupid or what? This teacher hated kids, you know she was always screaming...I was a very obedient child...I didn’t want to get hit...this was like ’64, ’63, ’62...and when you see this on a daily basis...you know, it affects you...she would be like, Hurry up! You sat there too long! And it went on a regular basis, every single day”.

Frida’s experience with the abuse in her school helped to form a sense of survival within her, as it related to the school itself—the classroom, the chairs, the teacher, and the ruler. All of these items become connotations around the participant’s sense of self. That is, the student becomes defined, in a way, by the interplay of these objects and agents. The self, then, emerges as agentic—or not—as the student infers his own narrative as related to said interplay.

Table 3

*Witness Stand*

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Grade Left School	Return to School/Degree
<b>Joel</b>	34	WHT/HSP	11	Yes/BA
<b>Nigel</b>	42	WHT	12	Yes/No
<b>Hank</b>	46	AA	9	Yes/HVAC cert.
<b>Saul</b>	44	WHT/HSP	11	No/No
<b>Frida</b>	52	WHT	12	No/No
<b>Joy</b>	22	HSP	11	Yes/AA
<b>Lance</b>	38	AA	10	Yes/BA
<b>Noel</b>	18	HSP	12	Yes/Plumbing cert.
<b>Heidi</b>	23	HSP	11	Yes/No
<b>Sara</b>	22	HSP	12	Yes/No

**Discussion**

If we start with a chair, it might seem easy to determine why a student cannot or will not sit still—wants to get up and out of their seat. There is an unseen thing happening within his soul, and outside of her body. Some chairs are more comfortable than others, *true*. Some *souls* are more ready to be ordered publicly, and co-created among peers. The child who has found himself sitting in the chair just outside of the Principal’s office,

likely feels different from the others, and probably should be sitting on a couch in the Talented and Gifted classroom. What are the differences between the two spaces and places to sit? How did each student end up sitting in those seats? The reasons for empty seats in a school classroom are many, all of them real, and involving living souls invested by the ordering, numbering, and disciplining of their respective bodies.

The seat, chair, place to sit, and its symbolism of rest—timelessness, reflexivity, dimensionality, and transcendence—entangles the subject, sitting there, with their own past and their potential future selves. This inextricable becoming of embodied souls is prototypically symbolized by two hypothetical objects: The Picaro’s Stool & The Prayer Rug. The high-school dropout, as viewed through the delimitations of *this* autoethnographical approach—dropout as agentic trickster, politicized body—problematizes historical, and post-positivist approaches to analyzing social problems as related to public schooling. That is, this approach assumes a post-structuralist paradigm toward individual and collective meaning making, as such is assumed in and around human participation (e.g. Personal/Political, Private/Public). The interface of myriad variables within our individual bodies, and our collective body of humanity, produce the fictional institutions that we hold as socially *real*. This includes the public school and its outputs. Thus, the valedictorian and the dropout are both *made real* via this shared idea of *schooling-a school*. Their categorical status, as a result of participating in the school, is equally made.

### **S(h)it**

Etymologically, a “poem” is ‘made, authored’, and this significance comes from a Proto-Indo European (PIE) gloss meaning ‘piled up, built, made’. Shit—*feces*,

clinically—is similar to poetry: It is a *made* thing. *Feces* (shit), then, shares an etymological root (faec-) with other words about ‘making things’: *Fact*, *fiction*, *factory*, *perfect*, *proficient*. All of these words can also be traced back to a PIE root (dhe-), shared in words like *thesis*, *antithesis*, *artifact*, and *biblioteca*. In executing linguistic analysis, we must keep in mind that language and words are alive—always giving a little and taking a little. Communication, as perhaps the most utilized human technique, functions to cultivate thought and mind. The words we know and use are at once beyond us and embodied in our very identities—written in our flesh and on our minds.

Language, though, is too consistent and self-sustaining of a function for social participation, in that etymology—any one technique of, say, linguistic analysis—cannot provide substantial insight to the lived experience of a student. We might even go as far as to delimit this entire study by its assumptions of our perceived physical presence of “students” and/or “student success” in any sensible reality. That is, can we assume that we are both here, and not here? There exists an equal potentiality for a student to succeed, and to fail; to attain a desired quality of life beyond high school, and to not attain this at all. Horace Mann’s education as “equalizer” never became real, nor did this frame ever prompt a collective educational industrial complex to equitably support all students. Black and brown bodies have always been both present and missing in the U.S. public school house. The real bodies of children, who were destroyed by a flattening manifest of “western” progress and dominion, were done so *inside* of the schoolhouse. If the child was not in their seat—in the class, the school, and the system—the child would be found, and then made flat (i.e. Punished).

As much as a student is either in his seat or not, a *hidden place*—according to millennia of human-to-human discord—seems equally, potentially occupied, or not. That is, we are either “living souls” or not—regardless of geopolitical, religious traditions. The tension inherent to this ancient, existential thought is equally elemental to our collective, onto-epistemological narrative. This is probably the primal thought that led to a first meaningful human utterance—a cry for quarter. Human bodies, then, become symbols for hidden souls, and those bodies make things. The valedictorian and dropout are equal here. The singularity is *shit*. It is the great equalizer. We are in it, of it, and it hides inside of us like a soul. It is there as consistent, sustaining, and varied as our respective mother tongues. It is akin to the story of humanity—our migratory histories across the earth, where we came to rest and sit—assembling ourselves to get in where we fit.

### **Forward**

In processing through my memories—the spaces, places, people, and troubles—I find myself, now, still unsettled. The unknowing of it all, the feelings of disconnect from society, and the traumatic experiences associated with school, all have come to be sifted through this dissertation. This manuscript comes as the final culminating task of the doctoral curriculum, and my positionality is mostly unmoved, as a result of the process. I have been a bit of a rebel with regard to my own propensity to conform to any hierarchical system, and perhaps the removal of any leadership and/or power dynamics in the home, invoked a kind of inability to feel my way through such frames of teaching and learning. In considering the witness interviews, and how the misconceptions about school and its purpose in society align with mine and Reuben’s experiences as children, I cannot help but to connect the two

threads. A free, public school in any U.S. community is likely conceptualized around an exchange of information, and probably through an intergenerational lens, wherein an adult is engaging with a child. Reuben's childhood and mine was rife with upset, satire, and mischief, and leadership figures did not register as much as they probably should have. My brother shares a picaresque epistemological tendency with me, in that he possesses sage wisdom of myriad topics, of which little hold too much value in popular, capitalistic society. He survived a number of visits to jail, and the throes of life in the streets with mad people always beckoning some damn thing. But Reuben lives, as do I. He is now a single father, raising his 7-year old daughter, Kaylee in Eugene, Oregon.

Norma tried. Considering her education and skillset, she allowed Reuben and me a childhood. We were free savages, running, burning, and flying—almost dying. She tried. Norma probably should have had a daughter or two, and perhaps Reuben and I should have had our father. In completing this project, my mother—Norma—did not want “to go back. I’m done with that...” and I respect that. Jose, my father is dead. I tried multiple times to get a hold of my former stepfather, to no avail. I did, however, get a hold of one of my mom's former boyfriends, Grant, who claims, “I broke up with your Mom, because she refused to enforce any rules with you guys, and you wouldn't listen to me”. The dropout is here.

## VI. Archaeology

### Texts

In this section, we will examine the emergence of the high-school dropout as a visible social problem, and the socio-political infrastructures that help to co-create such an educational category. The intricate assemblage that is the educational industrial complex as we know it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, moves, builds, and falls in *almost* predictable patterns related to local and national economies, human capital cost-benefit narratives, and a primal, push-pull kind of game that governs, perhaps, all human endeavors. The bodies of students are in-play here too, and sifting down through the layers of history, we find respective actions from vastly diverse cultures as indivisible from their beginnings as they are from their ends. That is, myriad narrative threads intersect in the build-up from Old World to New World schooling, and up until now, an assumption has always been made that there is a student who will not, cannot, and/or perhaps *must* not succeed.

This is the eventual high-school dropout, and from the turn of the twentieth century up until about 1954, this student existed. He could not make the grade. She was pushed out. They never had a chance. Eventually, the high-school diploma would reach a particular, standardized value, and the value of the student who does not earn the credential, became attributed to a cost borne by society. Policy archaeology is adapted here to fit an analysis of the high-school dropout among student bodies, toward forming a Foucauldian genealogy of the *dropout*, specifically from 1918-2018 in the United States. This time frame was selected because 1918 marks the year that the last state in the union—Mississippi—legislated compulsory schooling mandates statewide, and because it

seems fitting to have a one-hundred year span, as the research for this study was completed in 2018.

### **Concrescence of Bodies**

The genealogical ova of an eventual U.S. high-school dropout, generate in Europe, around and among increasingly literate, Christian populations. By the time that Martin Luther writes his 95 Theses (1517 CE), the printing press was already in existence for almost a century, and the genetic beginnings of a literate, liberal-sovereign empire had begun. “Martin Luther proposed compulsion as a religious duty of the state to its citizens. Everyone should be made to learn to read because he ought to be able to read the Bible for himself” (Cook, 1912) (p.331). The Catholic Church’s stranglehold on literacy, liberty, and personal, spiritual transcendence for the common layperson was fading, as more and more people were reading, writing, and thinking about their own consciousness—their divine birthright. Cook (1912) writes, “Two modern ideas at least may be mentioned, one in the Old World, the other in the New. Compulsory education in England has been regarded as necessary in order to keep the lower classes from wronging themselves; in America the matter has been considered from the social and political point of view instead of from the personal point of view. Americans consider compulsory education as the *sine qua non* of political existence, since the state cannot, for its own sake permit any of its citizens to grow up in ignorance” (p.332). Here, the Nation as Family conceptual metaphor (Lakoff, 2001) reveals its strict intentions with regard to child rearing—compelling bodies into schools was not simply to keep them from hurting their selves, but to ensure they knew *whose* they were, where they were, and how a *family* ought to think, move, and feel. This frame was puritanical, white Christendom, and any

bodies that could be categorized outside of said frame were disowned-expelled. Thus, attendance laws went forth, state by state, until the entire country symbolically agreed, *Yes, we are a part of this family, and we agree with this compulsion from the State.*

### **Arena 2: The Social Regularities Arena**

Rauscher (2014) found that “early compulsory laws had different effects by class, nativity, and race, increasing educational equality...[with] equalizing effects...more robust among young men” (p.22). As compulsory schooling laws emerged, young men of color and poor whites were in greater attendance, and the categorical value of their embodied human capital, also shifted. Whereas, prior to compulsory schooling, the human capital for a young man of color’s was valued for physicality, and what it could endure in a field or factory. An emerging, peculiar value placed upon the young, white woman’s body also shifts here, whereas before compulsory schooling laws, she was an easy tie for a first-place value, right alongside her white fathers and brothers. When non-white bodies were compelled inside, to sit and learn in ways similar, if not identical, to their white peers, any number of organic, sociopolitical regularities of the empire began to stir, and to conjure classes, types, and ranks of students, to maintain the order its own systematicity. Rauscher (2014) shows how there was “a noticeable gap between status groups in the censuses immediately before and after the compulsory law” (p.19), as the laws “weakened the relationship between social background and school attendance, especially among young men in the North (p.20).

### **State Cases**

Compulsory education in the United States became law in Massachusetts in 1852. The last state to adopt compulsory schooling policies was Mississippi (1918). All of my

schooling occurred in Oregon, but the framing for how I thought and felt about school came from my parents/guardians, who were raised and educated in California. Here, we will look at four cases of the aforementioned states, to deepen and problematize an understanding of Scheurich's (1994) grid of social regularities, and to examine how that came to make the high-school dropout visible in each regional context.

**Massachusetts.** In 1642, Puritan elders within the Massachusetts Bay Colony, “established a group of educational supervisors...charged with the task of judging parental neglect in child rearing and reporting these offenses to the court...established minimal standards by which parents and masters could be judges in their educational responsibilities” (Katz, 1976) (p.12). This is the symbolic beginning of a compulsory system of controlling and ordering bodies—any potential learning therein. The connotation in this policy is that there are ‘neglected’ children within the society. The outsider has emerged, as he relates to the free, public grammar school. Of course, she was long removed from the In/Out framework made manifest by Christianity in all of its potentialities—notions made real as a result of an increasingly literate populous, able to name their own state of self, consciousness, and transcendental possibilities—before they were superimposed upon the schoolhouse and the bodies inside. Here, the child in ‘neglect’ holds space for an eventual, *named* high-school dropout. A symbol of exclusion is germane to the compulsory policies coming down from the ‘educational supervisors’. These ‘selectmen’ represent a prototype for Scheurich’s (1994) regularity of “professionalization”, whereas the emergence of the need and relevance to create this position is inextricable from the relevance and need to identify, order, and control children in ‘neglect’. In 1852, Massachusetts “passed the first compulsory education law

to make sure that the children of poor white immigrants got “civilized” by learning obedience and restraint. Education would help them become good workers who did not contribute to social upheaval” (Rector, 2010) (p.5). The dropout is here, finding a way to not quite fit, and due to the state policy.

A 1935 report by the U.S. Department of the Interior shows the “compulsory attendance age—seven to sixteen”, with exemptions being only for students who meet “requirements for completion of sixth grade”; who were excused by the “Town Superintendent...for profitable employment at home”; where “physical or mental conditions is such as to render attendance inexpedient or impracticable”; who were “otherwise instructed in a manner approved in advance by the superintendent or the school committee”; where unusual cases are simply decided by the “Superintendent, or teachers authorized by him or by the school committee” (Deffenbaugh & Keesecker, 1935) (p.77). These statutory policies are fraught with puritanical, punitive connotations. It is easy to see where any number of students could simply miss meeting the criteria for being considered in ‘neglect’. Any emergency crisis which may arise for the child or her family en route to the schoolhouse could be the block that causes the student to stumble, drop back, fall out of line with the social order of any local schoolhouse. The U.S. Nation as Family metaphor, here, reveals an abusive dogma—a metabolism of suffering, othering, and chattel fetishes. In 2012, Massachusetts passed Chapter 222 “to design regulations that would redefine the due process of exclusion, with the goal of reducing its use” Richardson (2018) (p.3). This policy ultimately made “suspending and expelling students more tedious for schools... [but] does not include any means to advance restorative justice or any other alternative to problematic discipline practices”

(Richardson, 2018) (p.8). After five years of the Chapter 222 implementation, an Out of School Suspension (OSS) rate “for black students was reduced to an amount that is still *twice* the rate of OSS for white students” (p.21), and only “confirms what advocates of Chapter 222 expressed regarding inequity in school discipline, and shows that it has persisted since 2012” (p.22). Massachusetts’ Chapter 222 is a good example of Scheurich’s (1994) critique aimed at “symbolic” post-positivist attempts at “treatment, i.e. a policy solution” (p.298). Scheurich (1994) frames such ‘treatment’ as constraining the “range of policy solutions”, and as “constituted by the grid of social regularities”, while making “problem groups and solutions...socially visible” (p.311).

**Mississippi.** Katz (1976) writes that “the last state to pass a compulsory school attendance law, [was] Mississippi (1918)... [and] the first to repeal it—in 1956” (p.18). In fact, the economic infrastructure in Mississippi was built for agricultural and vocational pathways, and in the years of Reconstruction leading up to the 1918 legislation, the government mobilized around education to maintain the economy. Chapter 29 of the same 1917 Mississippi state legislation is evidence of Scheurich’s (1994) “governmentality” and “professionalization”, whereas the legislation provides “for co-operation with the states in the preparation of teachers of vocational subjects; and to appropriate money and regulate its expenditures; (Public No. 347, 64<sup>th</sup> congress)”, and this was framed as “good faith of the state” applied to “white rural schools” and “negro rural schools”...appointed by the governor” (MS Leg, 1918)(p.69).

These policies, along with transportation regulations that virtually kept any child living on or near a farm/plantation outside of the statutory, compulsory mandates, allowed Mississippi to retain their historic, master-slave framework, in and around free

public schools. The Governor who oversaw these legal structures, Theodore G. Bilbo, was infamously racist, and faced corruption charges before the U.S. Senate multiple times before his death. Ultimately, the compulsory schooling mandate was sustained by a punitive state justice mechanism, whereas any parent or guardian of a truant student who did not respond to the school's efforts to compel the parent's child into the school, would have an "affidavit against [them]...before any justice of the peace, mayor or police justice of any town or city...clothed with jurisdiction over all offenders with full power to hear...and punish" (MS Leg, 1918) (p.73).

Here, a grid of social regularities undergird the emergence of a compulsory schooling model in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mississippi, where race, class, gender, professionalization, and governmentality come to intersect with agriculture, architecture, prison, politics, ideology, and myth, all subsumed under an educational framework tied directly to local business and industry, before a national and global economy. Mississippi emerges as a symbol for compulsory schooling as being a cunning instrument toward empire building. Mistreatment of non-white students and exclusion of the same becomes systematized in a white supremacist, education judicial complex. In 1927, nine years after the state's compulsory laws went forth, "a young girl in Mississippi was excluded from attending high school for White children solely on the ground that she was of Chinese descent and not a member of the White race" (Dorsey, 2008)(p.15). Her father brought the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, claiming that as a taxpayer, his daughter had a right to attend the White school. The Supreme Court "determined that the young girl was a member of the Mongolian or Yellow race, and there was a school in the county for Colored children" (Dorset, 2008) (p.15). The dropout emerges in a U.S. culture made

from *outing*, wherein any one of us can be next the body identified as not belonging, and for myriad reasons.

**California.** California systematized its public schools with an organizational structure that aligned with other compulsory schooling frameworks, and included qualities and components such as districts, school boards, superintendents, principals, and business divisions. The public school house during this time, in California and elsewhere, becomes fraught with money-based power dynamics. The goal becomes financial gain and growth, and said goal becomes attainable through student attendance reports.

Richardson (1980) states that there are three general perspectives of compulsory schooling in the United States. “The first...sees compulsory attendance laws as functional responses to the expansion of the post-Civil War industrial economy. The second...emphasizes the role of conflict in the genesis and implementation of compulsory education. The third specifies the demographic and ecological conditions which enhanced or diminished the capacity of state to enact and to enforce compulsory school attendance” (p.154). In California, all three views were valid. In fact, the three proposed, common perspectives of compulsory attendance in state-operated schools amalgamate to frame the context for an emerging, identifiable white race.

One function of compulsory schooling laws in the U.S. is to help establish the significance of a so-called white race, and its relations with other, non-white races. A lever of the federal government with regard to compulsory schooling laws is financial support that ties to student attendance. In an increasingly diverse 19<sup>th</sup> century California, and “after San Francisco’s colored school was established, the [distribution of state education funds] law was changed and the first mention of race was included. State funds

now were to be distributed ‘in proportion to the number of white children’...” (Wollenberg, 1976)(p.12). In fact, implemented compulsory laws within schooling systems correlate directly with increased state and federal funding for schools. Katz (1976) shows how “In 1889-90, the total expenditures for elementary and secondary day schools was slightly in excess of \$140 million. By 1929-1930, that figure had jumped to more than \$1.84 billion. In the same period, the average number of days attended by each pupil rose from 86-143” (p.22). In this, the governmentality and professionalization regularities intersect to make visible “the establishment of attendance offices...school censuses...upgrading in the professional qualifications of truant officers” (Katz, 1976) (p.22)

Race and class also emerge as fundamental components to compulsory schooling legislation, wherein student bodies are ordered and organized according to a presumed privilege allocated to white bodies. In fact, the origins of “white privilege” as a tactical identity politics, arrives in 1864, in the cold valley between the Emancipation Proclamation and compulsory schooling legislation. The Bureau of Freedmen’s Affairs was established after the end of the Civil War, “to aid only persons of African descent, or such persons who were once slaves...Nevertheless, many opponents...protested that under the original bill, taxes would be paid by Whites to assist only Blacks, so they suggested that a bureau of Irishman’s Affairs...Dutchman’s Affairs, or one for those of Caucasian descent...As such, the support for White privilege prevailed, and the Freedman’s Bureau Act of 1864 was revised to include benefits for Whites” (Dorsey, 2008)(p.11). By 1870, “the number of paupers per 100 Negroes in California was less than half that of whites. California blacks were generally literate, fairly prosperous

people, and they were not willing to accept a status of civil or legal inferiority” (Wollenberg, 1980) (p.10). Thus, the cultural pragmatics in southern states were different from those in, say, Massachusetts or California, while the context of racism and white supremacy transcended all statutory and/or geographical boundaries. The public schoolhouse, then, becomes a battleground for both intergenerational and interracial, political combat.

The high-school dropout is realized here as an organic occurrence amid ornate, arcane sociopolitical systems. That is, within a given social system as such, it seems feasible that some person will emerge at some time as not being able to fit into the structures of the system. Compulsory legislation creates a symbolic space for the body that just can't seem to be compelled to complete the curriculum. However, the policy in and of itself is not enough to fully develop what we commonly know now as a high-school dropout. To arrive at our current understanding of this figure, the continued interplay of the aforementioned social regularities must necessarily continue to merge-intersect, and make visible an agreed upon, problematic social figure.

It is important to remember that each student-each body is viewed by the state as having some type of human-capital potential. Each child has to produce returns of the state's investment in their own body, mind, and life. In light of a state-mandated compulsory schooling model, this human-capital investment necessarily becomes divisive. That is, the funders were not looking to simply invest their resources flatly, in a free-market kind of spirit, suggesting, May the best students succeed! On the contrary, the game of financing free public schools in the U.S. has always been rigged. Similar to the racists who usurped the federal resources intended by the government to support

people and communities freed from slavery, the lawmakers, wealthy funders of public schools, and the white communities with children who would attend free public schools, at every turn, structured school systems and resources to ensure that white children would succeed, and that non-white children would not.

In post-Reconstruction California, like in many other states, state spending on free public schools increased dramatically. However, any schooling expenditure that was not compensated for by federal or state funding, a “remaining 60 per cent [of funding for elementary, high school, and junior college alone] comes from other resources, primarily the local property owner” (Stone, 1961) (p.96). In this scenario, property owners—white males and females—pick the tune to which California students would dance. Progressive politicism leveraged an emerging, national white narrative around social institutions and public schooling, which deepened the strict father patterns of arrangement between the government and the people, and allowed a developing white middle class to become codified in a kind of deputized participation in and around schools. That is, white taxpayers who voted—their selves, properties of the state—were free to discriminate, rig the game, to ensure that their white children would emerge as winners. Provasnik (2006) writes that after “World War I and the Russian Revolution, legislators and educational reformers, confident of the state’s *carte blanche* to regulate education under its police powers and in touch with popular concerns about...Catholics and immigrants who did not assimilate, attempted to enact even more prescriptive laws regulating schooling and the curriculum” (p.340). These laws “forbade any teaching of a modern foreign language to children in primary school... [And]...sought to compel all students to attend a public school” (Provasnik, 2006) (p.341). In regions of the country, such as California, where

Spanish had been the *lingua franca* for more than 200 years, assimilation meant attempting to become as approximate to *white* and *whiteness* as one could, in every facet of human experience. The *dropout*, then, emerges again as multi-lingual, non-white, and outside of the spheres of social influence and political power.

**Oregon.** The state of Oregon's history to conception is an awful, bloody story of imminent domain, dislocation, and murder. The passing of the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 "created a system of government and specified...that the United States had the right to occupy, give away or sell land that was already occupied by Native peoples" (Rector, 2010)(p.2). Here again, the disposition of the white supremacist government implements the Nation as Family conceptual metaphor, whereas non-white, non-Protestant students and families are not, in a way, genetic descendants, but rather orphaned and illegitimate adoptees, and having a need to be ordered and controlled.

Carter (1997) frames Oregon in terms of, "the nineteenth century vision of society as a combination not of atomistic individuals but of mutually dependent families—or, more to the point, of sets of parents speaking and acting on behalf of their families" (p.1203). White parents getting together and advocating for their children's educational outcomes, reifies their existing privilege, in countering the government's liberal theorizing that "the state is likely to make wise decisions and parents are likely to make bad ones" (Carter, 1997)(p.1208). That is, the concept of privilege those parents exercise in challenging the State's compulsory mandate, is made complete by the very interplay between the two groups. For the non-White, non-Protestant parents, their significance is also made complete by a similar interplay. Carter (1997) suggests that bans on "racially segregated education and...on organized religious observances in the

classroom...represented a forceful and even wrenching insistence to a nation wanting to be just white, just Protestant” (p.1216). This force would play out in and around schools during this time.

In Oregon, indigenous populations were mistreated, displaced, abused, and murdered with regularity. Organic technologies of *Columbia*, the “Goddess...blond white woman, who was the female symbolic counterpart to Uncle Sam...in a Roman toga to represent classical republicanism...bringing the light to the darkness,” and, “wielding the power of the schoolbook” (Bauer, 2017)(p. xiv-xv), helped to conjure the free public school, and its arcane machinations in local, state, and federal policies. In 1850, the Oregon Donation Land Act “was enacted by the U.S. Congress to promote homestead settlement in the Oregon territory...[granting] free land to Whites and half-breed Indians...[preventing] non-Whites from claiming land in Oregon even if they had already settled...whether they had previous deeds to the land or not” (Rector, 2010)(p.5). The so-called ownership of land emerges as a critical text within this discourse of power, in that the people who could not own land (e.g. Non-white humans) were not sovereign bodies, enjoying and practicing divine “rights”, but rather “wanderers...impaired and subordinate to the *discovery rights* of Europeans” (Rector, 2010)(p.3). Here, concepts of *Inness* and *Outness*, interiority and exteriority are brutally real. White supremacist policies around land ownership, social and civic participation, and eventually education, stand upon psychotic, schizophrenic governmental paradigms that, at once, lay claim to a divinely appointed “benevolent whiteness” and “...heroism [doing] this thankless and seemingly impossible work for the betterment of the nation” (Bauer, 2017) (p.31). The dropout is

here, before curricula are able to categorize the student's level of learning, there is a space reserved for her—a symbol of exclusion.

It is worth noting that Oregon's state constitution, along with those of Indiana and Illinois, "barred Black settlers", and almost all of the "Northern states passed [similar] Black Laws" that "restricted the rights and movement of Blacks" (Bennet, Jr., 1988) (p.452). In 1866, "Oregon citizens did not pass the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment granting citizenship to Blacks", and all "black and Mulatto children were assigned to a segregated school" (Rector, 2010) (p.7). In 1870, Oregon had one high school, compared to "500 public high schools in the United States with approximately 50,000 students, almost exclusively white boys. Education for women and most men was deemed only appropriate through the early grades" (p.8).

By 1926, Oregon had implemented compulsory and punitive schooling policies stating, " a parent guardian or other person having control or charge or custody of any child between the ages of eight and sixteen years shall fail to comply with any provision of this section, he shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall, on provision of this section, he shall on conviction thereof, be subject to a fine of not less than \$5, nor more than \$100, or to imprisonment in the county jail not less than two nor more than thirty days, or by both such fine and imprisonment in the discretion of the court" (Pierce vs SOS, Supreme Court, 1926). The precedent set here is that compulsory schooling policies evoke an abusive parenting framework to persuade the families living under their jurisdiction to abandon their sovereignty as natural parents of children, and that the State was to "control the education of children, lest their parents arrange for them to learn something the state disliked" (Carter, 1997)(p. 1201). The unit of interest here is not the

fading, sovereign and liberal individual walking in off of the horizon, but the aforementioned “mutually dependent [white] families” (Carter, 1997)(p. 1203), and their social codification to exclude students and families based on, primarily, race. The *Pierce* case found that certain students—those who were either white or who could assimilate toward whiteness—were free to attend private, religious schools with “the explicit permission of the state” (Carter, 1997) (p. 1200).

### **Arena 1: The education/social problem arena**

Arena 1 is the “education and social problem arena” (Scheurich, 1994) (p. 300), and here we examine the social construction of the “high-school dropout” as a *problem*. In this Arena, the dropout is made visible by a number of existing social regularities—race, gender, class, governmentality, and professionalization. In this, it becomes impossible to extract the visibility of the high-school dropout from the building of all socio-economical industries as part of the U.S. Empire. Thus, the dropout is co-created within the fractal becoming of civilization and society. She is as much the church as she is the school; the factory as the army; the bank as the farm; the jail as the court. As onto-epistemological witness to this empire’s exclusionary spirit, the dropout bears a special tale, one of having been *plucked* from the line, removed from the system, and left off the grid. Alexander’s (2010) identified *castes* are made visible via this same epistemologico-judicial line—the felon is a stone’s throw from the high-school dropout. Historically, a *dropout* concept becomes attributable to a schooling context—beyond transcendental philosophies about sovereignty or divine royalty—as public schooling grew in the New World, and moved westward. Schools, like churches, were “planted” by colonial foreigners, and seen as symbols, by those empirical leaders to be “...seed corn [from

which] the whole American system of free education grew” (Jenks, 1886) (p.5). Lest it be forgotten, these temples (i.e. Schools), were already conceptualized as weapons, wielded by sovereign bodies. Jenks (1886) wrote, “...John Winthrop and the other founders...wish and determination was to beat Satan in each and all of his lairs...knowing that ignorance was the darkest of these lairs, into that first, they threw the light from their reflectors” (p.5). Barnard (1893) wrote that this education system was “...drawn from treatises of teachers and educators in different languages...as embodied in the manners and history of each people...what has been accomplished in the family and schools...reached by Christianity” (p. 13). Schooling as an evangelical methodology under a guise of European holiness bears genetic exclusivity, in which any non-convert is equally—instantly—unequal, and/or dead. Here, a symbolic space is reserved for scriptural “wandering stars”, ever surveilled by orthodoxy, and for whom is reserved the darkness of blackness forever. These atmospheric contexts carry-*in* to specific, place-based histories, *realities*, and emergences of human industry, and systematization. The plantation, the army, the church, the school, the jail—all of the extraneous, emerging micro/meso/maxo-level social entities—are, ultimately as inextricable from their by-products, as any *one name* from some hypothetical, genealogical framework of a family tree. Unless the name removed from said tree is the newest addition to the genealogy—the youngest family member—the entire story of said family’s name would begin to deconstruct. Even if it were the newest person/name that was removed from said family genealogy, we might still imagine how that removal could impact those people who came to co-create the removed person—thus, initiating deconstructionist realities again. In this, the high-school dropout becomes visible as a political body—mutated from a complex

system of repressive, empirical, social theories, and institutions of human control-social order.

The U.S. free public school is a mutant offspring; beget by the Protestant church—bastardized runaway from Catholic dogmatism and Anglican psychosis—queer replicas of Ancient African socio-political institutions—complicit in the enslavement and murdering of indigenous bodies—symbols of stolen, primordial *birthrights*—some version of a philosopher’s stone. The modern school inherently worked against Old World models of empire and power, as a new *whiteness* emerged in nineteenth and twentieth century classrooms. The schoolhouse in United States Empire is a unique intermediary; instrument of intergenerational division—disciplining the child’s body to provide order toward adult affairs, and to teach skills to kids, whilst dividing them their nascence, nurturance—regardless of body type. Here, the school is merely an instrument of the State, used to invest the bodies of its citizens—symbols of capital. How much more were/are indigenous—black and brown bodies—divided and destroyed by these same mechanisms of empire and conquest. The dropout is framed, here, as an organic intersection of human capital and social participation, under a master-slave, domination paradigm, guised as *compulsory education*, toward the greater good of a new *white* empire.

The high-school dropout becomes an organic witness to the *social grids of regularity* made manifest in this emerging educational industrial complex, whose origins are inextricable from the Catholic Reformation, Spanish Inquisition, European Renaissance, and the Scientific Revolution. Here, the dropout is *conceived*—regardless of their respective, embodied demography—as organic counterbalance to a thrusting,

compulsion of a new (white) American empire. The European conquest of *this* land—from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, to date—produced a type of modern white agency—*Selectmen*—that permeated every social sector and economic industry. The real human bodies that stood in this space—donning Coates’ (2017) “bloody heirloom”, and backed by the State—were the mothers and fathers of puritanical pedagogy, and punitive pragmatism, which came to form U.S. schooling culture writ large.

Children in the U.S. were/are viewed as “chattels of the family...wards of the state”, and needed discipline and instruction “...to prevent sloth and idleness wherein such children are easily corrupted” (Smith, 1983) (p.222). The organic give and take between generations, genders, and all power dynamics, becomes almost fetishistic in the United States. Dorn (1996) states, “the focus on teenagers has simply maintained a deep-rooted obsession about transitions between dependence and independence in American society. Growing high school attendance in the first half of the twentieth century matched the simultaneous reduction in child labor, and the new mission of comprehensive secondary education made that exclusion from labor seem appropriate. Teenagers should go to school, people agreed, so that they could be productive as adults.” (p.7).

Fine (1991) expresses another side to this obsession, “I came to see...a series of institutional beliefs and rituals which buttress, invade, and preserve...high school...occupied and organized by a series of what I consider “fetishes,” which effectively order the experiences, beliefs, rituals, and behaviors known as public schooling. They divert the institution away from the tasks of education and bolster problematic relationships between and among administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders, and students” (p180). Here, the interplay between human bodies

transcends generational differences and many socioeconomic factors—hierarchical professionalization of the shared space emerges as paramount, over all other processes.

### **Compulsion Volition Conundrum**

In a frame of ritualized school/schooling, questions arise around the purported intention of a school. *Who can learn? Who should learn? What can become learned and/or be taught?* Durkheim (2000) situated *learning* as needing “two elements...there must be a generation of adults and one of youth, in interaction, and an influence exercised by the first on the second. It remains for us to define the nature of this influence” (p.59). The nature of western schooling—objectifying embodied souls via compulsory education—emerges upon an ever-orienting concrescence of *social domination*, comprised of “personality variables” and “social attitudes” (e.g. Gender, nationalism, military policy, noblesse oblige, etc.) (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) (p.742). The myth of the *modern body*, and its family’s way of knowing, tells of an ever-merciful God, who anointed dominion under a guise of divine birthright—all imagined worlds—thus, all murder, rape, and compelling of bodies into industrious, statutory systems, are thus ultimately absolved. Roland Barthes (1957) states that “myth hides nothing: its function is to distort...” and, “...there is no need of an unconscious in order to explain myth...” (p. 120).

Without an unconscious, matters are truly *at-hand*, and *progress* thus becomes imbalanced, as acts of *seeking* become uniquely instantiated as meaningful, while the credulity of *remembering/recovering* becomes suspect. This is elemental distortion—invoking eventual classes of knowledge, and the times associated with the acquisition of said knowledge—underpinning the morphology of an emerging hypothesis: Compulsion

Volition Conundrum (CVC). This hypothesis states—in syllogistic manner—if embodied (e.g. Student/scholastic) human souls are *willful* (i.e. Volatile), and ordering said *will* requires a type of *compulsion* (i.e. Striking, thrusting) upon inferred ‘body’ (i.e. Construed by schooling entity), then said *student-soul* shall (i.e. Will) emerge as meaningful/meaning-making, in both material and immaterial ways. Thus, the school dropout emerges as symbolic prototype of compulsory schooling-indicative of making some unique meaning, apart from its intended endpoint. That is, if a high-school valedictorian represents a prototype for free (i.e. Compulsory) public schooling *success*, then the high-school dropout, also represents *equal* value, as an output of a system built on *compelling* the *volition* of student-human souls to relent, conform, and abide by a social order ushered-*in* by European imperialists (e.g. Rapists, murderers), and their educational industrial complex. In Foucauldian frames, we are all complicit, so the dropout then becomes symbolic for the space held between our collective knowledge and whatever *soul* could/should exist in and around schools and schooling. The valedictorian is also within this symbolic space—the C-student, the student refugee, and each participating body compelled by the same system—reflecting our collective onto-epistemological discourse conundrum. Should any one of us be able/expected to call on another to complete a/some task? Who can escape this pickle? Transcending the body becomes the singularity, and the dropout represents this—from a body of believers; the fading bride of the dying redeemer.

Free public schools in the United States bear witness to this distortion, in real time, as students are transported from school to alternative school to detention center—loaded dice *cast* and re-cast into the annals of institutional pathways. The high-school

dropout emerges as a Saussurean sign—*denotating* the failure of *free* public schooling and its systems; its capacity to control a student’s body. The connotations of this reality are virtual assemblages of both the *school* and the *student*. That is, any inferred meaning we are able to imagine as being *significant*, with respect to the emergence of the high-school dropout as a social problem, is indicative of either the student’s or the school’s relevance to an aforementioned “constitutive grid of conditions, assumptions, forces...” (Scheurich, 1994) (p. 300). This *grid* develops over many hundreds of years. It tells a story of inherited *debt*, wherein the value of a *free* education appears as a haunt—taunting sovereign bodies to be willful—to get up from their seat, to walk out of the classroom, down the hall, and out of the building—away from the State’s compelling order. In fact, babies here are born owing, and central to a primogeniture payment plan—most specifically among poor people—is compulsory schooling. The dropout, then, becomes akin to a runaway slave, and their body—potential capital to contribute to the State’s wealth—needs to be accounted for, found, numbered, and ordered back to its proper place within the constitutive grid of social regularities.

### **Conditions, Assumptions, & Forces**

Scheurich (1994) writes, “Policy archaeology ‘tries to establish the rules of formation [of social problems and policy choices, in this case], in order to define the conditions of their realization’ (Foucault, 1972: 207). Policy archaeology tries to describe the ‘complex group of relations’ that make social problems and policy choices possible” (p.301). Prior to the emergence and naming of the high-school dropout as a common social problem, there were distant patterns of sociopolitical interest at play—humans doing things *with* and *to* one another, then free schools become moderating variables for

said “...conditions, assumptions, and forces...” (p.301). Imaging a shape for the rudiments in said *formation*, invokes thoughts of Platonic Solids—points, vectors, planes, and sacred geometrical underpinnings, thus ultimately shaping in flux—to, *through*, and *from* all things—symbols of our collective unconscious soul. These human intersections in and around schools co-create Scheurich’s (1994) “...constitutive grid...strands, traces...” of social regularity. These components do not solely, eventually, help make “visible...a social problem” (p.300), but they “establish the rules of formation” for said problem—in this case, the high-school dropout—and, indicate how certain “policy choices [become] possible” (p.301).

Emerging problems from the interplay of humans and their social systems are not “...a kind of deterministic mechanism...”, but are “...incredibly complex with uncountable macro- and micro- interactions occurring on an hourly basis” (Scheurich, 1994) (p.302). The complexity of these systems leave the individual human agents—their epistemologies and theories—inextricable from one another, and “...with their physical, social and psychological interactions make planet-sized weather systems look fairly simple” (Scheurich, 1994) (p. 302).

### **Storm Chasers**

Invoking Scheurich’s “weather” metaphor, we look back in time and space. From an information age vantage point, just over the ridges of some blurred, mountainous perimeter, we can see clouds of *social-domination* orienting—building, darkening, rumbling low over many hundreds of years—*brontide* reverberations, symbolic thunderclaps, intergenerational downpours, and a flooding of the land with ideologies, typologies, and systems of control. Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle (1994) frame

this thought as "...individuals and institutions [who] reinforce each other's hierarchy-enhancing tendencies, which we believe makes their discriminatory behaviors powerful, and difficult to change." (p.758). Further, "...the confluence of this individual-difference variable and a number of social factors including lack of common identity, high in-group status, and social role, contributes to the oppression of social groups" (p. 758). These incoming formations represent the brutal European conquest of the Americas, with puritanical religious concepts cum compulsory education frameworks in their modernizing toolkit.

Chief among the brutal ideologies borne by the invaders, was a Puritanical code, that said parents had a "moral obligation to educate their children and apprentices...Failure to do so was seen as a serious threat to the moral and economic well-being of the commonwealth" (Katz, 1976) (p. 11). Of course, this thought was held for the good of the Puritan colonists' children alone. The "in-group status" mentioned above, emerges here in practice, "...too many parent and masters were neglecting their child-rearing responsibilities, the Puritan elders on June 14, 1642, passed what might be viewed as the first compulsory education law in American History, transforming a moral obligation into a legal one" (Katz, 1976) (p. 11). It is important to note here, *compulsory schooling*, as a concept of state control, is genetic to European Christians, the British Empire, and the deep, theological compulsions within their blue-blood bodies. The thought is that children should be brought up to read the bible, obey civil authority, and perhaps aspire to leadership.

The metaphoric concept held, still, with respect to a modern compulsory public schooling model in the United States, frames the *source* of morality in parents, as

epigenetic fastidiousness—implementing discipline and rigor around master-pupil, domination behaviors with their children. The *target* of this metaphor, then, becomes those same parents’ aforementioned genetic obligations, as *quenched* within some implied, sanctified bosom of the almighty State (i.e. God). Parents, families, communities were/are urged to relent a supposed sovereignty unto the trust of their God—the Father, State, flag, songs, holidays, codes, and *Selectmen*—the strict, austere walls of the pastor (church), and the master (school). The conceptual metaphor is Nation is A Family (Lakoff, 2006). Yet, some of us are perpetual children. Thus, at the heart of this shared, western-white concept of sociopolitical participation, is a European Conquering Family’s (ECF) hatred of the Sun—a fight against a dying solar God; a conceptual framework which birthed agricultural reality—sovereignty, property, domination, and the emerging European global control—queer relations between Germanic tribes and the seasons, ancient peoples, and systems of society. The solar God is just about dead, and so are his systems of time. This fight against time—the past—and an inherent want for control of space, flora, fauna, and all non-white humans, still permeates our modern day free public school systems, and the children therein.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental economic organization, “with 36 member countries”, functions to coordinate European/White bodies in all parts of the world. These member countries have all sprung from European conquest—one country or another—wherein “...it is necessary in order to achieve the greatest good for individual and community to organize and control the education of the young through the creation of a primary societal institution...attendance at this institution has then to be compulsory so as to safeguard the

right of every child to education.” (OECD, 1983) (p.10). Here, the dropout emerges always already, as the perpetual child in need of a father, a cane to the nape, and perhaps a cage fit to temper her back into order.

Deffensbaugh & Keesecker (1935) frame compulsory schooling in the United States as “attendance laws...to abolish illiteracy” (p.57). With the growth of empire, and the increased controlling of bodies in and around schools, economic progress provided deeper context for an eventual school *dropout* to emerge. The concept grew out of punitive ecclesiastical cultures based in good and evil, *Inness* and *Outness*. This age of conception—approximately since the Fall of Grenada (1492) up to the end of the U.S. Civil War (1865)—was the lead-up to specific social “Conditions in Europe...population explosion and a resulting shortage of cultivable land, national rivalries, persecution of minorities...underlying them all, and coloring and shaping them in ways such that a reasonable man might be persuaded to invest capital and even the lives of his family in Neo-European adventures...” (Crosby, 1986) (p.5). These modern narratives become, mostly, white history framed as European pre-conquest—rationales for the eventual agricultural cum industrial cum informational rape of all spaces and bodies, real and imagined. Northend (1844) used agricultural pragmatism as a frame for interpreting the compulsory public school model, “...in the nursery, they should be watched and cultivated with the greatest of care, that they may become fit subjects for transplantation. If allowed, in the nursery, from an overgrowth of weeds and thorns to become crooked and stunted, they will probably always continue so, or become ill-shaped and worthless trees.” (p. 18).

The writer goes on to then reframe the school as holy sanctuary, where, "...if they are withheld, or grudgingly rendered, they must continue, as in many cases they have continued, necessary evils, or places in which habits are formed which must be subsequently eradicated..." (p. 19). Here we see, exemplified in print, the free, U.S. public grammar school as *sanctuary*—a garden of sorts, but also a quasi-holy place— with solar symbols subsuming the entire trope. Students are soil and lessons are seeds— some seeds fall to the hot earth and burn, some are picked-swallowed by birds, and others germinate, grow, and produce fruits. However, in the New World—the story of the United States, specifically—said seeds are memes of empire, rape and murder—the last impotent drips from His white lips.

The best student is the self-compelled learner. This student may not fit perfectly into a school system, building, room, seat, or curriculum, but if they can train their body to attend school, success seems imminent. Deffensbaugh & Keesecker (1935) state that "...nonattendance and illiteracy keep rather close company...", and that "less rigid and definite laws also manifested an unusually high rate of nonattendance and illiteracy among native white population between 10 and 20 years of age" (p.58). The authors also go on to capture those students with picaresque proclivities, and how compulsory models, yet, still fail, "...secondary school teachers and principals complaining about certain pupils whom they describe in the most opprobrious terms—pupils who come into their institutions as a result of compulsory school attendance laws but are unable to do the work required...pupils decried as impossible...they are uninterested, that they disrupt the school, and that they render impossible the maintenance of standards of scholarship" (Deffensbaugh & Keesecker 1935) (p.64).

The Compulsion Volition Conundrum (CVC), thus, is metonymic with the ECF epigenetic pedagogy cum sociopolitical systems alignment, which was born from their fight against the Sun/Solar deity. That is, Chosen People, Western Progress, Manifest Destiny, and Make America Great Again rhetoric and policy, result in local, public school systems that compel, expel, and traditionally kill children. The bodies of children take on a similar, modern, color-classing system that affects the bodies of adults too. The white male body is the most valued, with an orphaned white male body being more valuable than an illegitimate one. The orphaned child is more valued than the illegitimate child, likely due to an inferred narrative around the unknown origins of the same child. There is an obvious puritanical perspective—ashamed of sex and sexuality—that frames the conception of all children as being either sinful or not, anointed of God or not. Said puritanical paradigm, also required colonialists to value the orphan over the illegitimate child—the widow over the harlot—and the illegitimate body may possibly host the DNA of a parent with indigenous and/or African genes. This unknowing allows the dominating, Christian imperialist to do what they whilst upon the illegitimate body.

This allowance was not distributed equally among the bodies of all children. In an empire-building sense, the brown and black bodies of male children were valued higher than the white bodies of female children, in that the master dominators could more readily and forcibly compel the brown/black male bodies into the fields, the factories, and eventually schooling pathways that lead right back to said factories, fields, and emerging systems of jails and prisons—castes for the subjects, the children, of the collective *ECF's* soul—virtual spaces for the gradual indoctrination of the family, and punitive State interventions of the, once, autonomous *student's* soul.

With the growth of public schools, the bodies of all children would simply be compelled into different places and spaces of training and education. Whereas, for the three-hundred years leading up to a nationwide adoption of compulsory education laws, children were afforded more embodied liberty, or at least their parents were.

(Deffensbaugh & Keesecker 1935) write “Before compulsory attendance laws were enacted or strictly enforced a parent was entirely at liberty to keep his child out of school for as long a time as he might choose without it being necessary for him to give a reason for the child’s absence” (p.63).

A question emerges here, why might any given parent choose to keep their child out of school? In a 21<sup>st</sup> Century context, that rationale could include abuse, bullying, gun violence, drug dogs, students being tracked into specific pathways, or any number of reasons. What about the poor parent—working endlessly to merely subsist, in a post-Keynesian economic landscape, where Presidential cabinets, now, openly mock, and rob the American public—who realizes no significant return on her investments, fleshly or otherwise? What about her? Anyon (2005) shows how the American “...bank panic of 1907...led to the establishment of the Federal Reserve System in 1913...to the 1929 crash...the financialization that has taken hold of the U.S. economy since 1980...its intricate and arcane technologies and its global interconnectedness” (p.21). This framing for an eventual neoliberal value paradigm in schools and teachers, leaders and systems—students and families, allows a Clinton-Bush-Obama-Trump storm system to instrument a fog of school finance, and thus steal our supposed sovereignty, before any of our children enter a compulsory, full-day pre-K pipeline. For the poor families now compelled by the

State to send their children to full-day pre-K, who will pay, and who will bear which costs?

Compulsory attendance laws “established two prerogatives of the state: the right to lay down minimal standard for the education of children; and the right to compel the establishment of two minimal educational provisions—teachers and schools.” (Katz, 1976)(p.13). This statutory ecclesia—divine parenting—does not ask families to willfully transcend their respective moral obligation (soulical push) unto their legal one (fleshly pull), rather it suggests, *Like it or not, this is what is happening*. That is, the Government as Strict Father God concept, is omnipresent, and children would be removed from their homes, placed into schools—public systems for the greater good of society—the intrusive, abusive family tree we are all hanging from. Deffensbaugh & Keesecker (1935) write, “...the State had insisted upon children in one trade being educated, it was impossible that to them should remain confined a benefit equally needed by the children in all other trades; and when once children had been forced to school from working in useful employments, to let the idle unproductive children go free was an anomaly that could not endure” (p.897).

### **A Constitution**

Here, the concept of the school dropout emerges from the concrescence of almost four-hundred years of social regularities, as realized in the United States, and within a global context of white supremacy. The bodies of the children are further compounded by categorization here too, as white female students rise to a second place value behind their white brothers and fathers. Brown and black female bodies become more valuable than those of their male brothers and fathers, as the white overseers—mentioned

“teachers” in “schools”, and the administrators of those schools—still, work to keep any significant numbers of brown and black male student bodies away from white female student bodies. The brown and black female student is less threatening to the school system, and the human capital exchange, in a learning community under Betsy Devos’ watch, sees more return on investment, by compelling black and brown males toward physical, hard labor, and/or imprisonment (i.e. Slave labor). Bennet Jr. (1988) wrote about how in “...1849 Benjamin F. Roberts filed a suit in Boston on behalf of his daughter, Sarah, who had been barred from white schools” (p.171). In this case, the mechanisms of state and civic participation become tools to deconstruct an inequitable school system. Such a fight—near the storied Boston Public School, no less—becomes even more problematic as Roberts’ litigation efforts were eventually “ignored”, and were a step along the way to “...the first separate but equal legal decision” (p.171). Further irony within the championing—by professional educators—of a nation built on warfare and bloodshed, and with regard to the so-called dropout, can be found in an article written in 1892, by the Superintendent of Indianapolis schools, L.H. Jones, wherein Jones writes about the “evolution of institutional life”, and how it is the institution’s obligation to turn to the “...laggard to civilize him, if possible, to a degree which makes companionship with him possible; but if he is not sufficiently developed to be lifted into communion with his self-appointed censors, these same institutions are called upon to separate him as a criminal from his fellows” (p.104). The dropout abides.

Controlling and compelling the children of an empire, transcends the containment capacity of any one institution within the greater system. In fact, “...1825-1832, reports on child labor...found children 6 to 17 years of age working 12 or 13 hours, six days a

week. Concerned about children's health, some states passed laws between 1842 and 1867 limiting the workday for children under 12 years of age to 10 hours...under 16 were limited to 60 hours a week" (Northend, 1844) (p.222). For example, "Samuel Slater...father of American manufacturing...staffed the first factory in Pawtucket...entirely with youngsters from 7 to 12 years...[who] worked 72 to 84 hours a week" (Northend,1844) (p.222).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the nation had almost completely, collectively re-centered its framing of children as units of human capital to be invested with sociopolitical power relations, toward the greater economic good of a *were-sovereign cum liberal State* legislative, parenting models. This emergence is inextricable from the rise of industrial machinations, and the decline of a massive need for human hands in the field. Herndon & Murray (2009) state, "...we emphasize children's literacy and education, and we expect children to graduate high school. Early Americans measured success by acquisition of work skills that enabled children to perform adult labor" (p.4). Bedichek (1912) offered a similar refrain, regarding child laborers in Texas,

"The farmer, who has plowed and hoed himself into the ownership of a farm may not have the assistance of his boy in making or harvesting his crop and the good wife the help or cooperation of her daughter, until, if then, they consult the regulations prepared at Washington; and the mechanic, hard-working and fatherly, cannot allow his healthy boy of 15 to 18 to go out to work, though he may have had a common school education, nor the wife her daughter to assist in womanly and household duties without consulting some professional Government child welfare worker as to whether such labor be permitted by law!" (p.148).

Gibbons & Armentrout (1925) showed that children in Texas were missing class due to the expectations of their parents—often farmers, sharecroppers, and uneducated families of all races, “Cotton picking caused 44.6 percent of the white children and 56.7 per cent of the negro children to miss school...“Other kinds of work” caused 19.4 percent of the white children and 28.1 per cent of the negro children to be out of school...For white children nearly 62 per cent of the loss of school time was due to work, about three-fourths of which was cotton picking. For negro children 84 per cent of the loss of school time was due to work, over 80 per cent of which was cotton picking. Work affected the attendance of negro children more greatly than that of white children in spite of the fact that negro schools starts on the average about two weeks later than the white schools” (p.42). The solar God’s time is almost up, and his imprisoning, capital-building, human information extractors (i.e. Algorithmic plantations), will emerge anew from current, independent schooling systems, into memes of a new God—an eternal aeon of Big Data/Big Daddy. There is a certain amount of value added to the work on the ground by having an all subsuming cloud of data perpetually rolling in, but the nuance of a student’s lived experience is not made predictable by cute statistical analyses, nor can anyone school house control for each factor that may inhibit student success. Yet and still, the new prophet hides in the matrices of multi-regression analyses outputs—the devil is there too, as always.

Steinberg (2015) conceptualizes the manifestations of power within institutions as part of a “historical schema” with, “dispersed governmentalization...[where the] juridical recedes in the rising wake of this governmentality...mercantilism and policing are superseded by liberalism and the invisible hand of the market” (p.493). That is to say, we

are a century past Dewey's "Democracy and Education (1916), and though a utopian view of public schooling—society at large—has ran its course, a cold statistical machination is coming to prove itself as equally impotent in situating America's educational system as something provable. Henry (2000) alludes to the conflation of human institutions as symbolic, stating "...our contemporary education system is constantly under attack. When, in anxiety about the present state of the world, we turn upon the schools with even more venom than we turn on our government, we are "right" in the sense that it is in the schools that the basic binding and freeing processes that will "save" us will be established" (p.55). Studying to show one's self approved has never taken on such importance.

Ravitch (2001) points to the intersection of church, state, and schooling in U.S. history as such, "America had diverse forms of education, some of them organized by churches, others by local groups of parents...in the mid-nineteenth century, selfless and public-spirited reformers realized that the only democratic form of education was one that was entirely controlled by the state...when the public agreed with them, every state created a public school system to advance the public interest...on this rock of state control of public education, our democracy rests" (p.2).

This type of social control gives the illusion of its working at an institutional level, but individual students still bear a very real cost from the corporatization of public schooling. Yosso (2005) indicates how traditional models of schooling—most American industries—fail to embrace the various forms of "capital" that each person possesses (e.g. Cultural, linguistic, aspirational, familial, etc.)(p.78). This framework views community

cultural wealth as a progressive form of cultural capital, based in Critical Race Theory (CRT).

It is worth considering all forms of “capital” within a system of capitalism as being/becoming weaponized to some degree. This would extend to the students, their stories and possessions, the school and all of its parts, and the overlapping area between the two. Ford (2015) states that “Under capitalism, space is abstracted and mobilized as a means of production; more specifically, it becomes mobilized as a means of productive consumption” (p.5) This includes the spaces in and around public schools. The generation of new, alternative spaces for learning and exchanges of capital is at the heart of education for future generations. What will or should schools look and feel like in the future? Ford (2015) views this fight for “space” as fundamental to fixing schools, “the current standardization of education must be rooted in an analysis of the capitalist mode of production and its production of space.

The struggle over standardized testing and the common core becomes one struggle over the use of the school as form (p.790). Lastly, it is a fine time to turn unto ourselves as a privileged educator class and ask, “Are we failures?” That is, have we collectively failed the great statistician in the sky? Are we unable to build a school/system that has the capacity to educate any one person equitably? Payne & Kaba (2007) suggest that we have a “collective tendency to think simplistically about how change happens” (p.37). After about five-hundred years of educational building, testing-retesting, and destroying anything possible along the way, it may be safe to say, a ‘change’ ‘aint necessarily gonna come.

Ravitch (2001) alluded to this thought, “Market reforms have a certain appeal to some of those who are accustomed to “seeing like a state”. There is something comforting about the belief that the invisible hand of the market, as Adam Smith called it, will bring improvements through some unknown force.” (p.11). If the future of public schooling in the United States does not find a substitute system after which to model itself, and soon, then our collective future is quite predictable. One only has to look at how the hand of capitalism draws a narrative arc over time. For the most vulnerable and in-need among us, the market is a jailer and a thief. The master-slave, social domination paradigm must also die with agricultural prophecies, but how will we then view social, public space, and its expectations for democracy, and public participation? As a parent’s moral obligation was once quenched by the sanctified bosom of a State legal apparatus (e.g. Compulsory Schooling), under a new omnipresence—the dawning of the Age of Aquarius—*said* legal obligation must also now transcend, back to the cloud as it were, in a new sovereignty of the soul, but not the body. The morning star shall return to the night, and our cosmic responses will emerge as ever-connected shadows—hidden, non-conscious, embodied records transcending the flesh, into the air.

### **Policy Choices**

The framing above works to set a complex landscape of U.S. public schooling from 1918-2018, and which has come to co-create a social category called the high-school dropout. The student who just won’t/can’t stay in their seat is both symbolic and literal, but she is also made by the bricks and mortar of the building, the minds behind the curricula—the white bodies teaching and leading the systems, and their onto-epistemological baggage, intersecting in social grids that regulate the ordering of would-

be, sovereign student bodies. Applying a Policy Archaeology method, we uncover objects along this U.S. schooling system pipeline, which story in capacities to predict student outcomes—graduates, and dropouts alike. More pointedly, we try to unrest some responses to Scheurich’s (1994) queries, through a *policy archaeology* frame, “Why are the most vulnerable groups seen as a social problem and the powerful groups not seen as a problem within domain public and academic discourses? What has brought us to this circumstance? What is it about our society that has produced this monstrous result?” (p.313).

Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982) write, of Foucault’s archaeology, “As a technique, archaeology serves genealogy. As a method of isolating discourse objects, it serves to distance and defamiliarize the serious discourse of the human sciences. This, in turn, enables Foucault to raise the genealogical questions: How are these discourses used? What role do they play in society?” (p. xxi). Here, we seek to realize a genealogy of the U.S. high-school dropout—considering myriad, implied master-slave; subject-object discourse scenarios within and among the emerging, 500 year, white-supremacy story, in a Foucauldian framework, while intentionally applying Scheurich’s (1994) “...five regularities (amongst others) that are necessary to the constitution or emergence or construction of the problem of failing school children...” (p.305). Those “others” are framed here around Scheurich’s “five”, and in Arena II, “the social regularities arena” (p. 300). In building toward a genealogy, this approach is framed through Foucault (1977), as an analysis of *texts* in *discourse*, in this case the *school*—the dropout, more specifically, and their negotiation for bodily power.

The dropout's "body itself is invested by power relations". There is an "entry of the soul on the scene of [educational] systematicity", and the dropout's body becomes a "political technology...in which might be read a common history of power relations and object relations" (p.24). The high-school dropout is the unit of analysis, and here we dig down into history, in a way—*Foucauldian*, at least, yet much more than that—with archaeological methods in our toolkit, and in this case *one*, admittedly, focused on a "grid of social regularities", that is [a] "complex, difficult...somewhat mobile metaphor that requires more scrutiny" (p. 313). The temperament of this literature aligns with my approach, "loose ends and confusing contradictions..." ad infinitum.

### **Centennial**

September 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, marked the one-hundredth birthday of the U.S. High-school Dropout. As a collective, nationally recognized social problem, the concept, *dropout*, was ostensibly born on 09/01/1918 in Mississippi, as an organically *expelled* dual to a hypothetical, *successfully* compelled student. The southern states were the last to compel their working children from field and factory, and from wandering around, and doing whatever out there in the world. The original Western, modern *dropout* body, is a residual of *were*-sovereignty, via wild, white theories walking in off the horizon, with a good chin, and a strong right hand—out before sundown tones in their poetics-to their prose. This symbol, itself, a reemerging technology of an aforementioned archetype: *Surviving body*.

The body of the *survivor* is likely assumed to be that of a soldier, who was supposed to die, but did not. However, the prototypical survivor is elementally a *compelled* body—regardless of classification—professional or otherwise. That is, the

body that makes it back and somehow is able to *now* tell a story or two of how said survival was made manifest, then it does not matter the office, duty, assignment of said body, only that it *survived*. That non-conscious body *alone*—a conscious mind implied—is *the* bearer of witness. Who will bear witness in the face of compulsion? Who can face the force of an army, survive, return to their homeland, and *then* tell tales of how an external, compelling force had failed in capturing her? Somehow, she had fought off a man twice her size, outran a dog, and climbed through a jungle of prickly bushes, only to walk affront her extended family, anew, warning of terrible realities, and myriad unseen implications. Can anyone say who *should not* have survived?

If a father has two twin sons, and one lives his entire life in calm obedience of his father's every word, request, and demand. The father loved this first son. He was the light in the father's heart—the diamond in his mind. The second son was a troubled story. He never seemed able to understand the father's lessons, and consistently—year after year—made significant social blunders that ended up costing the father a lot of money and time; the episodes damaged the family's reputation a great deal. The two twin sons could not be more different. They were like the day and the night; life and death. One afternoon, the father sent his two twin sons out to run some errands on his behalf, nothing big, but enough of a task that would take the sons away from their father's home for most of the day. When the twins never returned home that night, the father became very anxious and afraid. He rose from his bed and began to pace about the home, then he saw many police lights coming up the road toward his house, and as the cars arrived and parked, the sheriff approached the door, removing his hat on his way up the steps. The sheriff informed the father that one of his sons had died in a car accident. In the father's heart and mind,

which son does he hope has survived? Whom, in your mind and heart, would be the more worthy survivor? Furthermore, how could you know if you were accurate in your assessment, or not?

### **Social Regularities**

Scheurich (1994) frames the archaeological analysis, of *text-objects*, in a Foucauldian power-discourse context, as, here, including “five regularities” (p. 305). These regularities “are gender, race, class, governmentality, and professionalization [a]...complex grid-like intersection of these five regularities (and others as yet unidentified) makes it possible for this particular problem as an ‘object’ of social visibility...” (p.305). In this analysis, I pick up on Scheurich’s (1994) “...*others* as yet unidentified...” *prod*, suggesting here, at least, my 20 more potential regularities. Further categorization and sub-categorizing is likely in order. Those twenty-five regularities—including Scheurich’s *five*—are framed below, as draft *objects* and *subjects*—within a mathematical, formal concept analysis matrix—toward creating a visibility of Scheurich’s (1994) “grid-like intersection...” (p.305). The additional twenty regularities are: *Agriculture, architecture, bloodlines, business, consciousness, economics, education, entertainment/media, hierarchy, ideology, justice, labor, military, myths, narratives, politics, prison, religion, subaltern, war*. This list also includes a co-category of “sex”, which is coupled here with gender, in a sub-function of identity as being made “visible” via a similar socio-political fetishizing—systemic paradigms underpinning emerging, radical categories for transgender/post-gendered and pro-sex minds, with or without simple, archaic/puritanical frames for young bodies. For example, a volunteer that subjected their formal concept analysis results, for this crude intersection test, between

would-be *objects* and *attributes* (Weill, 1982), within Scheurich’s (1994) “...policy discussions of [a] particular problem-policy praxis” (p. 309), helps us to make visible, perhaps, educational tendencies which point to why students drop out.

an X to signify and Attribute belonging to an Object. Non-corresponding relationships are left blank.

Attributes	Class	Consciousness	Gender	Hierarchy	Ideology	Justice	Professional- ization	Sex	Subaltern	TOTALS
OBJECTS										
AGRICULTURE	X		X	X			X		X	5
ARCHITECTURE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	8
BLOODLINES	X	X		X			X		X	6
BUSINESS	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	8
ECONOMY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
EDUCATION	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	8
ENTERTAINMENT/MEDIA	X		X		X			X	X	5
LABOR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
MILITARY	X		X	X	X		X		X	6
MYTHS		X	X	X	X	X		X		6
NARRATIVES		X	X		X					3
POLITICS	X	X	X	X	X		X			6
PRISON	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
RACE	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	8
RELIGION	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		7
WAR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			7
TOTALS	14	13	15	14	13	10	11	8	11	

Figure 10. Draft of formal concept analysis of grid of social regularities

The additional *nineteen regularities* (Figure 10) come from two sources. The first source is my *a priori* ideating around this “dropout” topic, before having been made aware of Scheurich’s (1994) policy archaeology method. These *a priori* constructions became *agriculture, architecture, bloodlines, military, myths, prison, consciousness, hierarchy, ideology, justice, and subaltern.*

Another group of social regularities is framed after the counter-racism scholarship of Fuller Jr. (1984), where he states that under a global, systemic control of racism/white supremacy, we should analyze things through “Nine Major Areas of [People] Activity”. Those “nine” are *economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex, and war/counter war.* Including Fuller Jr.’s (1984) nine, minus ‘sex’ as it is collapsed here with gender, aligning with Fuller Jr.’s intent to mean a disparity in this manner, my own eleven, and Scheurich’s (1994) five, we arrive at twenty-four possible intersecting vectors—bearing semblances of some human capital—items of text from a post-post-modern sociopolitical junkyards.

In the most literal of narrative lines, the rise of big agriculture, before the U.S. Civil War, and after, contextualized some, supposed intergenerational push-pull concept, whereas privileged flesh was made ways out from the fields, of the factories, and into the comfort of schools modeled after sanctuaries. The spectral shift of student body values, came after compulsory schooling, whereas with physical—Sun based labor activities and tasks—demands, the privileged, few ECF offspring would afford better advantages inside, out of the sun, and in dealing with privileged, hierarchical systems of teaching and learning. The bloody fields of empire come rushing indoors, after the turn of the twentieth century, and in novel, organic non-conscious manifestations of ECF code-switching, predictive statistics emerge as standards toward measuring the controlled environments for testing, away from the freer, more qualitative systems for measuring student success, in the past.

The U.S. Empire, as borne through free public schools from 1918-2018, functions as a social-ordering mechanism via the aforementioned 25 social regularities, and invests the bodies of students as socially complex bodies, in politically complex environments. Counter-racist narratives are elemental to the emergence of a genealogy of the high-school dropout. A question of what is human, who is human, and who shall decide such things, helps constitute a “bloody heirloom” of Western empire in every intersected time and/or space, as considered through said social regularities. Within this system of myriad sociopolitical patterning—made real through willful humans, waging their own resistances against some outside, compelling force—will one day emerge as myriad solutions to their dualized social “problems”, once conceived by similar weird-weather in-

comings, at once predictable in their similarity to past patterns, yet newly queer beyond a given capacity for conception in 21<sup>st</sup> century, U.S. public schools.

### **Arena 3: The policy solution arena**

#### **Empire Abides**

Scheurich (1994) states that policy archaeology suggests a “range of policy choices will accord with the grid of regularities”, and that any proposed solutions for a given social problem “which contradict or question...do not emerge or...do not achieve any credibility among the governmental and policy...gatekeepers” (p.310). Thus, we are made privy to an inner voice for said gatekeepers that regresses upon its own self in megalomaniacal strategies for social order and control. A persona for public schools and schooling that is *now* a conqueror-*now* a missionary-*now* a hero-*now* a victim. The free, U.S. public grammar school was created out of a nationalistic identity crisis. The European *settlers* dealt in discipline and punishment, rape and murder. Their schools, still, produce derivatives of this violent framework, with dropouts and high-risk students being located, detained, and punished toward the greater good of society.

Scheurich (1994) uses the example of “linked school services” as being prototypical of how post-positivist symbolism bears professionalized public value in U.S. education, but it does not solve problems around low-income students transitioning from school to school. He states, “If present social, health and schooling services have to date not been able significantly to solve this large social problem, it is difficult to believe that linking them together would seriously impact major restructuring of social, health and schooling services...” and, points to how “the smallness of the policy solution in relation to the largeness of the problem, again, highlights the performance nature of this policy

solution” (p.310). This is the post-positivist “performance” solving social problems with public policy. If we think about this frame as applied to the “social problem” of the high-school dropout, then a prototypical signifier would be a policy solution that bears the same compulsory cum exclusionary and punitive approach to conforming the student’s body and mind to be “patriotic and law-abiding” (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 1924)(510-526).

In this arena, the policy solutions come to re-erect the regularities, which provided it a function to emerge in the first place. Well-meaning white voters who vote for school finances to be allocated in their desired directions—perhaps to solve some kind of social problem—are instantiating the very systems which originally created the said social problem. It is important to note that the topic and, one might say, social intervention of compulsory schooling, varies from state to state, and place to place. Tyack (1976) wrote that it “lends itself to sharply different valuation” (p.356), and that a key component in that variance was “teacher-administration resistance to...the mandate that teachers educate exceptional pupils, be they truants, mentally slow or culturally different” (p. 70). Broad-sweeping legislation like compulsory schooling mandates allowed some school systems to flatten in a way, in such that white teachers who were used to instructing white students in ease of thought, and peace of mind, would now have to differentiate their approach, and perhaps look at their own hearts and minds in the process.

Richardson (1980) wrote that the “essential link to implementation of compulsory school attendance [is] the role of public school teachers” (p. 159). He shows how teachers organizing into associations “represented a significant change in the political orientation of teachers, from local concerns to state and national ones”, and a “distinction

between locals and cosmopolitans” [establishing] “...teachers as a cosmopolitan influence” (p.160). Furthermore, this self-organizing by the teachers was “one factor behind the movement to standardize school curricula” (p. 160), and this advocacy by teachers “at the state level became the necessary link between the objective conditions favoring compulsory schooling and the legislative process implementing the law” (p. 160). As we look back in the history of U.S. public schooling, it is the teacher who informs the headmaster, who informs the superintendent, who initiates a requisite punishment for a truant student. The teacher—sanctified symbol of Columbia’s goodness—learned by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that if the schoolhouse itself would survive Reconstruction and continue to be the instrument with which white purity would be honed, she must organize. The codification of quality teacher training and implementation was in reaction to free African descendants and huge numbers of immigrants “who brought with them strange languages, strange customs, and, most of all, strange religions” (Carter, 1997) (p.1197). By 1918, all fifty states, and the District of Columbia had implemented compulsory schooling policies, ostensibly creating a legal space for any given student to, perhaps, become not compelled by such mandates, and who then finds their self in violation of said policy. Here, we look at a five other states and some of their compulsory schooling criteria.

Table 4

*Sample of Compulsory School Laws by State*

<b>State</b>	<b>Year of Policy</b>	<b>Compulsory Ages</b>	<b>Minimum Attendance Required</b>	<b>Min. Ed. to obtain Labor Permit</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	1915	7-16	Full term	8 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>D.C.</b>	1864	7-16	Full term	8 <sup>th</sup> grade (if under 16)
<b>Louisiana</b>	1910	7-14	140 days	None mentioned
<b>New Mexico</b>	1872	6-17	Full term	None mentioned
<b>New York</b>	1874	7-16	Full term	8 <sup>th</sup> grade (if 14); 6 <sup>th</sup> (if 15 or older)

Attendance provisions by states. Deffensbaugh & Keesecker (1935) (pp. 65-96)

**Relocating the Dropout**

By the time that WWII concludes, the U.S. public high school, with its credentialing power and its efficiency in numbering, controlling, and ordering students is an industrial complex, “with the mission of socializing a growing proportion of teenagers.

This shifted the focus of secondary education from the question of democratic support to that of utilitarian purpose” (Dorn, 1996) (p.39). Considering a country grown rich off free labor, and powerful from global dominance through warfare, who if the mere high-school dropout now? What value does this figure represent for the country and its commitment to educate its children? It is important to note that leading up to the 1960’s, the stage has been set for the student who is conceptually *Out*. This same student is also perpetually *Out*. This is primarily the non-white student.

This may seem counterintuitive to the trained post-positivist, who might think, *It is the work—the scores, grades, and failure to master content which determine the dropout!* However, if we peel back letter grades, and even the grade point systems of averaging a determination of success or failure, and we look at the systems of schooling—how they are structured and designed for the success of white students, then perhaps we can edge toward equity. Dorn (1996) writes, “Battles over school desegregation affected the dropout debate...in two significant ways”, in that the same state-funded offices that built a bureaucratic “wall around the issue of race” were the same “structures responsible for dropout programs” (p. 100). He goes on to state that a kind of “siege mentality of school districts, when faced with demands for desegregation, contributed to the rigidity of and limitations on dropout programs” (Dorn, 1996) (p.101). It is not too hard to imagine how a school administrator might allocate funds to one program versus another, one group of students versus some other group.

### **Examination and Standardization**

The constitutive grid that undergirds the policy choices that create any given social problem can often be the same that attempts to solve said problem. It takes,

perhaps, a radical force from outside of that system of social regularities to provide a real solution. For instance, the systems within a school which help to create categories of competence and mastery, are at once establishing categories for the incompetent and the failed. Stray (2005) shows how the emergence of student grading and ranking systems began in Anglican Universities, where examinations became “purely cognitive assessments of individuals”, and a “rigorous marking system...took place in the home of Newtonian mechanical materialism” (pp. 108-109), and helped to shape how a student could be viewed as either in or out. The genetic beginnings of standardized testing emerge there, in Oxford and Cambridge Universities, from the late eighteenth century on. The thought was framed as “fairness [of] the individual”, wherein educational leaders saw that “the only fair procedure in comparing candidates was to give them all the same questions” (Stray, 2005) (p. 103).

Not too far removed from oral, outdoor, and group settings, the scholastic examination became more standardized in all aspects of its input and output. Standardizing the experience for massive increases in the “sheer numbers of students” becoming literate, and pursuing a higher education called for a more efficient, predictive model for testing content knowledge. Though these approaches seem to be providing opportunities for more students, perhaps especially as they are conceived in eighteenth century Europe, they are equally providing limits on the number of students who can receive an allowable value of any given alphanumeric rank.

This manner of rating student achievement and ranking students in schooling systems, helped to justify the exclusionary practices and traditions already in place. With clear alphanumeric touchpoints to measure any given student’s development in any given

system, a space emerges to design and predict outcomes for students. Hoskin & Macve (1986) write about how the student ranking systems that emerged out of England were deemed successful because they established “a monopoly over competence by taking over the written, graded examination with its power to control entry, set standards and simultaneously validate the status of those who passed” (p.133). Such validation became systematically quantified with the rise of computational technology in the 1960’s and beyond, when the United States saw its largest swell of secondary students (i.e. Potential dropouts).

The professionalization in and around schools, as an obvious intersection of highly-funded, governmentalized education strategies, emerges as a response to sociopolitical pressure to educate more children, which necessarily require the standardization of testing measures for student competency and success. From the student body pulling outward—from the state policy-making machine, the school environment, culture, and climate pushing in—the chair, desk, writing instrument, recording device, room, and building all become standardized in a way that is controlled, predictive, and continuously experimental. Stray (2005) shares a capturing of this thought, from an anonymous “commentator” in the Cambridge Review (1910),

“By the twitching of the shoulders and the responsive creak of chairs you may divine the intense mental concentration that surrounds you. An athlete frowns dreadfully...A black man lolls a purplish tongue...A red-haired youth is staring intently at a vacant wall...Somewhere else a nervous cough” (p.97).

Given an elaborate scene as such, it may seem easy to imagine one student who simply cannot take it. He knows he will not pass the test. She is sure that because she will

fail the test, her grade-point average will *drop* her out of contention for, *some* thing. There is another student who will not have any of it—the curriculum is too narrow and the culture too strict. This student does not show up to face standardization, and thus, is out. A compulsory framework for social participation, in this case, is a high-level political tactic to organize *free* people, and to predict their movement in and around public space. Watson & Hemmer (2015) suggest that a compulsory schooling model fails because it is set up to punish the student for not attending, and that an “alternative attendance policy” would have more “flexibility” in attendance “accounting procedures” (p.4). The authors further justify the compulsory schooling model’s culture and environment conjure a kind of “stigma” in the classroom, where students face “boredom” and are prevented from “enrolling in alternative schools” (p.5). For the flattened, standardized education experience, otherness and outsiders become more visible, more significant. What value should be assigned to any given student body? There was once a time when a student had more space to express their oral testimony, something of their lived experience perhaps. However, in a hyper-technical and controlled schooling environment, variation from the norm holds little value, if one cannot pass the State’s testing protocols.

The symbolism inherent to post-positivist policy solutions, aiming to remedy an educational pipeline, now, funded as according to enrollment and attendance rates, and scores on standardized tests. This high-stakes culture seems to only want to call on more government intervention and accountability measures in order to keep the school in business, and the personnel employed. Scheurich’s (1994) governmentality and professionalization, in considering federal and state legislation to standardize the

compulsory experience, emerge ubiquitous around all areas of education. For instance, the 2001 federal legislation, No Child Left Behind, symbolically sought to oversee public schooling from a new, high standard, expanding “the role of the federal government in elementary and secondary education” and, “to bring greater accountability for student achievement [since] the 1994 reauthorization [Improve America’s Schools Act] of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Shaul & Ganson, 2018) (p. 151). We can trace those federal interventions—aimed at compelling the most student bodies possible, in the most strategically designed way—to *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954), and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), and perhaps *Dred Scot v. Sandford* (1857). Looking closely, we see how the evolving grid of social regularities moves in and out with time, and governmentality and professionalization come to land in schools, then, in strange ways around class, race, and gender. Twenty-first century, neoliberal education sees “the federal government...responding to state concerns...” and, “educators...looking for creative ways to meet the spirit of the law” (Shaul & Ganson, 2018) (p.163).

For the dropout—the student who could never find their way in—since the seventeenth century, legislation comes to, at once, save and sacrifice the student. Thomas & Brady (2018) write how in 1969—four years after ESEA—a federal audit found that “more than 15% of Title I funds had been misappropriated” and how, under the Reagan administration, “Presidential and congressional support for ESEA waned sharply...with significantly fewer educationally disadvantaged children served under the law...than in the 1970s” (p.53). This is Fine’s (1991) “Ideological Fetish 1” writ large, where “universal access defines education in the United States” and where “we find dreadful

discrepancies that fall along the contours of social class, race, and ethnicity, and gender” (p. 181). The dropout is here.

#### **Arena 4: The policy studies arena**

Scheurich (1994) admits that he may have “alienated policy analysts and drawn a forbidding characterization of a monstrosity called the grid of social regularities” (p.312). Perhaps such a “monstrosity” is needed, to define and/or deconstruct a strict-father government figure, who has a history of treating the child/student as a “mere creature of the State” (Carter, 1997) (p.1202). Within a post-positivist, big Data onto-epistemological paradigm, the high-school dropout is the creature who could not be domesticated, and their very escape from the order of the school, implicates the State and its ability to fulfill the office of sovereign master—divinely appointed ruler of the world, and everything in it.

Scheurich (1994) states that “policy analysts count, label and describe problems and problem groups; they are, thus, key in the construction of such problems and groups; and because of their ‘expertise’, they legitimize these constructions” (p.311). For those analysts, leaders, educators, academics, and activists who do not “question the social order” (p.311), their efforts then become suspect, and perhaps outright complicit in the co-creation of some students and their experiences as being more valuable than others are. The high school dropout, the truant student, the kid who has every obstacle in front of him – crimes, especially violent ones, on campus are another issue altogether – and even the top-ranked student, can come to be viewed and respected as an organic manifestation of the respective institution—a necessary technology, bearing witness of its maker—public schooling organism. Thus, policy studies serve a social function in

deepening the virtual runs of social regularities—those small “p” policy changes in day-to-day human practices which lead to and big “P” institutionalized policy changes, reinforcing an onto-epistemological status-quo. In our case, the Manifest Destiny narrative has yet to cease, and within that frame are embedded all genetic beginnings of race, racism, and human capital underpinnings and interplay as such. In 2019, conversations stay centered on a lack of success among brown and black male students, and the data substantiated this story, thus, help to freeze racial categories and their stories of failure and/or success.

The best schools in the *best*—mostly White—communities do not need critical scholars working for said school’s political agency or democratic participation in a larger national-global narrative. Those communities do not participate in this conversation of equity and inclusion, for it is rare that the children from those *best* places are subjected to punitive policies, let alone physical detainment cum public humiliation, or private anguish in grappling with some deficit label. Contrarily, those of the best(s) have been able to cash in on their own cultural capital, what Lewis & Diamond (2015) called “whiteness as a symbolic resource...to pay off to the advantage of white students” (p.92).

Michel Foucault (1977) wrote of power in *Discipline & Punish: The birth of the prison*, whereas it can be identified in those who possess apparatuses necessary to subject human bodies to the effects of said power, and to make visible “the means of coercion” on those same bodies. Foucault ultimately shows how this type of hierarchical power is socially complex, with many different variables affecting the intersections of influence on any given situation or person. He also recognizes those nameless bodies as politically charged, whose physical bodies come to be central in a discussion about human capital

and state discipline.. Looking at public education, we work to identify and problematize a common process or matrix that explains the country's processing of more than 1.5 million dropouts each year, in whom are disproportionately represented poor, minority students, and those with disabilities (Barrett, Katsiyannis, Zhang & Zhang, 2014; Cole & Vasquez-Heilig, 2011).

According to the U.S. DOE's National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), high schools tend to graduate, on average, about 80% of their students, and see about 6.5% drop out of school. Inherent to the public policy function, in considering power dynamics between individuals and groups, is an epistemologico-judicial mother brain, birthing replicated policy after policy, which may scrutinize school success to repressive ends. Foucault's "coercion" is at play—moving students through the grades, the bills through the annals of legislature. The professionalized policy analysts, whose own professional justification is borne by the same constitutive grid of social regularities. Scheurich (1994) writes of policy studies, that it is "but one governmental apparatus that produces grid-congruent problems, problem groups and policy solutions...they are, thus, key in the construction of such problems and groups" (p.311). He goes on to write that "Post-positivist policy analysts, in general, think they see policy somewhat differently than conventional policy analysts..." but, "both conventional and post positivist studies, then, are a key facet of the social construction of problems, problem groups and the narrowly constrained range of policy solutions" (p.311).

## **1962**

We will follow Dorn's (1996) lead, and place the official, national naming of the high-school dropout as a social problem made visible, in 1962, following the National

Education Association's (NEA) "Project on School Dropouts". The approach taken by the NEA—the largest labor union and professional interest group in the United States—fits neatly into Scheurich's (1994) frame for post positivist political efforts, as functionally providing "a definition of correct, productive behavior to citizens who are already acting in concert with the social order" (p.312). Richardson (1980) alluded to this thought that the dropout is legitimized as a perpetual problem, through the normalized organizing of educator labor unions, and the professionalized discipline measures implemented in and around schools.

An elemental concept complicit to the deep-freezing of the U.S. high-school dropout as a constant social problem is the 1979 Department of Education Organization Act, which established the DOE as the national overseer of compulsory education, and all of its intricate, arcane machinations. This act enable the DOE to "protect the rights of State and local governments and public and private educational institutions in the areas of educational policies and administration of programs and institutions over their own educational programs and policies" (Department of Education, 1979). Furthermore, with the election of Ronald Reagan, and a "new federalism...transferring more power and financial responsibility from the national government to the states" (Smart, 1985) (p.1), the privatization-professionalization of public education was rolled-out. Reagan extended a "politicization of education policy...[by] his systematic...sacking...of most of the Carter appointed members [of the DOE]" (p. 22), which ushered in a new public policy connotation of deregulated, highly-political funding choices, that no longer looked to provide for the individual student, but for the individual corporation.

The punitive, privatization that conceptualizes U.S. free, public schooling from, say, 1988-2018, builds upon the genetic beginnings of isolating the student due to the restrictions of a written exam—born from masses of children looking to be educated, compelled or not. The personnel who have historically constituted educators, responded by organizing their selves to negotiate with the State—the Strict Father—to provide pathways, tracks, and choices for students and their parents. For example, a 1991 amendment to the National Literacy Act, under Bush I, states a “revised...discretionary grant program for literacy for incarcerated individuals by removing the program...and adding a life skills training program” (Irwin, 1991) (p. 27). The standardized test, then, becomes a way of schooling, and a culture of anxiety. The concept of sovereignty becomes, under privatizing, commoditized war-mongers who sign off on education policies students with see-through backpacks, escape tactics, and high-stakes measures of their worth to the nation—their value-add to the Family. The chief function of policy studies within and around the U.S. education industrial complex is the psychoanalysis of an unknowable State-Parent consciousness. Students and school improvement are but witnesses and technologies of the empire’s nurseries (i.e. Schools).

## VII. FINDINGS

### Conceptual

#### In/Out Dimensionality

In considering a genealogy of the U.S. high-school dropout over the past one-hundred years, we find that concepts of Inness and Outness are pervasive, ubiquitous, and applicable to all preliminary categories for Scheurich's (1994) 'constitutive grid' of 'social regularities'. This dual frame for considering what or who can be categorized as being *In* vs *Out*, applies to people, groups, institutions, large bureaucratic, governmental systems, and in the ways we talk and act around any given topic or category. When we look at the individual, and in this case the dropout, we bear witness to a kind of interiority—born out of reflexive work that responds to lived experience; worlds unseen by outsiders—compared to exteriority, problematizing assumptions made in society—in this case, in education. This dimensionality is best represented, perhaps, by the words, grammar, and language carrying forward the narrative of the dropout. That is to say, English prepositions are inherently physio-spatial, both conceptual and material at once. Therefore, a concept of "In", automatically invokes the concept of a container—three dimensionality, and subjects being contained therein. The dropout—once outside of the school system—establishes a new form of *Inness*, of which the school system is, perhaps, on the outside. This duality plays out in the naming subjecting, and objectifying of the student body, in thought, language, action, and here in research.

Foucault's (1970) discourse analysis—in combination with policy archaeology, toward a genealogy—bears the In/Out duality through and through, where the "body is invested by power relations", and where there is "an entry to the soul", in this case "on

the scene” of educational systematicity (p.24). Foucault’s concern with power is inherently dualistic—more ouroboros than yin/yon—and the processes have “an immediate hold upon [the body]; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault, 1978) (p.25). Toward a genealogy of the U.S. high-school dropout, we might consider the subject as falling from the forced march (i.e. Compulsory schooling). The march here is held as a conceptual framework for a continuum of legitimacy-to-illegitimacy for the bodies of students, under the watch of local, state, and federal governments.

### **Nation as Family Metaphor**

George Lakoff (1995) wrote that the “Nation-as-Family metaphor...turns family-based morality into political morality, providing the link between...family values and...political policies” (p.195). He goes on to show how in the United States, the government are the parents, and the citizens are the children. In that, the parenting paradigm that has prevailed is a “Strict Father Model...with the father having primary responsibility for the well-being of the household...for setting overall family policy” (p. 191). In a public schooling context, this framework views children as immoral, and in need of discipline. A student who is, then, able to discipline their self and advance on their own, without having to beg, cry, or ask for help, is viewed as moral—capable of aspiring to leadership and higher-education. The student who somehow can’t get it right—who can’t discipline their body to sit still long enough amid “the responsive creak of chairs...the intense mental concentration that surrounds” (Anonymous, 1910), they, then, are deemed undisciplined, thus immoral and they “deserve their poverty” (Lakoff, 2001).

In a Strict Father, Nation as Family schooling context, the dropout is the runaway child, the disowned child, the bastard child, the illegitimate child, and/or the orphaned child. This thread could continue further, if we wished. Considering an analysis with Scheurich's (1994) policy archaeology, where a "constitutive grid" of social regularities assemble to frame public policy around the values of different human bodies. Herndon & Murray (2009) show how capital values were assigned to children according to race and gender, "White boys were usually promised the most literacy...girls generally were promised less literacy training", and that the "disparity was emphasized by race...boys of color sometimes were promised more literacy and skill training than white girls, but...less than white boys", and that "girls of color benefited the least from the system, exiting indenture with the least literacy training and fewest work skills...binding out became increasingly associated with children of color"(p.16). The same Strict Father model that compelled children into factories and farms—tracking them each and all according to the white supremacist undercurrent, heaving forward—found a balance in compelling children into schools, with similar values of perceived human capital attributed as such.

Russo & Russo (2009) write, with regard to the value assigned to dropouts—bastards and illegitimate children—that, "Male orphan children comprised the group most likely to be taught reading and writing in addition to learning a skill" and, "illegitimate boys were comparatively disadvantaged...far fewer entered adulthood equipped with even a modest degree of education" (p.163). The authors frame the experience of 18<sup>th</sup> century, female child-laborers, stating "For girls, legitimacy had less of an impact...society considered routine field labor suitable only for black and mulatto

women, white female children... whether legitimate or illegitimate... tended to receive the education that... prepared [them] to be housewives, or, failing marriage, to be housekeepers or domestic servants”(p.163).

The high-school dropout, as some kind of “illegitimate child” of the United States, is filtered as such through the public schooling institution, which assigns symbolic values of human capital and potential to all students. Compulsory schooling mandates rearranged the order of these embodied values by virtue of the schoolhouse’s very *Inness*. That is, white boys and girls would be seated at the head of the class, and if they had to be seated next to non-white bodies, they should be female. Thus, the symbolic, embodied capital value held by brown and black boys fell to the back of the classroom with compulsory schooling, receiving the least amount of investment from the school and the State.

### **Social Regularities Problematic**

In the spirit of academic discourse, I will respond to Scheurich’s (1994) *alienation* of “policy analysts... [from having] drawn a forbidding characterization of a monstrosity called the grid of social regularities” (p.312). Although I am not a trained analyst, I find the “constitutive grid” to be a useful framework for working through the emergence of social problems. I also have responded to Scheurich’s (1994) implication of more ‘regularities’ beyond his identified “five – race, gender, class, governmentality and professionalization”, in that he states his “are but five” and, “are not the only social regularities operant in the contemporary world” (p.307). Thus, here I attempt to organize some of the microsystems within Scheurich’s (1994) ‘constitutive grid’, in attempt to ‘make visible’ the grid itself. Here, the five regularities are joined by 18 other regular

concepts and/or objects, equaling twenty-three. These social regularities are framed as the elemental forces hidden within the living public, and private discourse. In a Foucauldian discourse analysis, each of these regularities is categorized as bearing one of two deep processes of power: *Connaissance* or *Savoir*. In a simple way, both words have to do with *knowledge*, or *knowing*.

- *Connaissance* refers to how you *know*, say, an enemy, and all of the implications of power in processing through that relationship.
- *Savoir* refers to how you *know*, say, gun repair, and all of the implications of power in those processes.

An amalgam of the social regularities is parsed out with regard to *connaissance* and *savoir* in Table 5. These two categories for *knowing-power* are ever-present, and inextricably wound in every facet of socio-political activity. The processes of intersecting knowledge streams generate power, inside and outside of these regularities, and thus constitute *discourse*.

The enemy and the gun are but examples *text*, similar to, say, a student, his books, the teacher and her lesson plan, or the school and its curriculum. These are all examples of text, which when engaged, are exemplifying Foucault's *discourse*. The texts substantiate domains for knowledge, and thus *power* generates when said *texts* intersect, as "complex social systems" (Scheurich, 1994) (p.302).

Table 5.

*Knowledge-power analysis of regularities*

	<b>Connaisance</b>	<b>Savoir</b>
	Race	Agriculture
	Religion	Entertainment
	Subaltern	Education
	Architecture	
	Prison	
<b>OBJECT</b>	War	
	Military	
	Labor	
	Bloodlines	
	Gender	
	Ideology	
<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>		
	Power	Justice
	Class	Spirituality
	Hierarchy	Consciousness
	Governmentality	Myths
		Politics
		Economics
		Professionalization

A Formal Concept Analysis (FCA) (Ganter, Stumme, and Wille, 1982) method of sorting through lists of similar concepts, objects, qualities, and attributes, will be applied to consider Scheurich's (1994) 'constitutive grid'. FCA will help us visualize the streams of knowledge-power regularities, make them visible, and perhaps identify thematic patterns in responses. This method is used to examine our Concept: Dropping out of school. In using FCA, we consider Objects as extensions of the Concept (the social problem). They "belong" to the Concept. Attributes are the properties that give the Objects meaning. They describe (or not!) the Object. For instance, if Class were an attribute of Objects like, say, education, politics, or the economy, then that would signify that Class helps to give education, politics, and the economy meaning. Scoring these connections is binary. If any given item is considered an attribute of any given object, it is scored 1. If it is not an attribute, it is scored 0. For example, Figure 11 shows a proposed grid of social regularities as analyzed through Formal Concept Analysis. In considering the myriad intersections of objects and attributes that come to co-create the concept of a high-school dropout, each participant who completes such an analysis, must then end up with some Super Objects and Attributes. That is, the corresponding relationships between objects and attributes—*connaissance* and *savoir*—that score the highest, become Super. It may be that for any given participant who completes an FCA of social regularities, with regard to school dropouts, that Super-scored items are respective to that person, and how they experience the world.

Attributes	Class	Consciousness	Gender	Hierarchy	Ideology	Justice	Professionalization	Sex	Subaltern	TOTALS
AGRICULTURE	0	0				0	1	0	0	1
ARCHITECTURE	0	0				0	1	0	0	1
BOOKS	0	0				0	1	0	0	1
BUSINESS	0	0				0	1	0	0	1
ECONOMY	0	0				0	1	0	0	1
EDUCATION	1	0				0	1	0	0	2
ENTERTAINMENT/MEDIA	1	0				0	0	0	0	1
LABOR	0	0				0	0	0	0	0
MILITARY	0	1				1	1	0	0	2
MYTHS	1	0				0	0	1	1	3
NARRATIVES	0	0				0	0	0	0	0
POLITICS	0	0				0	0	0	0	0
POISON	0	0				0	0	0	0	0
RACE	0	0				0	1	0	0	1
RELIGION	0	0				0	0	0	0	0
WAR	0	0				1	0	1	0	2
TOTALS	7	1				1	12	1	1	22

Figure 11. Formal Concept Analysis of Social Regularities

This finding is mostly framed to complement Scheurich’s (1994) ‘constitutive grid’, but it is also attempting to problematize how we think about the processes of influence, through a Foucauldian critical discourse analysis lens—seeing these regularities as texts, and their interfacing processes as knowledge-power. The dropout as a popular symbol in the collective consciousness, is neither subjugated nor vindicated here, but is made present in a problematic way. It should be noted, that the scores presented here, and the categorization of any one concept as being more like an ‘attribute’ or more like an ‘object’, is wholly in question.

### Witness and Technology of Empire

The high-school dropout, like every socio-political category held popular in this country and culture, is an organic *technology* of the empire itself. That is, the very human being is a craft of this earth—this world—and, in each respective society and/or culture, said crafts/crafting become systematic, wherein the human/the dropout is an attribute of the object (e.g. Culture, country, earth), and gives it meaning. In this, the dropout—the valedictorian, C-student, star athlete—are made witnesses to the schooling system, the State, and the empire, and they each contribute to giving the country its significance. An easy metaphorical line can be imagined through Lakoff’s (1995) Nation-as-Family conceptual metaphor—perhaps in considering a child and what she signifies

for her parents' and the family's meaning—wherein the students of the free public schools in the U.S. emerge as organic technologies, crafted by the empire, which then reflect back upon the Strict Father government, a sense of self. Here, the United States of America is as much illegitimate outcast as any school dropout that has ever existed.

Henry Barnard (1856) wrote about the, eventual, replicated free grammar schools of America, stating that “public grammar schools are the nurseries of the scholars of England” (p.13). The “free” schools of England were not—as the eventual American schools—intended to be supported by tax revenues. They were to be endowed, and attended by, mostly, a privileged class of students. Sometimes a poor student, who was born within a certain parish, would enjoy the fruits of education as well. Many of the first colonialists in what would become the United States of America were educated. They were also, largely, puritanical Christian ministers. There was no real separation between education and religion. Jenks (1886) notes that, “Among theorists of today there is a handful argue that the utmost the State is bound to furnish to its children is a knowledge of the three R's (i.e. Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic); that the study of the classics, of higher mathematics and science, is to be classed among specialties” (p.5). Overall the intended output from such a grammar school was: (1) Read the Bible, (2) Obey Civil Authority, and (3) Aspire to Leadership (Cohen, 1974) (p. 399).

These prerequisites for a colonial school's success are genetic to Western Empire, and an American public schooling system up until, at least, the Industrial Revolution. The school dropout was there at every step of the way, bearing witness to an organic, everlasting abandonment. Increasing global literacy was ushered in by the development of the printing press, steam power, incorporated cities, and eventually, independent

schools. All of these are examples of modern, organic technologies, bearing witness to the glory of empire. The Reverend John Cotton, who was educated in those first Anglican *genes*, founded the Boston Public Latin School and declared it “the forerunner for a thousand more that should follow...free for all” (Jenks, 1886) (p.8). However, it cannot be overlooked that with the advent of a New World education system, a bloody Christian past came blazing new paths of evangelism and ideology *forward*—evidenced by Rev. Cotton’s grandson, the witch-hunter Cotton Mather, and an increasingly self-identifying White populous longing to “...do something to advance his kingdom in the new world” (Mather, 1647) (p.14).

The bloody tenets of Christian empire have been washing the American schooling system since those intrusive beginnings in Boston. An aspiration toward higher education was inherently exclusive, whereas “Selectmen” in any given colony could determine anyone’s capacity to become educated up to, or beyond the “Three R’s”. As the bloody tenets went forth, and her heirloom was passed from generation to generation, schools came too—compelling children into buildings and chairs-curricula toward white idolatry (i.e. Western progress). The compulsion as control concept is borne out by what Crosby (1986) calls “the Dupin technique, after Edgar Allan Poe’s detective, C. Auguste Dupin, who found the invaluable “Purloined Letter” not hidden in a bookbinding or a gimlet hole in a chair leg but out where everyone could see it in a letter rack...” (p. 5). In other words, the schoolhouse, and its compulsory schooling policies, prepare the perfect scene for a crime—a hidden curriculum made to order embodied human capital along tracked pathways, toward progress (i.e. White power).

### **Picaro Theory of Participation**

Embarking on this project, I had known I wanted to infuse my love—identification with—the genre of literature known as Picaresque. More specifically, it was the thematic models from first wave, sixteenth-century Spanish literature (e.g. *Lazarillo de Tormes*, etc.) with which I came to find a kind of, literary kinship. The characters in the stories, and the episodic, survive-by-your-wits epistemology they seemed to own, resonated deeply with me. I identified with the models because I had grown up in a mischievous way, around slick rascal types, and I attempted to outwit God and the Devil along my way. When I became a redeemed high-school dropout—undergraduate Spanish major—reclaiming my Chicano roots, my own epistemological pathway met at a familiar crossroads with the *picaro*. Organically, the proper application of this emerging theory was made to fit the lived experience of a high-school dropout. It should be noted, the dropout is not a monolith. There are many several reasons why a student chooses not to attend school, and sometimes they have to do with luxury and excess, comfort and pampering, versus the picaresque, sociopolitical trials by fire.

Thinking through this emerging theory, I needed some grounding—something to help systematize the process. Charmaz (1996) writes of Grounded Theory, that it applies methods that are “a logically consistent set of data collection and analytic procedures aimed to develop theory...a set of inductive strategies for analyzing data”, building from an “area of study...your theoretical analysis on what you discover is relevant in the actual worlds that you study within this area” (p.28). Here, the *picaro* emerges at his end point—an eschaton of sorts—upon a three-legged stool, eating a small piece of bread. This image is the prototype for the *Picaro Theory of Participation (PTOP)* in public institutions. From there, the chair—seat, or place of rest—becomes a grounding object,

an instrument through which to analyze the lived experience of any individual. In this case, thinking about a schooling context, and an eventual dropout figure, it makes sense to identify a series of chairs/seats/resting places through which to analyze one's journey through participating with public institutions (e.g. School, church), and on their way to their own, private eschaton. For the picaro, it is the bread—symbolically food, resources, and/or knowledge—but, for the privileged, powdered and pampered types, it could be something else.

Finally, in developing the thought behind the PTO, the frames of chairs and chairness, help to emerge prototypes for the individual participant through which to reflexively process their journey toward their *thing*—the endpoint. For the picaro, the prototypes are conceptualized as an Interiority (Prayer Rug) and an Exteriority (Three-Legged Stool). Pilloud & Courvoisier (2003) write that we may think in terms of “two dimensions in bodily experience: an external one, that comprehends perception of the body from the outside, by the subject him or herself and/or by any other observer; skin alterations, for example, belong to this external dimension, whereas itching would be part of the second dimension, the internal one. It concerns feeling and sensation purely interior and intimate, excluding a third person” (p. 452). This dimensionality is the border upon which push-pull factors interface, and the student experiences a kind of migration (i.e. Exterior) or meta-migration (i.e. Interior), with respect to their space and place in the class-the world.

However, where the picaro is aloof, loosely bound to anyone or anything, and is happiest in the space just before she attains the bread, another contradictory figure emerges, Rivera's (1975) *searching* symbol, found in Marcos is “humanly

total...distinctly Chicano” (p. 301), and rounds out the picaresque implications of some illegitimate picaro under the Inquisition in Spain. Rivera’s ‘searcher’ grounds the interdimensional figure here in the U.S. Perhaps more pointedly, this emerging PTO, placed in the American Southwest, allows a space for the displaced, multi-lingual child who has not yet found a good fit in the school, who is constantly on the move, and who might benefit from a brief pause, reflection-remembering, before evaluating their next step forward.

The picaro in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and Rivera’s protagonist “Marcos”, are quite different, and perhaps Marcos’ sense of *familia* informs his sense of volition- provides the room for him to, not just outsmart the devil and/or trick some publican—as the picaro does—but, to confront and challenge the deity—calling out to the other side, unafraid of “ghosts, souls, la llorona, the devil, Juan sin miedo...women with horses heads” (Rivera, 1975)(p.303).

### **Pragmatic**

#### **The Unknown/Misconceptions about Education (THUMB)**

These misconceptions can be framed as representing the *unknown* of scholastic success and achievement for the high-school dropout. That is, many dropouts express not knowing how to succeed, and even not understanding why they *should* learn how to succeed in school. This unknown element could be considered with respect to concepts of both success and failure.

#### **Fit and Connectivity Education (FACE)**

This concept emerges out of the participants’ responses to questions such as, *What is the body of a dropout? How did you experience your body in school? Do you*

*remember how you felt in school?* These questions emerge from Foucault's focus on the body of the subject, and how the body is intersected by myriad power negotiations. Power, then, becomes a process, defined by said negotiations, and just how the body then becomes ordered, organized, disciplined, and punished. FACE, then, was defined by qualitative student data that reflect how the student experienced the school building itself, the people with whom they connected/did not connect, and specific schooling experiences they feel are defined by/with their body.

### **Drama and Trauma (DATA)**

This concept is frame the *drama* and *trauma* experienced either outside of the school, or in and around schools. *Drama* refers to events and experiences that were burdensome for the participant, and which caused some type of loss, or setback for the participant. These events are different from trauma, in that they are experienced at a kind of popular, social level, and there are no real lasting psycho-emotional deficits as a result. *Trauma*, on the other hand, represents episodes or events that had a deeply troubling impact on the participant, and which were perhaps violent or abusive in nature.

## **Methodological**

### **The Body Mnemonic**

In considering the high-school dropout, as it has been framed in this document, we might see a kind of body emerging—coming almost into view. Sure, the picaro is on his stool eating her bread, and the Chicax is running into the woods, cursing at God, but the presumption is that some type of *rest* is coming—a kind of eschatological longing, perhaps, in all inhabitants here—where, whiteness disappears from our lexicon, and our socio-political spheres of participation, and we reflect on all that could have been.

Nevertheless, the *rest* is real—equally a commode and its contents, or new wineskins with old wine—and when the body comes to sit, a story might emerge.

I used a new method called a body autograph to do an autoethnographic scan of my body, but I look here to Guajardo & Guajardo's (2010) *Anatomy of a Story*, where the authors use the navel, heart, mind, hands, and legs to anatomically frame “story as a complex and organic process that is at the core of human activity” (p.94). The authors use the navel to represent the “core message and the questions” that are “Essential for developing the...purpose of the story”, and the heart to symbolize “human passion...shaped by the values that guide the efforts that fuel action” (p.95). For the dropout, their literal *body* is the chief unit of analysis at-hand, in the interest of the State. Thus, their body becomes problematized as living record—walking, breathing, running and cussing epistemology. Guajardo & Guajardo (2010) frame the mind as the “center of analytical thinking...what fuels ideas...imagination and instructional action”, the hands as symbolizing “negotiation...where the story is told and retold until... [everything] is coordinated and delivered” (p.95). Lastly, the authors use legs to symbolize a story's potential for “longevity”, and if it “moves people to action, provokes new questions...helps to identify the work that is connected to the story” (p.95).

Through this lens, we find the dropout in migratory/meta-migratory states, resting when she is able, and remembering what he can. The chairs upon which the body rests bears myriad symbolic implications around place and power, and the people associated with both. The dropout scans their body, in reflexive dimensionality, considering their place in society, the country, and the world. They have a story to tell. The story, then, is filtered through these frames, toward *identity formation, building relationships, crossing*

*boundaries, nurturing the imagination, and if everything goes well, toward cultivating a community narrative*” (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010) (p.97). In this, the dropout figure can find some grounding—with or without biological family present—in their own reflexive awareness of who they are—scanning their self in a *body autograph*—and, finding the legs for their narrative, with an *anatomy of story*.

### **Themes Revisited**

At this point of analysis, the subject—dropout, picaro, searching figure—has rested, and has come to know their story—their own ways of knowing power—and, within the larger story, Grimes’ (2011) *scenarios* come to be identified by thematic findings. The subject’s reflexive journey draws their memories through the unknown/misconceptions they had, how they fit and connected (or did not) with others, and through any dramatic or traumatic events that occurred. Each threshold crossed in this analysis, problematizes the topic newly, and asks the high-school dropout to perform, perhaps, as it never has. In this, I aim to analyze the high-school dropout as a “technique possessing its own specificity” and as a “complex social function” (Foucault, 1977) (p.23). That is, “power” is attributed to the *dropout’s* ways of knowing (i.e. Epistemology), and the reflexive techniques built in to the autoethnographic processes, and conceptual frameworks mentioned above, respond to Charmaz’ (1996) “logically consistent set of data collection and analytic procedures” (p.28), grounding the emergence of literal body of a dropout as methodologically relevant.

### **Technical**

#### **Blogging and Podcasting**

It should be briefly noted that online blog and podcast publication was used as strategic, pedagogic instruments under personal predispositions to auto-didactic, cathartic approaches to organizing thoughts. The online blogging platform provides an easy way to record thoughts, expand on ideas, and to publish novel content in the subject area. Podcasting—mentioned above in the Witnesses chapter, for its benefits—allowed for a kind of public transparency as iterated through emerging technology. I have found these methods to be useful in helping to clarify big ideas over a long period. For instance, after I defended my proposal, I began blogging on my topic, mainly to keep my mind fresh and focused on the subject matter. It took me almost one year to complete the entire project, and I have been blogging about various aspects and components of the project the entire time. This approach provides public transparency to the limitations and delimitations inherent to this epistemological-theoretical constructs seen, and unseen in this document, in presentations, and recorded in online media platforms.

## **Genealogical**

### **The Dropout**

It is crucial to remember that in a Foucauldian sense, a ‘genealogy’ is not linear, and it is not similar to a family-tree framework (Figure 12). It is also very important to remember that this entire document represents the object of pursuit in this endeavor: A genealogy of the U.S. high-school dropout. If a reader is looking for a kind of map toward a trail-a treasure, perhaps. It is also here and not here, at once. In fact, the genealogy does not end anywhere—at any one point. We may point to a few dates, locations, people and their racist policies, but the high-school dropout does not belong to

any one of those entities, nor do their punitive mechanisms for maintaining social order quash the emergence of the prototype: The *survivor*.

The concept itself, an almost metaphysical thing—immediately implying some kind of dimensionality—emerges here; There he is, by God! I see her! They are, at once, In and Out. I tend to think of the emergence of *the dropout* within its own genealogy, as “sparks in wheat”, after the ancient Greek poet Archilocus, and Carolyn Forché’s (2014) depiction of the same. That is to say, a non-linear genealogy burns out and away from the unit of analysis (e.g. Dropout), in strange and wild frameworks, that are not necessarily linear or non-structured (Figure 13). When the field finally burns out, and the flames have ceased, the pattern remaining is close to the genealogical framework we are after when thinking through Foucault.

Thus, a genealogy, for the sake of optics, is less this,

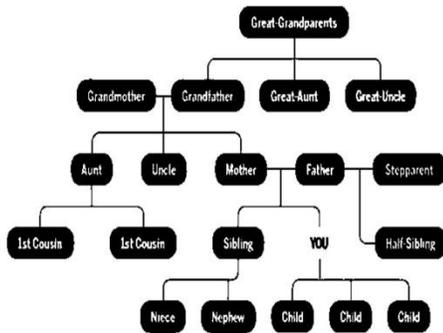


Figure 12. Family Tree

and more this,



*Figure 13.* Burned field

We have already framed the dropout at length as a kind of unwanted or strayed child, who somehow is *out of order*. This subject emerges on the national scene in 1962, when National Education Association employee Daniel Schreiber reported that “dropouts” were “running away from work half done, from school half-completed”, and “How American education solves the problem of school dropouts...may well determine America’s future” (Schreiber, 1962)(p. 234). However, a similar student was not able to stay in step with the rest, when Massachusetts passed compulsory mandates in 1852, some ninety years prior to Schreiber’s report. Furthermore, the dropout abides, in perhaps more arcane publicity. Emerging from the deregulatory periods, following the Progressive Era and up until Reagan’s A Nation at Risk report (1983), the high school dropout/the dropout problem is a constant. This amalgam—the high-school dropout—has come to bear witness to Scheurich’s (1994) constitutive grid of social regularities in a way that may only be solvable be a semiological intervention. That is, in the very construction of categorical nomenclature in and around students and their bodies, it is in the best interest of school improvement—perhaps even more so, now, in the age of information, click-bait and *gotcha* culture—to reframe the way students are categorized, organized, and transitioned through its systems.

Thomas & Brady (2005) show how policies under “Reagan in 1980 marked a significant reduction in federal education program funding as well as a presidential effort to reduce the role of the federal government in domestic policy areas, namely public education” (p.53). Under Reagan, the Department of Education reported, “the need for higher academic standards, increased student course requirements, a longer school day, and significant changes in the training and retention of teachers” (pp.53-54). Leading up to the information age, and the technology boom, Reed (1990) frames educational progress, in and around the high-school dropout as such:

“In assessing the magnitude of the educational progress of black Americans over the last 50 years [i.e. Since ~1940], the judgment is definitely mixed...careful assessments demonstrate that the deviation between black and white attainment is still significantly large...many disadvantaged urban and rural black children continue to fare poorly on achievement tests and assessments of fundamental literacy skills, large numbers continue to drop out of schools early in their secondary school years” (pp.23-24).

Primary to a conception of a new Big Data deity, sending down statistically predictable school improvement models is a response from the individuals on the ground, to quite literally re-evaluate their concept of self and their role within the education industrial complex. That is, a high-salaried and well-dressed body does not an educational *leader* make. There are unseen components, that can be learned from the dropout witnesses and their testimonies, perhaps based in social emotional approaches to pedagogy, but comprehensively, are simply human. Thus, the dropout is realized as such, in a genealogical framework that bears witness to the student as an “educational

mechanism...in a series of possible effects” (Foucault, 1977) (p.23). The student herself, possesses her own “specificity...exercising power...as a political tactic” (p.23).

Furthermore, the dropout is not come to be made visible because of some 1852 compulsory schooling policy in Massachusetts, or some NEA report in 1942, but from a “single process...epistemologico-juridicial formation” (p.23). Said common matrix which helps emerge the U.S. high-school dropout as a common social problem, is realized through Scheurich’s (1994) constitutive grid of social regularities. These processes of power, in between humans and their institutions, are made clearer with critical discourse analysis techniques—bringing the genealogy into organization.

Lastly, the genealogy of the dropout considers the human body as where we can “discover whether this entry of the soul on the scene of [educational] systematicity... [carries] a whole corpus of knowledge”, and where we can “read a common history of power relations and object relations” (p.24). This framing is significant because we find students becoming more structured with respect to schooling, as the millennium draws near. Thus, family dynamics shift too, and school culture builds upon its high-stakes climate, by rallying behind Strict Father norms: Patriotism, suspicion, purity, profit. The others among us have become pronounced, and they are the remaining champions of the Strict Father paradigm. A kind of post-millennium tension has tightened its grip on the high-school dropout, as more girls and boys of color enter the criminal justice system—often as a direct effect of some event that occurred within the free, public school. Puritanical anxiety and fear have always suspended what this country—any country—can/could be, and our Nation as Family culture is proving to be anti-intellectual, pro-fear mongering, xenophobic, and celebratory of discipline and punishment writ large.

## Discussion

### Toward School Improvement

Truth becomes an emancipatory “object” that either is named by a teacher, or is realized by the possessing student. Never the less, an unpolished *object* as such helps to give significance to both the teacher and the student. Biesta (2014) states, “...it becomes the task of the critical educator to make visible what is hidden for those who are the “object” of the emancipatory endeavors of the critical educator...making visible what is hidden from everyday view” (p.78). This unseen element of school/schooling—the intersection of spaces and things, learned and taught—becomes a *proto*-principle in education (i.e. *Ducere*). That is, a space can be found wherein both the teacher and the student learn at once. It is a space that is both anticipated and non-predictive, and it is not necessarily located within the school or the classroom, or the book, or the teacher, or the student.

It is a symbolic space where intentional learners (Teachers *and* students) go and comb through symbols, shapes, and structures until small bulbs of newness appear-then appear again in patterns-structured into complex root systems of linguistic discourse, and intellectual record. Ranciere (1991) conceptualized the space of learning through instruction that can “give, not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself” (p.39). This statement hints at a truth suggesting that any person should be free to learn, to read, to write, and to rise to the highest self they can sense as possibly real. This seems to be what schools should be for, to nurture consciousness that is capable of seeing beyond *any* object of immobility or injustice.

However, who can be *sure* in a socioeconomic landscape that, daily, conjures up new opportunities to cut pedagogical and organizational corners in order to move some proverbial needle—to meet a bottom line. We are failing our most in-need students. Has it always been this way? Why should schooling prove to succeed “all” students? What is school anyway? Horvat & Davis (2011) show how Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” is rightly placed on a schooling context, where there is a “system of lasting, transposable dispositions which...functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions...” (144). School is a layered structure of many organizational approaches, and for differing sociopolitical intentions. It is at once an architectural reality and a theoretical curriculum. Schooling is no more a teacher than it is a student.

Perhaps it is easier to ask ourselves, what is a church? What is a holy temple for? What does it do? It is easier to make the metaphorical leap in considering that a holy sanctuary is not in need of a savior, but rather the individual/the sinner who is sitting in a row, is the one in need. Dorn (1993) points to the hypocrisy that was germane to public schooling as natural extension of the church, “in few cases did the structures of schools come under fire...when schools had become an institution where most adolescents spent several years, writers claimed that dropouts, and by extension their families, deserved most of the blame for the failures of schools and labor markets” (p.369).

It is difficult to imagine what public schooling would be like today without, say, standardized tests, external accountability bodies, or grab bags of reform-ready products designed by former educators. Public schooling is increasingly becoming an inter-institutional venture that relies on multiple, diverse stakeholders to help create systems that can educate *all*. Ishimaru & Galloway (2014) state that “equitable leadership practice

involves an ongoing cycle of inquiry with members of the entire school community using multiple forms of data (for example, data beyond test score results, such as course enrollments, discipline data, shadowing, students voice and non-cognitive indicators...to better inform decision making...to assess the effectiveness of changes to policy and practice” (p.106).

Taking into account a broad swath of qualitative and quantitative data, educators are able to think in terms of an “inclusive school improvement” (Messiou, K., et al, 2016) (p.46). This approach aims to “eliminate exclusionary processes from education that are a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in relation to race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender...as well as with regards to disabilities”(p.46). There is a certain amount of value added to the work on the ground by having an all subsuming cloud of Big Data perpetually rolling in, but the nuance of a student’s lived experience is not made predictable by cute statistical analyses, nor can any *one* schoolhouse control for each factor that may inhibit student success.

Steinberg (2015) conceptualizes the manifestations of power within institutions as part of a “historical schema” with, “dispersed governmentalization [where the] juridical recedes in the rising wake of this governmentality...mercantilism and policing are superseded by liberalism and the invisible hand of the market” (p.493). That is to say, we are a century past Dewey’s “Democracy and Education (1916), and although a utopian view of public schooling—society at large—has ran its course, a cold statistical machination is coming to prove itself as equally impotent in situating an American educational system as something provable. Henry (2000) alludes to the conflation of human institutions as symbolic, stating “...our contemporary education system is

constantly under attack. When, in anxiety about the present state of the world, we turn upon the schools with even more venom than we turn on our government, we are “right” in the sense that it is in the schools that the basic binding and freeing processes that will “save” us will be established” (p.55). Studying to show one’s self approved has never taken on such importance.

Ravitch (2001) points to the intersection of church, state, and schooling in U.S. history as such, “America had diverse forms of education, some of them organized by churches, others by local groups of parents...in the mid-nineteenth century, selfless and public-spirited reformers realized that the only democratic form of education was one that was entirely controlled by the state...when the public agreed with them, every state created a public school system to advance the public interest...on this rock of state control of public education, our democracy rests” (p.2). This type of social control gives the illusion of its working at an institutional level, but individual students still bear the very real cost of the corporatization of public schooling. Yosso (2005) indicates how traditional models of schooling—most American industries—fail to embrace the various forms of “capital” that each person possesses (e.g. Cultural, linguistic, aspirational, familial, etc.)(p.78). This framework views community cultural wealth as a progressive form of cultural capital, based in Critical Race Theory (CRT).

It is worth considering all forms of “capital” within a system of capitalism as being/becoming weaponized to some degree. This would extend to the students, their stories and possessions, the school and all of its parts, and the overlapping area between the two. Ford (2015) states that “Under capitalism, space is abstracted and mobilized as a means of production; more specifically, it becomes mobilized as a means of productive

consumption” (p.5) The generation of new, alternative spaces for learning and exchanges of capital, is at the heart of future schooling. Ford (2015) views this fight for “space” as fundamental to fixing schools, “the current standardization of education must be rooted in an analysis of the capitalist mode of production and its production of space.

Payne & Kaba (2007) suggest that we have a “collective tendency to think simplistically about how change happens” (p.37). Ravitch (2001) alluded to the unseen work in public space and thought, “Market reforms have a certain appeal to some of those who are accustomed to “seeing like a state”. There is something comforting about the belief that the invisible hand of the market, as Adam Smith called it, will bring improvements through some unknown force.” (p.11). If the future of public schooling in the United States does not find a substitute system after which to model itself, and soon, then our collective future is quite predictable. One only has to look at how the hand of capitalism draws a narrative arc over time. For the most vulnerable and in-need among us, the market is a jailer and a thief.

Fine (1991) showed how “low-income adolescents are routinely shut out of their comprehensive high schools, psychologically if not bodily” (p.161). Her study of New York high schools and the students who passed through the buildings. To the epistemological value of curricula on the outside of school, she stated “It doesn’t take much time to learn that these parents, mostly mothers, desire more than anything a good education for their children...”, but the same women “...won’t risk...making trouble, because they fear that anything short of full cooperation with a school might jeopardize their children’s education” (p.162). The knowledge carried to and from—in and out of—school each day, is informed by myriad narratives. The lived experiences of the most in-

need students and families are valuable; the very heart of contemporary society. Here in the 21st century, amid an on-rush of charter schools—choices—and, in the face of increasing global migration, endless war, and Trumpean anti-intellectualism, in-school curricula never looked so damning. Poor families persist on the outside of a narrative containing, in part, intergenerational wealth and power. Majumder (2013) stated that, with respect to economics and equity, “addressing issues of exclusion and stagnancy among specific socio-cultural groups is extremely important to pre-empt chances of unrest and instability” (p.5). This may seem as common sense, though the author also states—studying intergenerational wealth—that “caste systems” function by “segregating society into rigid compartments based on traditional occupation, the system being hereditary, closed, exclusionary, and ritualistic” (p.2). Here is the dropout.

Education is the promised tie to wealth in the United States, though any given child’s own promise is dependent, randomly, on the success of their respective parent(s). Huebener (2015) studied the role of parental risk attitudes in sons’ long-run education outcomes, with a focus on “intergenerational transmission of incomes and education” (p.64). He found the “link between parental risk attitudes and children’s education outcomes could vanish in the long-run as children become more independent from their parents” (p.66). Sadly, the motion toward independence—away from poor parenting agents-*out* of their home—is not so easily won, perhaps less so a way *in* to higher learning. Even heavier the burden becomes, after a history of “...burned schools established by the Freedmen’s Bureau in the late 1860’s, harassed teachers and students...”, and with visits to the school by “Kluxers” who “frightened the children...” (Sitton & Conrad, 2005) (p.108). An intersection of policy—police forces and their

budgets included—that has emerged as punitive, invasive, and which also helps to normalize repressive responses to those out of order. Spruill (2018) showed how “the use of police dogs to police plantations, and presently...black neighborhoods, was a common thread running from slave patrolling to the modern police department” (p.45).

With the conception of the Department of Education—out of the NEA—a national standard emerged to maintain, as then NEA President George Sayer stated, a “national system of education which will provide for the complete Americanization of millions of foreigners” (Laats, 2018)(p.330). The author goes on to show how public education and white supremacy have always been inextricably tied, citing how among many KKK groups “educational issues dominated [their] public activism”, in their thought that “control of education symbolized control of municipal politics and even control of the local economy” (p. 343). An intersection of social regularities emerges around this topic, considering police and dogs in schools—there to continue a normalization of punishing particular, identified student groups.

Reynolds (2007) writes, “Most students have no expectation of privacy in the smell emanating from their vehicle in school property. Similarly, some students have no expectation of privacy in school either, where the school retains control over their lockers and the students have been provided with notice of this policy” (p.592). The legitimizing of this type of public intrusion emerges along with, newly identified, social problems like ‘school shooters’. With the shooters, comes the constitutive grid, wherein “Law-enforcement officers assigned to Columbine...were unable to stop the shootings...yet the tragedy led to the addition of police officers at schools across the country, many funded by the Department of Justice” (Shah, 2013)(p.14). Shooter profiles do not wholly overlap

with those of dropouts, where “They came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and varied in age from 11 to 21...situations ranged from intact families to foster homes. Academic performance ranged from excellent to failing. Few had been diagnosed with any mental disorder...one-third had histories of drug or alcohol” (DOJ, 2002) (pp.4-5). There is the dropout.

Hawkes (2012) writes that schools do not have a “responsibility for the upward mobility of the masses; schools alone can’t structurally reform a society, but...no child’s fate is sealed...each one’s mind and life are open for hope and transformation” (p.61). Where once the truant became the suspended—the expelled, the dropout—now, some hidden student becomes the shooter. Emery (2013) writes about “intragroup bonding social capital” (p.58), in which each student connects with someone they can trust at the school. Payne & Kaba (2007) state that an ongoing climate of “distrust” ensures that “schools cannot make use of financial and technical resources even when they become available” (p.32), and the students whom endure the most of the cost are, historically, the poorest ones. Spring (2010) shows how the scene had long been set, for perpetual division to breed into, among communities—bridging an objectification of the innate unknown; the seeds and fruits of American empire and education “...to protect the ideology of an Anglo-American Protestant culture” (p.5).

Mohanty (1993) invokes Foucault’s concept of power in that power, essentially, cannot belong to one “...point of origin...” like the state, a colonial ideology, the royal family, “...the sovereign or God” (p.34). This also includes the local school. Our current practice of regressing to the Big Data *coup du jour* comes to be illusory. We still do not know what to do. Students still fail. They still drop out, and they still go to jail. But for a

national institution (e.g. Public education) to reflect upon its identity, in earnest, might just reveal Foucault's (1977) presumed power after all—making new spaces and ways of knowing--discursively--to deconstruct the "...mechanisms of normalization and the wide-ranging powers...new disciplines..."(p.306). Here is the dropout.

The student who does not succeed from secondary preparation—without the *encaging of her body* as being a next, logical strategy for academic reform--is then in a primed position to begin work restoring and repairing her identified shortcomings, failures, or involved social dilemmas. However an objectification and accounting for--the locking-up of, even the killing of--an *other*, is probably *the* U.S. national tradition, and students (i.e. Children) have never been an exception. Williams (2005) shows the beginnings of juvenile "reform", in early nineteenth century New York, Philadelphia, and Boston as being "...brought on by the impact of industrialization, immigration, poverty, and crime" (p.167). Yet even more so, the action to *reform* ignited because those adults in charge--selectmen--of education and civic society, adhered to an aforementioned representational ideology that had, to date, sustained a divided America. Instead of delving their presumed Christian heart into years of honed expertise and agency, the same would-be educational leaders of the 1820's feared "...disorder caused by freed black adolescents in a rapidly transforming society...Slave owners had previously been responsible for disciplining black youth...would-be reformers appealed to the government to take on the part" (p.167).

### **Power Revisited**

The work of empire necessitates observation, subjection, division, and control. In that, the mind of those in power calls on a framework of containers—rationality based on

case, type, color, class, etc. This same *power* fears the vibrant possibilities of a liberated mind-body, and thus responds by first dividing its own self from an observable datum (e.g. In-need student). Rather than emerging headlong into the same social and cultural capital of the most underserved students, the fearful educator/reformer symbolically detaches the accountability necessary to begin building a scholar out of an abused orphan, or to transform a failing school into a center of cultural dynamo and academic extremity. A new framework is needed, one that integrates the people, resources, and institutions as part of a larger whole—framing school as a process of healing “...by which individuals involved in a crime or harmful incident are brought together to repair their relationship” (Morris, 2016).

Yosso (2005) states that a critical lens to filter culture, and therein our respective capitals, “...shifts the center of focus from notions of White, middle class culture to the cultures of Communities of Color”. This same “lens” can then “see...cultural wealth...” as manifest in “...capital...” (p.77). Yosso (2005) goes on to list six “forms” of cultural capital: *aspirational* (i.e. resiliency); *linguistic* (i.e. multiple languages, styles); *family* (i.e. understandings of kinship); *social* (i.e. community networks); *navigational* (i.e. institutional maneuverability); and *resistant* (i.e. oppositional stances to inequity). Approaches to improving schools, and to changing the lived experiences for students most vulnerable to dropping out, involves conceptualizing, “...what changes to implement (theories of education) and how to implement them (theories of change)” (Fullan, 2001) (p.48). A justice-minded, equitable approach focuses on creating a culture of care on campus, and in making real connections with students. True care and connection take time to establish. Fine (1991) says that “Serious rooted

change...requires...patience. Schools will not become educationally successful by deadlines and mandates” (p.225).

Ravitch (2010) reminds us that, “If the policymaker cannot persuade others, then his plans will not be implemented. That’s democracy” (p.11). Yet she also says that we must “...engage in seeing like a state...If no one thought like a state, there would be no...public works of any kind” (p.10). Hill-Collins (2009) stated, “...inequalities are produced within the educational system, just as schools are essential to inequality’s survival. Schools are also frontline spaces for working for social justice” (p.134). What does it look like when these same children—set up to walk down a predictive path toward prison—are informed, empowered, and activated as agents of organic change in their own selves, their family and community? Guajardo & Guajardo (2008) show how a pedagogy of place “...gives students and teachers the power to see themselves not as consumers of information and data but, rather, as researchers and creators of knowledge” (p.17).

By engaging students where they are, and by employing each student’s personal assets, in the context of a community rich in resources children begin to, as Haddix & Mardhani-Bayne (2016) suggest, “...reclaim their identities...identities supported in school spaces” (p.145). The school then must not appear to be in the ready with arms—militarized and punitive at its heart, but wholly conducive to, what Green (2016) calls “...creating an equitable and democratic space” (p.200), in order to “...shape the youth...attitudes about their own political efficacy and abilities to make change” (p.202). Warren (2011) reminds us that although our most in-need students may not “...be the first to answer a call for public engagement...they can emerge as leaders to play a critical role in education reform” (p.162). Lopez (2016) wrote about how as an “...isolated,

urban-poor, minority..." student, he was able to "transgress" his "assortment of disciplinary referrals" and "...the truancies that ...derailed [his] forward progress" in his South Texas high school, because of the influences from a "maternal love" and from "professionals" in the school district that "...similarly made me feel cared for" (p.15). Genuine care for students is at the heart of keeping them in the classroom, and in the school until completion.

This is an example of select bodies—students—developing within a "microsystem" of support (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011), which help to "mold and shape the developing youngster" (p.71). Such immediate, microsystems "include immediate or nuclear family, community or neighborhood, church, peers, and school" (p.72). A singular system, such as a well-financed religious institution or school, can be enough of a positive influence on a child that they can persist through a school's system, but the "school is no more important for child development and educational outcomes than the home, neighborhood, church, and peers" (p.72).

Any child's respective microsystem prepares the student for each successive, ecological stage of development: Mesosystem (i.e. Interface of microsystems), Exosystem (i.e. School board, local government), and Macrosystem (i.e. Culture, customs) (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011) (p.73). The singular systems that help a student to develop, perhaps especially familial systems, are crucial to future success. There are often distinct "discontinuities between the culture of the student and that of the school", which serve to render the schooling experience as "meaningless" (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991) (p.73). The issue is confounded, creating "a boring and inadequate educational experience that manufactures failure" for "at-risk" students, and which is also "not

appropriate for the...students who are academically able but alienated..." (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991) (p.209).

Reality for young students is "marked, not by one, but several developmental paths...to define their roles, the different paths become reflected in an increased sorting among groups of students" (Roderick, 1993) (p.132). As students become "sorted" into different pathways *en route* to life outside of the school, the multiple "transitions" that occur in development can be mitigated by schools with "the capacity to influence the nature" of the "transitions, the policies that govern schools, and how students are organized for instruction" (Roderick, 1993) (p.164). Diverse pathways out of high school start at home, and lead in to said school. Smyth & Hattam (2004) state that "the problem is often understood in terms of catering for an increasingly diverse student clientele...that schools are being asked to offer a meaningful transition into adult life for the diverse population" (p.17).

This take, surely, centers itself squarely within American whiteness, by othering the "diverse student" as non-white. Cole Robinson (2007) states that "decisions to drop out were divided into *push* out and *pull* out factors...*push* out factors are related to the in-school curriculum," and that the pull out factors "refer to what is known as the non-school or out-of-school curriculum" (p.37). For the dropout, *Inness* refers to the spaces where organic curricular derivations are shared with "community, home, peers, media..." (Cole Robinson, 2007) (p.37). If the nation is framed as a metaphorical family, and public schools are framed as a kind of offspring from the nation's imagined bosom, then the punished student—the high-school dropout—becomes, also, a kind of unwanted descendant from the same glorified social order.

The former president of Harvard University, C. W. Eliot (1892) wrote on uniformity, stating, “Education is properly the training of the individual, body, mind, and will. In our school systems, this training has been systematized into a military lock step, instead of into individual freedom in action. The schools treat the individual only as an average atom of society” (p.104). It is difficult to parse out precisely how the abuses of early empire are separate from the post-Reconstruction, heightened language in educational leadership journals. Blessington (1974) wrote about America’s “conditioning” of “young adults” (aged 12-17 y.o.) in late 20<sup>th</sup> century schooling, “Is there really a need any longer for a compulsory school law? It was needed at the beginning, but it now offends the strong intelligence of the modern young adult. It suggests he would not wish to learn anything if he were not forced” (p.131).

U.S. democracy, and compulsory education in the same right, have told a tale, where rising tides do not lift boats, but drown the poor in their own homes. If a student and their family cannot find a way in to the streams of currency purported by education-advanced education, they must come to realize a different space, wherein they are *always already* qualified.

## Recommendations

The recommendations that come from this dissertation have been framed and explicated throughout this document in myriad assemblages of concepts and content, but here I will explain a bit more—embedding future research suggestions within the recommendations. A primary recommendation is designed to deal with the heaving undercurrent of *whiteness* that has become the narrative line upon which all bodies, minds, and collective ideologies seem-to-must-need to come and regress. The significance of all bodies and minds—the systems within which they move and think—are made relevant by their very approximation and articulation to the narrative arc of said *whiteness*. In the case of the U.S. high-school dropout, this narrative bears Coates' (2017) 'bloody heirloom', and has passed down conquest from generation to generation. This concept of *whiteness* is different from, say, people who are characterized and categorized as 'white', although *whiteness* is sustained through so-called 'white people'. Whiteness, here, is symbolized by temporo-spatial phenomena, wherein scenarios of socio-political regularity emerge in patterns, over time, and constitute ideologico-institutional techniques of repression toward the aforementioned 'unassimilable' (i.e. Non-white) bodies.

Deconstructing whiteness, as related to compulsory education policies cum high-school dropout epistemologies, and subsequent policy interventions, calls for an examination of the Nation as Family conceptual metaphor, as related to the social co-create whiteness. Thus, I wholly recommend developing a genealogy of Whiteness, Foucauldian or not, in terms of education, empire, and social domination methodologies. Schools in 21<sup>st</sup> century United States public education systems have fewer and fewer so-

called white students—as did Pachamama herself—and, future philosophical approaches to free, public education, curricular implementation, instruction and leadership needs to post-Solar God, post-colonial, post-Big Data, and post-White. All of us have entered a new turn in onto-epistemological, collective intuition, and the best teaching and learning is ahead of us. Our educative methodologies from time immemorial have corresponded with the deity of the time. In our infancy, Mother Earth taught us all—taxonomical typologies, social and civic sustainability norms, and hunting, gathering methods grounding an emerging theology of animism, interconnectedness, and an ever-present duality in all things. As the Sun became father, and things (e.g. People) became property, our socio-political regularities established education systems of exclusivity, punishment, and legal *Inness/Outness*. Since at least the Scientific Revolution in Europe (16<sup>th</sup> century), but probably since the Fall of Granada (1492), our deity has been in Air, and more recently, the Cloud. The culling of information, knowledge, and sciences, as organic technologies made from the social regularities of the time, has come to be held as a symbol for all that we know as U.S./Western progress. This is our empire deity—a, kind of, prince of the air—who has held Whiteness frozen above our heads for more than four-hundred years, but he is now melting, cracking, and breaking down, at the genealogical level. His schools—their paradigms and practices—will be remembered soon as cruel instruments of perversion and repression.

What will be the new thing? If we collectively suppose a flattened ontology going forward—the ice white Big Data deity is completing the turn, raining down now in an age of Aquarius, as a renewing source, and the precedent to our collective return to a beginning of known time and space—how can we understand our immediate shared

knowing, without tearing one another apart? The fall of an empire seems imminent, and now we can learn from those who have already learned how to learn, amid chaos and strife. The privileged are few, and much of the world has had to pick up, walk, and leave what, perhaps, was once warm, safe, and familiar. How do the children refugees learn how to learn in and around U.S. public schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What becomes status-quo in a world at war? It seems to me that the best education happens between a knowledgeable and talented instructor, and a ready and aware student—escaping the parent/child, nation/family framework is hard—perhaps impossible. Children can learn with greater intensity, saturation, and diversity than our current—and historical—free, U.S. public schools provide or allow. The tempering of bodies—minds, souls—in a preK-12 pipeline, is, at best, a punitive instrument of classism, used to predict student outcomes, and their pathways toward higher education, or not. In considering what might constitute an improved school, given the findings of this study, I make a few practical recommendations here, as they might be implemented within the existing—decaying—public schooling system.

There are three recommendations that I find valuable when considering how to improve the schooling success of certain students, who may be “at-risk” for dropping out, or who are seemingly on their way to leaving school without graduating. However, these three recommendations assume an implementation and integration within an existing free, public educational system in the United States, and thus would likely become solutions as unassimilable as the dropout would.

1. *Give the most to the student who needs the most* (e.g.

Attention/resources/assistance/understanding/etc.) An instructor, leader, school

and district should always strive to give *the most they have to give to those who need the most*. This extends to common care, conversation, support and guidance in and around any matter pressing in the child's life. The school dropout is in need. They may need to understand what is happening to them in their life outside of the school walls, and/or they might need to understand what a school is for, and why they are being forced to attend. The student who needs the most—toward their own scholastic success—needs to know that they are in need. For the child living in picaresque, episodic conditions, they may think they only need some *pan-bread*, when they truly need some knowledge. This is the foundation for a definition of equity, within any context. Public schools have an opportunity—amid changing demographics, yet a non-representative teacher workforce—to delve earnestly into deconstructing their own culture of whiteness. This may include implementing an equity audit within the district to ensure the teachers and staff are trained and performing in an equitable way. This also could be approached by developing a kind of equity rubric for the school and district, so that individuals, the district, and the community can all measure one another on equitable indicators and criteria. In the twenty-first century, it is time to go beyond equity—*stop talking about it*—and truly implement practices that meet the needs for the least among Us All.

2. Structure the school building for an experience of *equitable movement*. This simply mean, allow everyone a place to feel, at once, free *and* connected. The student who drops out does not *feel* right within the school building, and this could be for many reasons. Often, the reactionary strategy to support a student

who is almost out the door is a transference to an alternative school building and curriculum. I suggest thinking about the design and decoration of schools—their walls, hallways, rooms, and hidden places—in a kind of cultural grammar framework. That is, the palpable experience of the student body moving through the space might invoke wonder and curiosity—like a museum can do, or like something ancient or artisanal—to a point wherein any student can see their own self, learning and practicing in an academic discipline at an early age.

Architecture and art, here, are inextricable, but the décor has something to say as well about scholastic culture and climate. Since at least 2000, a common local, statewide, and national education mantra has been “College for All!” Following this highly professionalized, post-positivist messaging behind this rally cry—itsself part reaction to racist affirmative action critiques—a multitude of first-generation enrolled in postsecondary coursework, leveraging Pell grants, and loans at record rates. Even in Texas, longitudinal dropout rates decreased from 2007 (12% of cohort) to 2016 (7% of cohort), and postsecondary enrollment rates decreased over the same period, by 5% (i.e. Percent of high-school graduates) (E3 Alliance, 2018). Thus, in 2019 it is a good time to change the drapes, as it were. I suggest educational leaders consider redecorating their entire campuses into functional laboratories for the liberal arts, sciences and mathematics, technology and entrepreneurship. An old model of ‘teach to the test’, and focus on each score as if it holds the key to the student’s future is dead. Twenty-first century thinkers do not need schools, they need *spaceships*—philosophies, structures, decorations, cultures, and climates—that exceed the students’ capacities to access the same.

Thus, spending time worrying about a “college-going culture becomes the *old story*.

3. Corresponding with the above, perhaps radical, presumption that any one motivated educational leader could usher in such school improvement resources and collaboration to build some kind of new-age, STEAM university for their most in-need, secondary students, it is critical that the curricula for tomorrow’s students is failing forward. The old story is drill and kill, and teach to the test. The new story is, *What do you want to know, and where do you want to go?* In an increasingly tech-driven economy, elementary and secondary students should be *automatically enrolled in coursework, of which they would have to consciously opt out*. These courses would be *those that align directly with the acquisition of the knowledge and skills requisite to earn a living wage* in any respective community. I would also suggest an automatic enrollment in traditional liberal arts, and other fine arts, with opt-out mechanisms equal to those for STEM curricula. Rigor and grit are good, but so is music and mysticism. Although it seems counterintuitive to think in such prescriptive terms, as an emerging post-structural scholar, using policy archaeology to analyze a social problem. However, one of the limitations of this study is the frameworks and formats of the dissertation and academic systems, from which come expectations for, perhaps, prods toward *progress*. Inherent to my approach in thinking through academia—its curricula, points and measures for entry and exit—is a biting want to deconstruct the more than five-hundred year dominance of a concretized *whiteness*, as borne out in free U.S. public schools and curricula. An equitable

turn for all educators—likely subsuming the dropout in its swoop—would be the literal, explicit, and critical deconstruction of whiteness writ large. This could be signified by the hiring of school personnel who are representative of the students they serve, in terms of race, gender, class, and many other combinations of the regular social objects and attributes. It is commonplace, in 2019, to attend and actively participate in, say, an implicit bias training for work or school. An entire professionalized, governmentality has permeated many social institutions, wherein specialists in equity training—or something like that—are contracted to help individuals and organizations think in terms of equity, and this often deals with whiteness—fragility, supremacy, histories, and the like—but, it is not enough. These types of trainings are often so softly delivered, and minimal in frequency that no attendee can build upon whatever they happened to learn. Going forward, any legitimately equitable educational curriculum will include a Critical White Studies component, where we gain some common, public consensus on where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

#### GENERAL DISSERTATION QUESTIONS

- (1) What is a/the common source for the dropout?
- (2) What are the social regularities that help to identify the dropout as a social problem?
- (3) What are the agentic qualities, if any, that are manifest as a result of the dropout?
- (4) What are the myriad lines of influence that created the complex of the dropout?
- (5) What is the body of a dropout?/How have you experienced your body as a dropout?

#### SPECIFIC DISSERTATION QUESTIONS

##### SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTION PROTOCOL:

The concepts listed below are intentional, and are based on literature around social policy, practice, and pedagogy. The 28 concepts listed below were generated in the usage here to elicit real, lived-in memories from the subjects. This will help to distill down to what exactly being-becoming a dropout feels like. Participants are free to not answer any question they choose, at no penalty.

##### 1. Justice: Question(s)

What experiences have you had with schooling and being disciplined?  
What experiences with being detained, or punished by some type of justice system within, or connected externally to the school have you had?

##### 2. Spirituality: Question(s)

Are there any spiritual realities, or realizations that you have had as connected to schools you have attended, or schooling in general?

##### 3. Entertainment: Question(s)

Are there any popular culture images or representations of high school dropouts with which you are familiar?

Do you identify with any of those images or representations? Are they problematic in any way?

**4. Professionalization: Question(s)**

Can you recall specific school personnel who reached out to you in assistance or any other kind of way to connect?

**5. Business: Question(s)**

How did/has dropping out of high school affected your views or understanding of business and industry? How has this affected your practical, lived experience within business and industry?

**6. Economics: Question(s)**

How did/has dropping out of high school affected your views or understanding of the economy? How has this affected your practical, lived experience with understanding the economy as you have become older?

**7. Politics: Question(s)**

Are there any unique political realities that you have experienced as a result of dropping out of high school, or by being labeled a drop out?

**8. Education: Question(s)**

How have your views on education changed since your days in primary and secondary school? Did you return to education? Do you desire to return to school? What value does education and schooling hold in your life? How do you think this has been affected by your being labeled a drop out?

**9. Consciousness: Question(s)**

How do you understand consciousness, and how has your schooling experience factored into that understanding?

**10. Narratives: Question(s)**

Are there any particular narratives that you have imagined, followed, been prescribed, or debunked as related to your having dropped out of high school?

**11. Myths: Question(s)**

Are there any stories that you have heard about high-school dropouts? Have any stories, myths, lies, or tales been told about you that are related to your schooling experience? Have those, if at all, factored into how you view yourself and/or education?

**12. Ideology: Question(s)**

Has your experience as being labeled a dropout led to any particular ideologies around education and/or society at large?

**13. Power: Question(s)**

When you were in high school did you feel empowered? Do you feel empowered now? How has education and/or schooling affected your sense of self-empowerment over your lifetime?

**14. Class: Question(s)**

How do you understand class, and do you feel as though that factored into your dropping out of high school? How does this same concept affect your lived experience now?

**15. Subaltern: Question(s)**

Did dropping out of high school alter your sense of society? Did it alter your actual, lived experience in public spaces, hidden spaces, and/or imagined places? What is your sense of mainstream society and/or “Inness”? Have you ever felt like an outsider? Are you an insider in some kind of way? How, if at all, does this relate to your having dropped out of high school?

**16. Race: Question(s)**

How do you feel like race factored into your dropping out of high school? How does race factor into concepts of social in-ness and out-ness?

**17. Religion: Question(s)**

18. How do you feel like religion factored into your dropping out of high school? How does religion factor into concepts of social in-ness and out-ness?

**19. Prison: Question(s)**

Have you experienced schooling as connected to jail or prison? In what way(s)? In your experience, what does one have to do with the other?

**20. War: Question(s)**

In what ways, if any, was school a violent experience for you? How did this factor into your dropping out? How do any of these past violent experiences affect your lived experience now?

**21. Military: Question(s)**

Do you draw any natural lines between public schooling and military service?

**22. Labor: Question(s)**

How did dropping out of high school affect your experience doing labor? What kinds of work have you done, and how do you see those experiences as related to your being labeled a dropout?

**23. Familial Bloodlines: Question(s)**

Have any of your family members also dropped out of high school? Do you draw any clear lines between you and your other family members who dropped out? Is this significant to you, and why?

**24. Gender: Question(s)**

What role did/does gender play in students dropping out of high school, in your opinion? Do you feel your gender played a role in your dropping out of high school? If so, why?

**25. Sex: Question(s)**

This may be a sensitive question, but how does the concept and act of sex factor into the idea of a high school dropout, if at all?

**26. Architecture: Question(s)**

Do you remember the architectural structure of your high school, and did that factor into your dropping out of that particular school?

**27. Unknown: Question(s)**

Are there any unknown or mysterious reasons, factors, or results that are related to your dropping out of high school, and being labeled a dropout?

**28. Agriculture: Question(s)**

Has your experience of being labeled a dropout affected your ability to eat? Has it affected your ability to access healthy food and resources to sustain yourself? If so, in what ways?

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

### Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Compulsion and volition: A Foucauldian genealogy of the high-school dropout.

Principal  
Investigator:

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(512) 589-4289

Texas State University IRB number: 5634

**PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:** You are being asked to take part in a research study being done by Isaac Torres, Doctoral Candidate at Texas State University. This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of former students categorized as “high-school dropouts”. The aim of this research is to problematize the category of a high-school dropout, as being an organic derivative of a compulsory public schooling system. This study is neither trying to further subjugate the category, nor vindicate the same. This post-structural analysis will be a socio-political examination of the confluence of data that helped to co-create the high-school dropout.

### PROCEDURES:

If you elect to participate, you will engage in a minimum of 1:1-hour long podcasting session which will include exposure to podcasting technical instruction, of managing audio files, and of how to potentially share the same information. This component of the methodological approach, disturbs assumed political borders, and allows the participants to be more immersed in the data collection process. This procedure does not have any known theoretical implications for the audio data recorded. The interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission. Taking part in this study is

voluntary so you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In no way will your participation in this study affect your relationship with your current service-provider.

**RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:** There is little risk in participating in this study. In talking about school and your schooling experience, you may become uncomfortable sharing challenges or unhappy experiences. However, you may choose to not answer any of the questions that make you uncomfortable, and still take part in the study. There are no known psychological or physiological risks associated with taking part in this research. **Title IX** is an institutional rule that protects human rights in cases of sexual abuse. All attention and intention will be given to protect the emotional, mental, and physical health of all participants. In a case where a participant might share a story that includes a report of sexual abuse, the lead investigator is required to report the same to the **Title IX** manager.

**BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES:** You may not benefit from taking part in this research. However, what you share may help other students in other school settings to benefit from using reflexive discourse in assessing school experiences.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your name will never appear on any research documents. A pseudonym (code) will be used to protect your identity. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the investigator's office and the investigator, Isaac A. Torres, will have sole access. Your response(s) will appear only with a pseudonym when presented in written or oral form at professional meetings. Your name will never appear in any publication of these data. All materials will be kept for five years before being destroyed.

**PAYMENT/COMPENSATION:** You will not be paid for taking part in this research.

**PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You can decide not to take part, or, if you start the study, you may stop participating at any time. If you refuse or fail to participate, this will not affect your relationship with your service-provider, or the researcher in any way.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read this Consent form and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. By signing this Consent form I am agreeing to allow my child to take part in this research project.

**QUESTIONS:**

Questions about this research should be addressed to Isaac A. Torres  
[it10@txstate.edu](mailto:it10@txstate.edu).

This project (IRB #5634) was approved by Texas State IRB on\_\_\_\_\_. Questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the the PI, Miguel Guajardo (512) 589-4289, IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert (512-245-8351 – ([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)), and to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager (512-245-2334 - [meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu)).

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**Participant's Signature**

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**Date**

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**Investigator's Signature**

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**Date**

You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options: I consent to audio recording: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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