

SENATOR MORRILL'S SPARTANS:  
CLASSICAL RECEPTIONS AND REBELLIONS IN THE  
HISTORICAL RHETORICS OF A LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY

By

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## ABSTRACT

### SENATOR MORRILL'S SPARTANS: CLASSICAL RECEPTIONS AND REBELLIONS IN THE HISTORICAL RHETORICS OF A LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY

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The primary goal of this work is to ask two questions: (1) Can an institution ever escape the rhetorics that built it? How are those in the university haunted by the rhetorics of its past? and (2) If a progressive cause – in this case the land-grant university – is supported by conservative rhetorics, how do those conservative rhetorics compromise the success of progressive goals? In three sections, I investigate these questions through a case study of the adoptions of and rebellions against classical (Greek and Roman) rhetorics in the history of Michigan State University. I introduce two hypotheses about historical rhetorics and political change. First, classical rhetorics built to support social inequality retain parts of their original meanings, even when repurposed to serve a progressive cause. Second, past institutional rhetorics remain embedded in each university. The consequences of their incomplete incorporation into the present rhetorics of the university show that historical rhetorics have a crucial role in our analyses of the institutional spaces and cultures in which we work and teach.

To Marcus Shapiro, who ‘wrote’ on my birthday card that he was “a big fan of writing.”  
To Adam Johnson, who enjoys hidden histories with me.  
To my parents, Ruth Ann and Albert Shapiro, who shaped my approaches to history,  
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## **Section I.**

### **Introduction**

The primary goal of this work is to ask two questions: (1) Can an institution ever escape the rhetorics that built it? How are those in the university haunted by the rhetorics of its past? and (2) If a progressive cause – in this case the land-grant university – is supported by conservative rhetorics, how do those conservative rhetorics compromise the success of progressive goals? In three sections, I investigate these questions through a case study of the adoptions of and rebellions against classical (Greek and Roman) rhetorics in the history of Michigan State University.

In “Section II: Institutional History and the Present,” I theorize through historical rhetorics the felt experiences of exclusion and displacement in the institution. In a case study of the recent rediscovery of Georgetown’s 1838 sale of 272 slaves in order to keep the university in business, I explore the rhetorical meanings of the various memorializations suggested and employed, and what stories they tell, or leave untold, about the university. Specifically, I ask: what are the consequences of dark pasts that remain silent, or hidden? How do the stories we tell about the institution’s past mean in the present, especially for the lived experience of individuals belonging to historically excluded groups, as they move in the institution? I use this example to explore the possibility of escaping the rhetorics of history, that uncomfortable truths, once buried, are not truly gone. Given that it is impossible to escape past rhetorics, I ask instead that scholars and all those in the university confront and come to terms with their own

emotional experiences of higher education, to enter into dialogue with the rhetorics of the institutional past.

The central case study of this project, however, pertains to classical reception in a specific, innovative college, then called the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, and presently Michigan State University. Therefore I delve more deeply into the history of emotional relationships with the Greek and Roman past in the United States broadly, and specifically in the nation's ivory towers, contemporary with the founding of that college. In addition, I review the relationships between the discipline of rhetoric and classical reception, a past which evokes complex emotional reactions in many scholars, especially those who belong to historically stigmatized and excluded groups, and who have experienced classical reception as a tool of exclusion, part of the (White, elite) shape of academia. There is much in the history of rhetoric that is uncomfortable, even painful, but the past does not go away: it haunts the present in gaps, inconsistencies, the forgotten original goals of partially repurposed rhetorical structures.<sup>1</sup> In this section, I exhort us as scholars to engage with the history of classical reception in higher education, and to identify and analyze our emotional responses to it.

The third section, "Senator Morrill's Spartans," is the first portion of a two-part case study of Michigan State University, the model for the nation's land-grant universities, a progressive agricultural school created to teach the applied science of agriculture and a liberal-arts background to the sons of farmers. Twice in the school's history, in disparate occasions and contexts, the students were compared to ancient Spartans. This first part of the case study has two goals: first, to parse and analyze the

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of haunting as a metaphor for historiography as atemporal, a discourse signifying a relationship among past (the dead), present, and future, see Ballif 2014.



highly conservative rhetorical approaches used to defend the creation of a radical and progressive new educational system, and second, to understand an oddity within those conservative rhetorical approaches: the characterization of the Spartans as farmers.

As the ancient sources show, it is precisely Sparta's most nationalistic narratives of essentialist superiority that later cultures, and even some of classical Sparta's Athenian contemporaries, have most eagerly repurposed. While it may seem odd that Senator Justin Morrill, in 1858, should use these narratives in support of a system devoted to the college education of the common man, this is partially explained as a means of Hellenizing his schools – appropriating the cultural authority of classical Greece – and at the same time distancing them from traditional higher education, which had taken Athens as its signifier.

The bizarre invention of the Spartan farmer, I demonstrate, is a hybrid of the Spartans with another fantasy of nationalistic manhood: the yeoman farmer. This figure is himself an amalgamation of conservative classical rhetorics aimed at excluding the landless poor and the slave. But most prominently, in the yeoman's U.S. incarnations as well as ancient ones, the yeoman is defined by his foils, the urban poor and rich, each portrayed as morally degenerate, and typically effeminized as well. Thus, like the Spartans, the yeoman farmer is a gendered and raced nationalistic rhetorical tool, which helped to win one of the most important pieces of legislation in higher education reform.

I introduce two hypotheses about historical rhetorics and political change in this section. First, a rhetoric built to support social inequality retains parts of its original meanings, even when repurposed to serve a progressive cause. By drawing on the rhetorics of the so-named Spartan Mirage and the yeoman farmer, Morrill came to use the

conservative rhetorics of gender normativity and nationalism to rhetorically justify an educational system designed to provide rural citizens of every income level with professional skills and a general liberal-arts background. In 1858, the effectiveness of normative gender rhetorics and nationalism is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, I raise the question: when we repurpose rhetorics with long and inequitable histories, what messages from the past come along for the ride? This question, above all, reminds us of our pressing need to maintain historical-rhetoric scholarship as part of the general knowledge of rhetoric and composition scholars. Those who have never studied the rhetorics of the Western and other pasts will be slower to recognize the sinister ghosts that intrude.

The fourth section, “The Spartan Mirage in the Visual Rhetorics of Michigan State University,” explores how the space of the rhetorical visual past intrudes on the present campus. The first sub-heading, “The Spartan: Neoclassicism, Nationalism, Masculinity, and Essentialist Narratives of Superiority,” describes the visual rhetorics, in historical context, of the nine-foot-high Spartan statue which has graced the campus since 1945. The neoclassical male nude is generically and stylistically influenced (as I argue) by the monumental art of the contemporary German National Socialists, because both carry the same message of nationalism and essentialist superiority, but for profoundly different institutional contexts: the one for rallying students and alumni ‘round the football team and that team’s excellence *qua* M.S.U. Spartans, and the other for rallying citizens around a totalitarian regime engaged in militaristic imperialism and racial ‘purification’ through genocide. This juxtaposition is not so absurd as it may at first appear, because the visual rhetorics which communicate a gendered and racialized nationalism may be similar, and similarly read, in two contemporary Western nations,

even when the ultimate uses to which that nationalism is put are radically different. This investigation into the exclusionary historical visual rhetorics which shaped this iconic image on the present campus of this innovative and progressive university raises the question: How do we, the progressive inhabitants and workers on a college campus, coexist with (and/or thrive in spite of) reactionary historical rhetorics of campus institutions?

In the final section, “Rebranding the Spartan: ‘Sparty’ and the Spartan Crest Poster Campaign”, I examine how the university branding campaign employing Spartan helmet crests attempts to negotiate the university’s conservative rhetorical past. The campaign depends on the continued appeal of the Spartan mirage, which, as I demonstrate in Section III, is an elitist rhetoric designed to sustain an exclusionary model. The branding campaign then places this symbol of Western exceptionalism on the heads of various people within the university, with the visual message that all of these diverse people, doing diverse activities, are part of this institution. The visual rhetorics at work are explicitly progressive, proclaiming, for example, Black women’s rightful place within the university. However, the posters in question operate on violating assumptions about the Western exceptionalism and cultural authority embodied in the Spartan crest, the expectations of a traditional university and its curriculum and spaces, and the gendered and raced bodies depicted. In sum, the visual rhetorics of the posters depend on an implicit mainstream cultural assumption that the elements within the picture are disparate, yet brought together at the progressive Michigan State University.

I interpret this strategy as a means of negotiating how to communicate a progressive message incorporating conservative (visual) rhetorics enmeshed in the

history of the institution. While the posters celebrate cultural and curricular diversity, they do so by making symbols of Western essentialist superiority – the Spartan and the Spartan crest – stand for all. Through the branding images’ use of stereotypes, they also implicitly perpetuate the very assumptions about gender, race, and the spaces and curricula of the university which they seek to complicate. These posters, and the cuter, cartoon “Sparty”, the mascot created to complement the image of the Spartan statue, all indicate a rhetoric at odds with elements of itself: in short, an amalgam of the different elements and ideologies within the modern university, and the rhetorical oddities created in making them an artificial whole. This intrusion of the past and its strategic and incomplete incorporation into the present rhetorics of the university shows that historical rhetorics have a crucial role in our analyses of the institutional spaces and cultures in which we work and teach.

## Section II.

### Institutional History and the Present

Why do we need a history of the rhetorics of classical reception in any university, let alone a category of university as specific as United States land-grant institutions? The answer is that we in higher education cannot afford to ignore or disown the past of our institutions – colleges and universities on the Western higher education model in general, and the specific institutions where we teach and study. The stories about the past are entities with whom we in the present have a relationship, an active dialogue, and an emotional dynamic. As King 2003 suggests, the telling of history is a rhetorical act, a story that shapes our perception of the present (62-89). History tells a story about the present, one invested with rhetorical significance, a contested positionality. But that is not the whole story. This premise specifies that there is a relationship between the present and the historical narrative of the past, without talking about the varied possibilities for the nature of that relationship, *how* that past can create meaning for the definition and identity in the present. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love offers a new theoretical orientation for reception, specifically lesbians' reception of the past: sometimes a tragic one, sometimes – as she argues of Sappho – a friend to reach for, across millennia (1-52). We are all, Love suggests, in an emotional relationship with the past.

In this project, I invite scholars of rhetoric to face the rhetorics of the university as an institution, to delve into the (his)stories the institution tells about itself, and into the histories of those rhetorics. Where do they come from? To what other narratives have they belonged? And, most importantly, do the meanings and messages of those other narratives linger, once the rhetoric has been repurposed? If so, how? If the people in the institution – students, faculty and community members – are unaware of the history, of the previous narratives that the university’s rhetorics have served, does that prevent the past from intruding on present meanings? Is it ever possible for a rhetoric to escape its history? The goal of this study is not to answer these questions definitively, because such an answer could not account for the complexities of any institution’s past and present. My goal here is to demonstrate the relevance and importance of the question for rhetorical studies.

To explore emotional relationships with history in higher education, I offer a case study of an unpleasant history underpinning the existence of a university. In 2016, the New York Times published an article about 272 slaves, including children, sold away from their families and homes in 1838 by the Jesuit priests running the Catholic university which was to be called Georgetown (Swarns 2016). The sale was organized in order to keep the school from going under by the then-presidents of the university, Jesuit priests Reverends Mulledy and McSherry, and netted the equivalent of 3.3 million dollars to keep the doors open. While a substantial number of U.S. universities have a slaveowning past, a fact publicly (though not frequently or loudly) acknowledged by the institutions, this sale was exceptional because of its magnitude, monetary value and purpose. This rediscovery of lost history demonstrates the significance of students’ and

community members' emotional relationships with the institutional past, and how they navigate that relationship through their (re)construction of the university in the present.

The decisions about how to respond, how to reshape Georgetown to accommodate this “new” truth, varied. The students wanted to eliminate the perpetrators from the physical landscape of the university. Upon learning of the sale, they used twitter to organize protests, until the university consented to remove the names of the two offending Antebellum university officials from campus buildings. But for others, this history defined to whom the university rightfully belonged. A concerned alumnus sought out the descendants of the men, women and children sold. As a result, the university formed a committee charged with memorializing and/or apologizing for the sale, and offering scholarships to descendants, although they would have to be admitted through the regular admissions process. Maxine Crump, a retired television anchorwoman, activist against institutional racism, and descendant of Cornelius Hawkins, sold as a child in the 1838 sale, called for more, dismissing “casual institutional apologies.”. She asked that the university seek out descendants, and pay them back in the cultural capital Georgetown sells: not only could descendants come on full scholarship, but should be admitted automatically (Swarns 2016).

People's emotional relationships with this previously unknown past were powerful, and inflected through their identities. Those who were descendants, like Ms. Crump, expressed anger. Students, university employees, alumni and descendants suggested and initiated a variety of rhetorical actions to begin “healing” the past. Each of these sought to change a different rhetoric of the institution's story about itself. First, students demanded renaming of the buildings dedicated to men who sold families apart

and children from their parents. The older rhetorics of the institution, the ones in play when the buildings were named for the old Jesuits, counted that act of sale as an unimportant past, not defining for the men who initiated it, not key in the reckoning of their memory and membership in the university. The students then put an end to that version of history, though, as I hope to argue, to erase a narrative from view does not necessarily end it.

A second rhetoric under threat is one more volatile in the modern university: that of meritocracy. The notion that the descendants could have a claim to the valuable goods the university offers, but not be admitted by the narrow and class-inflected meritocratic standards used by the admissions office, is perhaps the most contentious of the proposed “healing” acts. This is telling a story in which the past deracinates the university from the notion that its admissions are as they should be. It reveals the dark past that built the present, where the (white) children of slaveholders have more wealth, statistically speaking, and more access to the kinds of achievements that would get one admitted to Georgetown. Crump demands that the university rethink who the university belongs to, and who belongs in it: if your body, your ancestor’s body, were sacrificed for it, then it owes you its greatest gift, access to that cultural capital and marvelous flights of knowledge. Crump thus uses the “new” history to create a critical version of the present, one which strikes at the heart of what any modern university says it is. The rhetorics of university admissions suggests that the students are carefully selected because of their achievements. The school’s propaganda constructs the admissions process as sorting the very best, those whose potential for academic excellence shines through their application dossiers. Admissions is literally designed for exclusion. Crump suggests that the students



who belong in the university are those whose great-great grandparents were sold away from their loved ones so that others could pursue higher learning, that such youth own a share in the university now, just as it owned their ancestors. She creates a new present for the university, reading against and interrogating its institutional rhetorics. This impetus for change comes from a rewriting and reinterpretation of Georgetown's history.

The work of remembering, memorializing, and forgetting university history is part of the discipline of rhetoric. Michael Bernard-Donals, in his work on the holocaust and memory, describes the ruptures among event, memory, history, and emotion (Bernard-Donals 2009). He is interested in narrative memory, narrative history, and how the acts of saying, speaking, story-telling events is an act of forgetting, an act of editing out.

Bernard-Donals frames that storytelling process, the breaks between witnesses' narratives and their flashes of relived experience, and the ruptures among these and the "knowledge" (e.g. facts) of history, as a rhetorical problem, in which traumatic events and the full experience of having lived them continually break down the rhetorics of historical and witness narratives. In the history of the university, too, the stories the institution tells have breaks. A change in the historical narrative, the rediscovery of the 1838 sale, caused a disruption in the rhetorics of the university's past, in the rhetorics of the space of the university, and in the rhetorics of who belongs in it. Institutional histories, and their erasures, and ruptures, belong to the field of rhetorical studies.

What is lost by erasures, by changing university spaces, by forgetting what was? Does a dark past, once forgotten, go away? Through this thesis, I argue that histories erased or forgotten, are not gone, not completely. They are hidden. 'Erasing' history because it is terrible does not rub out its traces in the present. Norman Klein, a critical

historian of urban spaces in Los Angeles, speaks of the discontinuities left by a forgotten past, the features of the landscape which no longer make sense: a tunnel built for a subway that never was, a network of communities destroyed by real-estate speculators and city planners motivated by profit and racism (Klein 2008: 12-64). The suburbanization and decentralization which deracinated the Black and Latinx populations may still be felt by the people living in highly segregated communities, such as Watts, without community members ever knowing the past which created that segregation. I question also what may be the experiences of Black and Latinx individuals living in the suburban spaces of Los Angeles planned by real-estate speculators to tempt White Protestants from the middle of the country to sunny California. Do non-White residents in the present feel and experience any traces of the racial intentions which drove the creation of those spaces? There are other ways of interpreting these phenomena of structural racism and exclusion. But I suggest that historical rhetorics are a powerful tool for investigating potentially hidden realities of the past, whose consequences are felt, are experienced, in the present.

Even as the modern university tells a story of itself as a space of inclusion and social equality and mobility, for members of historically excluded groups, a thousand small things in the university's present structure still tell them, "you do not belong." One of my students at Michigan State University, the daughter of a migrant worker, confronted the temporal problems of supporting herself while also doing full-time course work. She struggled to find a schedule which made both work and school possible. She could see that neither the labor market nor higher education were designed to suit her situation, were shaped to fit someone like her. The force of exclusion, built into the

university and the world of labor, was very real to this dedicated woman, who felt the logistical and emotional force of history of the university without knowing all of the structures which created it. (I acknowledge that Michigan State University, in its tuition-free and student-supporting origins, might have suited this student better, though its evolution and revenue streams have since diverged from that model.)

Public rhetorics continue to interrogate what stories are told through memorials (e.g. Dickinson et al. 2010). I ask also what happens when stories and spatial realities are lost, are erased. What is lost by taking down the names from the lintels? It is not in keeping with humane values that these men, who sold Black children from their families, be honored by the university in the naming of its spaces. But in removing the names, we also lose that long history during which the names graced the buildings unproblematically, when the act of selling Black children *was not a stain on one's academic legacy*. What I present is the basis for a quandary, not a solution. But it should be a quandary which is addressed by scholars of rhetorics, how to tell stories in meaningful ways, and how the aftershocks of old stories can be felt, even when the stories themselves are all but forgotten. These questions are all part of why historical rhetorics should always have a role in the work of Rhetoric and Composition scholars. In this work, I invite them to revisit the significance of historical rhetorics, and in particular those which still exist in some form in the present environment of the institution.

### Classical Reception, the University, and the Nation

My case study in this thesis will be about rhetorics of classical reception that rebel from the classical and embrace it at the same time, and use the rhetorics of classical

reception – extremely conservative tools – to sustain progressive rhetorics about the university. But first, in order to understand how this contradictory relationship with the classics in the university might come about, it is necessary to explore the role that classical studies have had in the structures and ideologies of higher education. In this exploration, our individual, emotional relationships with the past count, whether love of the ancient world for the freedom it affords (e.g. from homophobia, from Christianity), to the brutalities of the colonialism of schooling, in which classical studies and reception played a large role, to say nothing of the brutalities in the ancient world itself (cf. Love 2007: 1-52). I focus on the nineteenth century United States, because it is from the middle of that period that my case study, the creation of the land-grant colleges, emerged. This section is also devoted to examining the rhetoric of the curriculum: the centrality of classical studies to the university in the early nineteenth century, and what it meant rhetorically for a college – the future Michigan State University – to distance itself from (and to connect itself with) that norm.

The Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, founded in 1855 and destined to become Michigan State University, will be the primary case study of this paper. It was a radical reimagining of higher education, because of its curriculum: the science of farming. This school, created by the efforts of the Michigan Agricultural Society, was a model for the Land Grant colleges, as created by the Morrill Act of 1862. Senator Justin S. Morrill, of Vermont, speaking before the House of Representatives in 1858, called for his Land Grant institutions to be “like that of Michigan, liberally supported by the State, in the full tide of successful experiment,” (quoted Kuhn 1955: v). Greek and Latin were not required, as they were in every other university (the more prestigious the school, the

greater fluency in reading and writing both languages was required). It was free to the young men it admitted to the original class of one hundred students, who paid for their education with their labor, clearing and building the campus. It did include substantial liberal arts: the boys read Shakespeare, Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, and classical history in translation. Yet still, the curriculum was a profound refiguring of what a college was.

Its curriculum, like its price tag (which, in fairness, was the same for some traditional public institutions, including the University of Michigan), were for the common man, the son of a farmer who would come back to the farm and run it better. (This was what the Michigan Agricultural Society and the farmers who sent their sons wanted, though the sons had other ideas from the start.) In addition, teaching soil science to the yeoman farmer was a Northern political project, addressing Northern concerns. Six years from the college's founding, the Civil War would begin, and the South would defend an economy and ideology predicated on the exploitation of slave labor. Agricultural science was an issue in the North. Farmers in Morrill's home state, Vermont, and also in Michigan, were seeing decreased crop yields, and were ready for soil science to rescue them. Morrill was a founding member, with Abraham Lincoln, of the Republican Party, then a progressive and anti-slavery national political movement. Thus the future Michigan State was always predicated on politically and educationally progressive ideas. In this project, I explore the classical-reception rhetorics used in defense of this radical, progressive undertaking. And I ask: does the use of a conservative rhetoric – typically the ones which have the most easily recognized cultural authority – compromise a progressive purpose, one defying the very cultural hegemony of classical reception even as it uses it? (Widder 2005: 15-91)

Before investigating this question further, it is necessary to establish the meanings of classical reception in the mainstream (read: middle- and upper-class White) U.S. popular culture, and in higher education. The nineteenth-century United States was undergoing a resurgence in the love of the classics. In the first half of that period, a new pedagogical approach thrived in schools, and a resurgence in Hellenism where Latin literature had previously dominated. The classical world in all its vividness was meant to come alive for the student – in short, young scholars were introduced to the classical world as a source of pleasure and excitement. This emotional relationship with the ancient world carried into the popular culture of those whose education was shaped by this enthusiasm for ancient texts in context. The pleasure the U.S. mainstream found in classics was a resurgence of interest, but in the classics had always held primacy in the U.S. colleges and universities of the 1800's. In 1841, when the first class of young men entered the University of Michigan in the tiny, thirteen-years-old farming community of Ann Arbor, they took entrance exams in mathematics, geography, Latin, and Greek (Peckham 1997). This was the education required for law, for medicine, for the professions.

Like many a rhetoric that portrays itself as hegemonic, it was not uncontested, but rather when it was contested, it became more visible in reasserting itself. In 1830, Henry Verthake, a professor of mathematics and philosophy at Princeton, questioned why young men must be forced to learn Latin and Greek so very well before learning anything else. A changing economy, one already leaning towards industrialism, led Jacob Bigelow, Harvard's first professor of applied science, to comment that "a professional man may pass his whole life without a single call for his knowledge of astronomy, of metaphysics,

of Greek or of German. But it is not so with the practical and useful applications of science,” (quoted Richard 2009: 91). It may be imagined that this pioneering scientist, whose professional expertise was like that of the soil scientists to be employed at the Agricultural College in Michigan, was responding to the resistance some colleagues might have offered towards his discipline. But rather than read these pedagogical reformers as the norm, consider them as indicative of the status quo. In 1853, the president of South Carolina College, James H. Thornwell, commented that “it is hard that [students] cannot be permitted to get a little chemistry, a little engineering, or a little natural philosophy, without going through Homer and Virgil, Aristotle and Locke,” (Richard 2009: 90-95). Locke’s native tongue notwithstanding, Thornwell’s complaint shows the norm: admission to and being educated in the university required an extremely rigorous curriculum in classical languages and literatures. Classics were the gateway to education, politics, the professions, the elite.

Greece and Rome were not confined to the education of the upper middle class and the wealthy. Classics infiltrated popular entertainments, because romantic tales of high adventure were construed as morally improving and deepening of one’s finer feelings, so long as they came from Greece and Rome. Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii*, a historical novel, was a best-seller in 1834. Plays included *Caius Gracchus*, published 1851 by Louisa McCord, and Robert Montgomery Bird’s 1831 Spartacus narrative, *The Gladiator*, with over one thousand performances (Richard 2009: 22, 32). This fandom was not limited to fictionalized history. Charles Anthon’s *A Manual of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, published in two volumes 1851-1852, was likewise a bestseller, though markedly unforgiving to the reader uninitiated in the subject matter. In

1839, an American cynic commented on the hordes of his fellow countrymen and women, as tourists, exclaiming over the transporting qualities of ancient art at the Vatican Museum (Richard 2009: 5). Parents named their children with classical names, evidently encouraging them to emulate classical models. Slaveowners inflicted classical epithets on slaves, too, but rather with the intention to deride and ideologically dominate. Classics were a colonizer's weapon, fantasy playground, and moral uplift.

Every political position could be and was justified with recourse to classical antecedents. For example, Hellenism and classicism were used to justify slavery and to fight it. (Slavery was heavy on the minds of North Americans in this period; Kansas was already “bleeding,” and the South would secede in 1861.) In short, The very notion of holding the White (or, more accurately, Whitened) Western past as an ideal reinforces white superiority. It was easy to justify slavery using rhetorics from conservative, slave-holding societies. In 1857, pro-slavery pamphleteer and lawyer George Fitzhugh claimed that slavery allowed Whites to practice the arts of citizenship:

“We need never have white slaves in the South, because we have black ones.

Our citizens, like those of Rome and Athens, are a privileged class. We should train and educate them to deserve the privileges and to perform the duties which society confers on them... It is a distinction to be a Southerner, as it once was to be a Roman citizen.” (Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All: Slaves Without Masters*, quoted Richard 2009: 183)

In sum, slaves' working at tasks unfit for a citizen elevates the citizenship to a sort of nationalistic aristocracy, an argument adapted from the rhetorical moves of politicians in



the Athenian democracy.<sup>2</sup> Conservative rhetorics from the ancient world well suited the needs of a conservative present. However, given the ubiquity and power of classics as a narrative in the U.S., it was by no means confined to the justification of slavery. Equally, Louisa McCord's 1851 play gave the Roman land reformer Gaius Gracchus the lines, "From the depopulated country fly / The shepherd and the husbandman, to make / Room for the rich man's slave," (McCord 1851, quoted Richard 2009: 184). The classical world could not only justify slavery, but also abolition. (It should be noted that while Gaius Gracchus objected to plantations, he did so, as McCord's speech suggests, because they damaged the yeoman farmer, the idealized citizen of the Roman – and the U.S. – republic.) The existence of a similar idea in the classical world was a means of justifying anything and everything.

A note: The modern student might assume that Sparta, with her elite population of full citizens and vast majority of agricultural serfs or slaves, was a natural emotional home for the American Southerner. But this was not the case. The democracy of the ancient world was hierarchical, elitist, unequal, and caste-dependent, and it dovetailed nicely with White Southern racial ideologies. It was up to those resisting them to take a different classical model. The Southern elite ideals of enjoying one's private property as a lord in one's own fiefdom, understood as life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness, were readily supported by Athenian democratic rhetorics. By contrast, the grim Spartan attention to duty, and their state-controlled property (including the huge population of agricultural slaves called helots), did not suit Southern ideas about property rights and the role of the federal government. Small wonder, then, that one year later,

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<sup>2</sup> Richard 2009: 182-203, cf. Ober 1991.

before the House of Representatives, Morrill would refer to his agricultural students as Spartans (Richard 2009: 182-188).

People from colonized pasts, *qua* moving and functioning in the racist mainstream, were not immune: two Native American leaders gave themselves classical names (“Neptune,” “Roman Nose”) and in 1832, African-Americans in Washington, D.C. hosted a fundraiser consisting of lectures on works of Plato and Cicero to pay for an individual slave’s freedom (Richard 2009: 4, 32). It is beyond the scope of this study to examine in full the rhetorical implications of White and nonwhite/colonized Americans’ changing emotional relationship with the classical past; for the time being, I seek only to briefly characterize it. In short, the mainstream, White United States was newly re-enamoured of the classics, delighting in the the adventure and romance of their (imagined, White-privileged fantasy) ancient world. For those with upper-class mores and the education to match, entertainment was not just fiction about the classical world, but serious classical scholarship.

To return from the general surge in interest in the classics in the nineteenth century to the academy: the discipline of English and Rhetoric was not immune to legitimizing itself through the classics. For example, at Harvard in 1806, the statesman, senator, and sixth president of the United States, John Quincy Adams, became the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric. The stipulations of the endowed chair required the holder to teach rhetoric, as defined by the works of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. Adams’ *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*, published 1810, covers invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory, an affirmation that the discipline was unchanged and unchanging from the ancient rhetorical tradition. (Berlin 1984: 1-33)

His was a conservative educational perspective even then. Eighteenth-century Scottish rhetoricians George Campbell, Hugh Blair and Richard Whately, who introduced scientific reasoning to the art of persuasion, had long predominated in most composition classrooms. This was part of a national shift away from classical-focused education, and towards a lionization of scientific knowledge, a shift to which the Agricultural College's curriculum and aims belongs. But consider against what this shift rebelled. Some of Adams' duties included leading twice-weekly recitations of classical texts in English (e.g. the students translate aloud, a standard method of reading practice in the original language, often interspersed with literary and cultural analysis), and grading translations of classical orations into English. The time split between classical sources in the original language and the readings and composition of English was roughly half and half. (Berlin 1984: 1-33)

The shift to vernacular education, against which Adams was a holdout, was political: holding all educational transactions in a language which is only accessible through expensive lessons and constant study is a system designed to exclude all but the wealthy, and those steeped in aristocratic privilege. It makes sense that Harvard, the self-styled gate-keeper of privilege, would cling to this version of rhetorical education. Nevertheless, given the classical context of American education and culture, as described above, Adams' system should not be considered as atypical as that. It is from this background, one born in imitation and reception of the ancient rhetorical tradition, that the modern discipline of Rhetoric comes, still bearing the ancient name and terminology used by Aristotle. (Berlin 1984: 1-33)

As I will argue in this paper, it is hard to escape one's past, even when one wants to, because it is uncomfortable, unpopular, or even unknown. When our students – or we ourselves – step into the university, they / we encounter the institutional past, as it is inscribed in the present. In the following section, I will outline how this encounter can become an opportunity to recognize and analyze the rhetorics of the institution. Ultimately, we can reflect on the past, the present, and our emotional relationship with both. In sum, I offer history of institutional rhetorics as a rhetorical approach to situating oneself and one's scholarly agenda in the university.

#### Institutional Histories as Recognition, Understanding, Healing, Activism

In Jennifer Trainor's *Rethinking Racism*, she describes white high school students who excuse themselves from history, and thus from complicity in the tragedies of slavery and segregation, and ultimately, of any White oppression of Black people (57-60). From a critical perspective, racism and white privilege, institutional and otherwise, shaped the past and shapes the present of everyone living in the U.S. Like Trainor's students, we in the university might feel at odds with an institutional past, and want to insulate ourselves from it. Students and faculty alike might find it easier to say that the university's past doesn't matter, and has no connection to themselves. But that is never true. Like all of us living in the consequences of America's racial history, all of us in the university are living in the consequences of an institutional history.

Some, because they belong to populations historically (and currently) excluded from or stigmatized by the university, may feel emotionally at odds with the university's present, and perhaps even more so with its past. The possibilities of non-Western, non-

exclusionary rhetorics, such as indigenous rhetorics (e.g. Baca and Villanueva 2010), are vital to healing these traumas – an intellectual, theoretical, rhetorical space to be in other than that Western pedagogy which has been a tool of exclusion and colonization. Some are unwilling to look back on the Western past. Their emotional relationship with that past is one of trauma. This emotional relationship is grounded in the personally felt consequences of a history of nations and peoples. This work is partially inspired by an impetus to interrogate whether obliterating a traumatic past is an action which attains the resolution it seeks. I suggest that the sometimes painful process of studying it can be part of confronting and coming to terms with an institutional past. Yet studying the past is not an end in itself; here, the rhetorical goal of telling this history is to find one's emotional relationship with the university, and one's place in it. Thus each individual member's emotional relationship with the university becomes a sort of research question: what past has happened that I am here and I have these feelings?

I am not suggesting acceptance and emotional reconciliation as a substitute for activism. Understanding the rhetorics of the university, and recognizing one's feelings and experience about one's place in it, are more tools of the activist than palliatives that substitute for change. If parts of the university's past and/or its corresponding present rhetorical structures provoke a negative emotional (or intellectual, or both) response from us as its members, we will find it useful to know what work that history and rhetoric has done and is now doing, and whom in the university it serves. Not every party in the university is equally invested in all of its rhetorical structures. For example, one student's rapist may be another's football hero. Thus I invite us to research and reflect on the university. I hope that in doing so, scholars of rhetoric and composition rediscover that

historical rhetorics are crucial, even central, to what drives us in the university, and to the choices we make as teachers and scholars.

I will give my own experience in the institution, as a freshman, to show how understanding one's present in the context of history of the university can bring emotional acceptance, and ultimately, scholarly direction shaped by and responding to my experience – activism, insofar as critical scholarship constitutes activism. As a freshman college student, I was faced with the task of getting the university to recognize and make “reasonable accommodations” for my disability, primarily dropping to one or two classes a term while maintaining full-time student status. With Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, the arbitrary number of units designated “full-time” – three classes – was more than I could do and still learn and maintain my GPA. This also meant rhetorically presenting myself as a disabled person but still studious, intelligent, and of potential value to society (something I did not truly believe myself) to all the people who had to help me with my schedule, including college and department undergraduate advisors. I had to do the same with professors, to explain frequent absences and sometimes extensions on work, when I had a flareup. My body literally did not fit the shape of undergraduate academic labor in the institution, and I was left to negotiate a way for myself, logistically and rhetorically, in a huge bureaucracy and a competitive academic environment.

Because Berkeley was a pioneer in disability rights, by happenstance I got a historical narrative to help frame my experience. The struggle for disabled students' rights to a college education was written on the waiting-area wall in the Disabled Students' Services office, where I would sit with mundane regularity. A family friend,

Berkeley local and alumna told me another institutional history that contributed to my difficulties. U.C. Berkeley was overcrowded, and had been for decades. Contributing to this were substantial numbers of students who, enjoying the town and the rich intellectual and artistic environment, dragged their degrees out, taking one class a term. Thus the university set draconian unit-limit policies in place on how many units one must take per semester, to move undergraduates out and make room for new admissions. This meant I was forced to prove my disability and press for accommodations in order to take fewer courses. This knowledge did not change what I did. I would still have had to negotiate a maze of bureaucracy, clinging to supporters (a brilliant advisor in Classical Studies, a fierce advocate in Disabled Students' Services), and progressively learning how to rhetorically frame my need for accommodations when outing myself, to minimize the damage done and get the help I needed. But knowing that the shape of the rules was designed to exclude, and designed that way to serve the needs of the institution (clearly not to serve the students), helped me deal with it emotionally. It also influenced my approaches as a critical social historian. As a person whose disability was defined by limited time and energy, critical scholarship was the form of activism most accessible to me. This multifaceted encounter with norms in the institution led me to a career searching for the cultural edifices that look unchanging, natural, inevitable, but are actually the products of specific histories.

### **Section III.**

#### **Senator Morrill's Spartans**

Michigan State University's mascot's origin was incidental: no deep ideological investment of the institution led the school to choose the Spartan as its symbol. However, the Spartan did emerge in a moment of crisis in the university's self-definition. The school and its vision of itself had developed in new directions. By 1915, enrollment in the agricultural division had shrunk by 25%, and engineering enrollment had increased by 50%. The Michigan Agricultural Society had created a school to make young men better farmers and to give them a general liberal-arts education. From the college's inception, fathers had sent their sons to the college to make them better farmers, and their sons, once there, had decided that they did not want to go back to the farm. Rather, they took advantage of new opportunities. Fathers saw class and economic reproduction, but students saw a means of class and economic upward mobility. The need for a new sports-team identity was occasioned by the recognition that the school had outgrown its original agriculture-centered vision. Alumni complained that its name, Michigan Agricultural College, undermined the credibility of their professional credentials, such as engineering degrees. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1925, the institution became "Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science." (Kuhn 1955: 260-332)

Up to this point, the college football team had been the "Aggies" or "Farmers." A contest held by the school newspaper to suggest replacement names resulted in a popular



winner, “Michigan Staters,” but this was rejected by editors at the school newspaper, the *Michigan State News*, who searched among rejected entries for a name with more marketing power. They chose “Spartans”. It was first used by the paper in April of 1926, and, to all appearances, was readily adopted.<sup>3</sup> The selection of the school’s mascot was hardly chosen in thoughtful dialogue with any larger institutional mission or purpose. (Kuhn 1955: 298-305)

Coincidentally, in 1858, the founder of land-grant universities, Senator Justin S. Morrill of Vermont, who took the institution then known as Michigan Agricultural College as a model, compared the future students of his hoped-for institutions to Spartans. In doing so, he gave (or appropriated for) his young college system a link with the classical past, but one which claimed a space for it in opposition to the classical education of traditional universities.

It is not that the football team chose Sparta because Morrill used it: the uses are not connected historically, but kairotically, because they both found the classical-reception rhetoric of Sparta expedient. Sparta emerges as a means of choosing a Western antecedent for masculinity, toughness, and action. It also marks one’s rhetorical juxtaposition of oneself with the traditional higher education, and its imagined ancient home, Sparta’s rival in the Peloponnesian War, the source of the majority of Greek literature – Athens. This rhetoric of classical reception, namely the invocation of Sparta, happened to emerge as useful in both moments in the characterization and development of land-grant universities in general, and the institution formerly known as Michigan Agricultural College in particular.

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<sup>3</sup> Kuhn remarks that “a year later ‘The Gods of Sparta’ was the water carnival theme” (Kuhn 1955: 298-305).

Not only is the choice of Sparta an odd one to describe higher education, but it also draws on extremely conservative ancient rhetorics, ones plied with the greatest vigor by determined enemies of democracy.<sup>4</sup> Thus we come to the central question which I hope to answer with this case study: Can conservative and/or exclusionary rhetorics defend progressive causes, without bringing at least some of that exclusion with them? Morrill succeeded in getting his bill passed, and a second in 1890, to create public Historically Black Colleges/Universities, an easier strategy than compelling schools in the South to admit Black students. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that he did, in fact, gain progressive ends through conservative rhetorics, but at a price. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the classical reception rhetorics that Morrill chooses, political agrarianism and the Spartan mirage, were tools of exclusion and privilege in the ancient world, and gained traction among United States lawmakers precisely for this reason. In addition, Morrill's rhetoric is based in that very classical education that his revolutionary educational program rejects.

What, then, does this mean for scholars of rhetoric? The histories of rhetorics – what they have been used to argue in times and circumstances past – matter. Historical rhetorics may be powerful precisely because they have been useful for enforcing the prevailing social order, and so they get progressive work done, even win over those who are content in the *status quo*. But, as I hope to show, they do not lose their previous meanings, not entirely, even when turned to new, more equitable purposes. In the final chapter, “The Spartan Mirage in the Visual Rhetorics of Michigan State University,” I examine how the re-use of exclusionary ancient rhetorics complicates the progressive

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that advocates of democracy were themselves also slaveholders, and otherwise not inclusive by the standards of the modern university.

intentions of the modern university's branding campaigns, and best serves the most conservative interests within the institution.

### The Spartan Mirage in Antiquity and Beyond

In order to understand why invoking Sparta and her narratives is a rhetorical move with conservative origins, I offer a brief overview of the culture of ancient Sparta, and the oppressive economic and social structure which the city's civic ideology supported. The Spartans had conquered their neighbors in Laconia and Messenia by the Eighth Century B.C.E., and controlled a vast empire of fertile farmland through constant military training for the comparatively few Spartiates, the elite citizen class, and routine terrorism and ritual public humiliation of their primarily agricultural slaves (helots), who vastly outnumbered the Spartan citizens and free *perioikoi*, who were not slaves, but had no say in *polis*-level decision-making, and were obligated to perform military service.<sup>5</sup> Every citizen (Spartiate) was *de facto* a professional soldier, trained from the age of six in the strenuous state educational system, the *agōgē*, and then the *krypteia*, a sort of secret service in which young Spartans were trained to steal from and murder helots. Land was held by the state, with each citizen (females included) allotted a plot and unfree labor to work it; citizens were forbidden from engaging in agriculture and trade, and from specific displays of wealth. Adult males wore their hair long, as did other old-fashioned aristocrats throughout Greece, and full beards, as was customary for all adult Greek

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<sup>5</sup> The relative numbers of these three groups, Spartiates, *perioikoi*, and helots is unknown. However, the majority of helots appear to have lived on agricultural estates, controlled by the state but assigned to the support of individual Spartiates. Sparta's population was decentralized, consisting of smaller towns rather than a large metropolis like Athens, and the *perioikoi* (or "dwellers-around") seem to have had their own towns. At different historical periods, the percentages of each group varied – in particular, the numbers of the Spartiates declined – but never did the sum of the two other groups equal the number of helots (Figueira 1986).

males. The city itself, and its group of unequal allies, the Peloponnesian League, was Athens' chief rival for imperial control of Greece. And, as illustrated below, the elitism of Spartan ideology is precisely what attracted non-Spartan authors to its discourses.

(Powell 1988: 218-270, Figueira 1986)

The "Spartan mirage" is the name classical historians have given to the übermensch fantasy which surrounds the Spartans even in antiquity. In fact, it is shaped by our dearth of Spartan sources: almost all our sources for the Spartan state are from outside of Sparta, as was Herodotus (whose account of the Greco-Persian Wars, including the Battle of Thermopylae, is a primary source for the Spartan mirage). Description and praise of Spartan society was, in antiquity as now, a conservative rhetoric. Xenophon, who wrote a *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* and *Agésilas*, a life of the Spartan king, was no friend to the Athenian democracy, having fought on the side of the post-Peloponnesian-War puppet government, the Thirty Tyrants, against the democratic rebels. Although technically protected by the amnesty of 403/402, he spent the rest of his life after the war abroad, often a mercenary for Spartan commanders. Kritias, the oligarchical and bloodthirsty leader of the Thirty Tyrants (403-404 B.C.E.), wrote an account of Spartan society, preserved only in fragments. (Cartledge 2003: 170) In sum, the Spartan mirage, an ancient confection, a celebration of an archaizing and militaristic civic culture, was, in antiquity, repeatedly brought into service to justify oligarchical politics.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sparta could also be merely a symbol of old-fashioned morality. Aeschines, in *Against Timarchus*, speaking before a pro-democracy audience of jurors, uses the Spartan council of elders, the Gerousia, as an exemplum of old-fashioned, archaicized virtue (Aeschin. 1.180 ff., Fisher 2001: 327-332). As has been much discussed by scholars of Athenian political discourses, the essential conservatism of a political discourse never precluded its appeal to the common man in democratic Athens (cf. Ober 1991, Loraux 2006).

The Spartan Mirage was very attractive to neighboring cultures, and even the Spartans' conquerors. The Athenians, Peloponnesian War notwithstanding, were not immune from the appeal. In fourth-century Athens, it was evidently fashionable among certain wealthy young men to affect Spartan dress and mores: wearing long hair, going without baths or much food, carrying Spartan cudgels, and wearing short cloaks and single-soled shoes, which would be colder and less comfortable (Dem. 54.34, Ar. *Aves* 1280-1284). By Rome's defeat of Sparta in 147 B.C.E., Sparta's mirage was already proving more enduring than her government. Sparta then capitalized on their own reputation for archaic toughness, reenacting quaint Doric festivals, such as Spartan youths stealing cheeses from the altar of Artemis Orthia and being whipped by adults standing guard, for benefit of Roman tourists. Romans looked up to classical Sparta, since they had their own traditions of self-denial, militarism, duty and physical endurance as elite male values. Even in antiquity, therefore, Spartans rhetorically signified masculine and military excellence.

However, the Spartans were never considered great orators, hence the English term, "laconic". Spartans had a reputation for backwardness, at least at Athens, the main source of surviving Greek literature. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Spartan characters speak with a silly, 'hick' accent (e.g. 980-1013), and prefer a 'lesser' bargain in the comic sexual peace negotiations – they ask for the female incarnation of Peace's backside, and the Athenians get the legs and the front (1163-1173). It is clear, from the Spartan mirage, why one would compare oneself to a Spartan for the sake of appearing manly and tough. It is less obvious why one would find Spartan characteristics desirable in an institution of higher learning.

## Sparta and Higher Education

Athenians' (or at least Aristophanes') comic characterization of Spartans as foolish brutes might discourage one from naming the students of one's future college as Spartans. However, in Senator Morrill's choice of ancient antecedents for young U.S. citizen males, gender normativity evidently won out. By 1907, in the United States, Athens, and the traditional university as a whole, were already irretrievably effeminate. A British philologist and early gay-rights activist, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, gave his own analysis of classical models through the lens of received gender: Rome is a city of redbloods, manly men of action; Athens a city of mollycoddles, reflective and introspective, misfits in the mold of masculinity.

Dickinson's 1907 essay, "Redbloods and Mollycoddles," is somewhat facetious, but "Athenians" is not a popular epithet for university football teams. Athens means high culture, and depth of learning in the traditional university curriculum. Dickinson was responding to a speech of Theodore Roosevelt's, delivered to Harvard undergraduates in 1907, which he happened to hear while visiting that university. Then-president Roosevelt told the assembled youth that colleges should beware lest they "turn out mollycoddles instead of vigorous men," and pronouncing that "the weakling and the coward are out of place in a free community," (quoted Murphy 2008: 1). Roosevelt's exhortations, given his audience, imply that, like the Athenians whose texts they studied, these undergraduates, among the highest-achieving young scholars the nation had to offer, are in grave danger of mollycoddlehood.<sup>7</sup> While Roosevelt's and Dickinson's textual exchange dates forty-nine years after Morrill's, their shared language – "vigorous men",

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<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roosevelt also spoke at the 1903 graduation in Hearst Greek Theatre before it was completed; the text of that speech will have to remain beyond the scope of the current study.

“American vigor” – suggests a shared underlying gender construction and ideal for the citizen as moulded by the American college – and a shared suspicion of the masculinity fostered by traditional higher education. As Roosevelt’s words suggest, scholarship in the Western canon of literature, history, philosophy, science and mathematics is always, in the United States, in danger of slipping from proper manhood. (Murphy 2008). Small wonder, then, that Morrill should favor a nation of rough and hardy warriors, legendary for their few words.

Some universities, eager to brand themselves as respectable bastions of traditional education, embraced their identification with Athens. For example, U.C. Berkeley styled itself the “Athens of the West” from its 1868 founding (ten years after Morrill’s speech in the U.S. Senate). In 1903, the university established the Hearst Greek Theatre, a copy of a surviving theatre at Epidauros, on the slope of the Tilden Park foothills, and inaugurated it with Aristophanes’ *Birds*. The university provided itself with an architectural and cultural geography to match its appropriated Athenian identity.<sup>8</sup> Clark Kerr, chancellor of U.C. Berkeley 1952-1958 and head of the U.C. system 1958-1967, relates in his memoirs how he asked a Harvard friend why he was visiting Berkeley. The friend replied, “to see, from the perspective of an Athenian, how they did things in Sparta,” (Kerr 2001). The rhetorical juxtaposition of the cities is clear in this jibe: Athens, here Harvard, is the true center of higher learning, and Sparta, or Berkeley, a rough place where learning is not valued. The meaning of Athens in the university is high culture and higher education. What Sparta signifies as a means of characterizing the university requires our continued exploration into historical rhetorics about Michigan State University.

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<sup>8</sup> The football stadium was added a quarter-mile away in 1923.

### The Spartan Mirage and Agrarian Political Rhetorics

In the House of Representatives, on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1858, the Honorable Senator of Vermont, Justin S. Morrill, delivered a speech in favor of granting lands for agricultural colleges. The agricultural college was not Morrill's idea; he had a model in the newly-founded Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, founded in 1855, whose students were still clearing the woods for their fields (the site of the school had been chosen by committee, such that it consisted of swampy, dense woods) and sharing the area south of the Red Cedar River with Native American camps (Kuhn 1-22). He would not succeed in getting the first bill passed until 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, and it was followed by a second bill in 1890, aimed at creating colleges whose mission was to treat Black applicants fairly in the admissions process, twenty-five years after the end of slavery. The creation of these schools avoided requiring the existing Southern institutions created by the 1862 bill to make their admissions fair to Black students. Morrill's educational vision was progressive, and the agricultural schools he described were radical departures from traditional higher education. A founding member of the Republican party, like Abraham Lincoln, Morrill was equally progressive in his social vision: an abolitionist who dedicated himself to offering educational opportunities to men who otherwise lacked them.

My focus here is Morrill's complicated use of the imagery and political thought of the classical past in seeking to promote his land-grant university project to his fellow political leaders. He at once distances himself from traditional higher education, identifying his universities not with a Rome or Athens, the classical models most closely associated with the university, but with an unlikely model for an agricultural college, or



any college: Sparta. In diverging from the traditional curriculum in a new kind of college, he does not choose to go beyond the useful cultural authority of classical models, but instead chooses a contrary classical exemplum – though not one out of keeping with his masculinized and nationalistic view of his educational system. Senator Morrill imagines his new “school of ancient Sparta” as building manliness and citizenship, and the students’ practice of farming is the act which yields both:

But if this bill shall pass, the institutions of the character required by the people, and by our native land, would spring into life, and not languish from poverty, doubt, or neglect. They would prove (if they should not literally, like the schools of ancient Sparta, hold the children of the State) the perennial nurseries of patriotism, thrift, and liberal information – places “where *men* do not decay.”

They would turn out men for solid use, and not drones. It may be assumed that tuition would be free, and that the exercise of holding the plow and swinging the scythe – every whit as noble, artistic, and graceful, as the postures of the gymnastic and military drill – would go far towards defraying all other expenses of the students. Muscles hardened by such training would not become soft in summer or torpid in winter; and the graduates would know how to sustain American institutions with American vigor.

The small farmer becomes a Spartan warrior, and his swinging of the scythe becomes the gymnastic training and hoplite drills of Sparta. Morrill bolsters his image with a narrative of national exceptionalism (“American institutions... American vigor”), which echoes the elitist narratives of Spartan citizenship. The analogy classicizes and romanticizes the students working on the school farm (to support the tuition-free university). But we

should ask ourselves why, given that there are plenty of classical models which idealize farming as a citizen-building occupation, for example, that of Cincinnatus (below), Morrill chose such a bizarre classical antecedent: Spartans, who compelled their Messenian helots to farm for them, in a system whose demographics and logistics were closer to the Antebellum South than any yeomanry. Had he and his audience in the House of Representatives paid any attention in an educational system built around classical literature, they would know this. As we saw in *Lysistrata* above, the Spartans were even mocked as stupid. But that still leaves the question: why make scholars or farmers of Spartans, who were famously neither?

Morrill's construction of the small farmers who work their own land as the ideal citizen has classical roots in democratic Athens and republican Rome. Again, it is odd for a progressive like Morrill to see oligarchical and monarchical Sparta as a political model, and to use the conservative political rhetorics which are heirs to Athenian and Roman agrarianisms. But he is reading against those who have already taken over the classical tradition for themselves, and creating a progressive discourse of classics. He does so, however, out of several improbable cloths. I posit that the very conservatisms and exceptionalisms preserved in the classical discourses he appropriates constitute a good part of their broad appeal, even when marshalled to champion an initiative meant for the benefit of the common man.

#### Classicism and Agrarianism in United States Political Discourse

The conservative, agrarian political rhetorics which imagine the farmer as the ideal citizen of the republic find their way into United States political discourses through

the classical education which the leading men of the nation received during this period. Agrarian rhetorics developed and changed, and became a new, American entity in their own right – one cannot accuse Andrew Jackson of deriving his politics from higher learning. But these rhetorics, I argue, even when progressive in their primary purposes, carry the ghosts of their exclusionary pasts with them. This very exclusion – celebrating the farmer through juxtaposing him against the inhabitants of the immoral city – may even be what makes this rhetoric familiar, powerful, and appealing.

The people of the young republic of the United States were, overwhelmingly, farmers. The populations of large cities did not begin to rival those of rural areas until the 1950's. Thus an agrarian rhetoric in this context simply plays to the majority of voters, a move with clear appeal for politicians. But the stories politicians tell are not strictly logical, nor do they need to be. These stories are important not merely because of their literal flattery of farmers, but because of the rhetorical construction of the farmer as citizen – the use of the farmer as ideal to describe what a citizen is supposed to be, and not supposed to be.

In order to understand the origins of the yeoman farmer in U.S. political rhetorics, we must take a step back and look at (other) classicizing rhetorics in the ideology of the founding of the United States. The early leadership of the young republic modeled its institutions on classical political models. The nomenclature of our national government speaks to both the cultural authority of the classics, and to the conservatism underlying the selection of classical models. Their preference for the terminology and representative democracy of the oligarchical Roman republic, as opposed to that of classical Athens, demonstrates the essential conservatism of their project. For example, the *praesidens* was

a domestic government post in the city of Rome, part of the ladders of power climbed by talented and connected elites (Taylor 1966). Small wonder that classical agrarianism, similarly a conservative ancient political narrative, gained a foothold as well.

The story of the upstanding yeoman farmer who works his land and fights to defend it, in various incarnations ancient and modern, gained traction, and has endured in ever-shifting form to this day in U.S. political discourse. As I hope to show, the class identity of this farmer changes from estate owners at the point of reception – the original classical texts – to its eventual reconfiguration as (frontiers)man of the people. But in making this shift from wealthy landowner to yeoman, the core of the rhetoric is the farmer's *independence*, economic and physical. That independence is classed, insofar as, even though the yeoman is no elite, he is never a servant, never a slave, never working someone else's land. It is gendered, in that producing one's sustenance from one's own labor and soil signifies the farmer's physical autonomy, a hallmark of Western masculinity from Athenian and Roman texts to the yeoman in the American political imaginary. And, at least in the modern era, it is raced: The yeoman is not Black, not Native American, not Asian, not Latino/a; the yeoman of American fantasy is White. The farmer as ideal citizen of the Republic is always defined in opposition to the city, which contains effeminized dependents of one or more types, including people employed by (and therefore in thrall to) others, and wealthy, debauched elites.<sup>9</sup> Having thus described the essential conservatism of agrarianism, I hope to demonstrate its origins in classical reception, to explore some of its American transformations, and ultimately, to prove that

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<sup>9</sup> The recent use of "urban" as a negative euphemism for Black culture and/or people is the latest heir to this political rhetoric.

Morrill's proposed farmer students belong in a conservative narrative of citizenship, despite the progressive aims of Morrill's educational program.

### Agrarian Narratives in the Classical World

In order to demonstrate both the borrowing of American agrarian narratives from the classical political views which the elite students read in school, and the original conservatism of those narratives (which, I argue, they can never wholly lose), it is necessary to review agrarian political narratives of classical Greek and Roman literature. Xenophon's Socratic dialogue *Oeconomicus*, on the art of household management, illustrates agrarian narratives of classical Athens. Xenophon was no champion of the common man, but oligarchical in his politics. The dialogue focuses on the best way to manage one's possessions, and gives an encomium of farming together with the use of estate management to come to a philosophical answer to the best ways to manage wealth. Socrates' interlocutor, Kritoboulos, and the exemplar they discuss, Ischomachus, are holders of rich estates, wealthy enough to be liturgists, and their properties are seen to by their wives and slaves. The citizen-building qualities of farming (estate-holder and subsistence farmer are intentionally elided into one), independence of soul and body, are illustrated by the alternative of being dependent on wages. Xenophon's Socrates explains to Kritoboulos the reasons why the truly poor are inadequate citizens and men:

... In fact, the so-called 'banausic' occupations are both denounced and, quite rightly, held in very low esteem by states. For they utterly ruin the bodies of those who work at them and those of their supervisors, by forcing them to lead a sedentary life and to stay indoors, and some of them even to spend the whole

day by the fire. When their bodies become effeminate, their souls too become much weaker. Furthermore, the so-called ‘banausic’ occupations leave a man no spare time to be concerned about his friends and city. Consequently such men seem to treat their friends badly and to defend their countries badly, too. In fact, in some cities, especially in those reputed to excel in war, none of the citizens is permitted to work at the banausic occupations. (Xen. IV.2-4, trans. Pomeroy 1994)

The banausic worker, or craftsman, Ischomachus explains, lacks the autonomy of soul to act as a useful citizen. His manhood and his worth as a friend and soldier are all destroyed by his occupation. As we shall see in Thomas Jefferson’s agrarian rhetorics, while his farmer looks different from Ischomachus, his *banausikos* is identical. Both define the best citizen by ideologically excluding the genuinely poor from an independent political voice and true citizenship. Following the above passage are pages of praise of farming as the most citizen-building of occupations. First, Socrates gives an anecdote describing the Persian King, Cyrus, here treated as a sage, making a practice of daily strenuous exercise in either training for war or agricultural labor (Xen. IV.23-25). The praise of farming culminates in the farmer’s superior physique, masculinity, and capacity in warfare:

Moreover, if those who are engaged in farming and receiving an energetic and manly training are sometimes deprived of their lands by successive invading armies, because they are well prepared mentally and physically, they are able to attack the territory of the men who are keeping them out of their own ... (Xen. V.13, trans. Pomeroy 1994)

According to Xenophon's Socrates, farm labor makes men more manly, better citizens and better soldiers. This, I argue, is a succinct example of the classical model of political agrarianism, which comes down through U.S. political discourses. Note that the nature of farming labor, of the physical and economic independence, is flexible. The encomium above sounds as though it applies to someone who works the farm himself. But Socrates reports that Ischomachus, whom he uses as an exemplary estate owner, stays healthy and fit by not eating too much lunch, walking around his farm while his slave leads his horse, and supervising his slaves' agricultural work closely (Xen. XI.12-21). This elision between the plantation owner and the yeoman remains a feature of agrarian discourses in Rome, and in the United States reception of the classical versions of this rhetorical trope. Xenophon provided a model for farming as a source of that autonomy which is the nurse of the best (as in elite and moral) citizenship, just one of many such sources regularly read in the grammar schools which trained men for government and other elite roles in the nineteenth-century United States.

The founding fathers drew more explicitly on the Roman agrarian political imaginary. The Roman narrative important to these republic-builders was that of the farmer-cum-general, who leads his country, but returns home seduced by neither power nor luxury.<sup>10</sup> Cincinnatus was the chief model, but there were, as we shall see from the brief review of Roman agrarian narratives, other sources. While the abjuration of power was undoubtedly the most crucial aspect of the model, the hardy, moral manhood generated by farming constructs and signifies the kind of man who steps down from ambition when his service to the state is concluded.

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<sup>10</sup> It was not, for example, Gracchan land redistribution schemes which early U.S. politicians sought to imitate.

The Romans of the late Republic and early Principate looked back to their predecessors as men of superior morality, who came from a more innocent world. Thomas Jefferson, a formidable classical scholar in his own right, had Cato's *De Re Rustica*, one of many farming manuals in the late Republic, all performances of the authors' own endorsement of the old-fashioned morality. The same might be said of Jefferson himself, though he, like all the authors in question, was master of a huge and profitable plantation run by hundreds of slaves. It is remarkable that the act of doing agricultural labor oneself evokes the nexus of farming, military worth, embodied masculinity, autonomy, and (as a result of all these) ideal citizenship, regardless of how patently fictional that imaginary of one man on the land is. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was the exemplar of this nexus to which the founders of the early United States looked. He, first and foremost, was the model for abjuring power. Cincinnatus held office three times, in 460, 458, and 439 B.C.E., first as suffect consul,<sup>11</sup> and twice as dictator, an office only filled in a state of national emergency. The iconic tale of Cincinnatus is that he was called from his plow to rescue Rome, only to lay down the fasces and return to his fields after the enemy was defeated and the state saved. It cannot be overemphasized that Cincinnatus is not everyman, no yeoman he – he is an exemplum for an aristocracy and culture undergoing rapid change, both in ancient Rome and in the nascent United States. How could the common man refuse total authority over the state, never having had it? The preserved examples show, his story itself is a conservative rhetoric, an illustration of how unnecessary reform is, when the aristocracy behave as they ought (Schultze 2007).

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<sup>11</sup> Elected to complete the consulship of a consul who had to leave office before the end of his yearlong tenure.



The story of Cincinnatus justified the aristocracy, both in ancient Rome, and, as we shall see, in the early United States.

Though aristocratic, Cincinnatus is not rich, and that is part of what makes him good. In fact, Livy and Dionysius both repeat the narrative gymnastics which leave Cincinnatus poor and isolated on his farm: the unjust prosecution of his son, Kaeso Quinctius, for whom the father stands bail, and then is ruined when the boy flees a trial fixed against his acquittal. Dionysius uses him to illustrate the “just poverty” (πενίαν δικάϊαν) in which the old Roman aristocrats lived, treating it as a consequence of Cincinnatus’ willingness to give up the power of a king which the dictator enjoyed. Despite his aristocratic status, the central defining feature of Cincinnatus is that he works his own land, leading a lifestyle of physical self-sufficiency (αὐτεργὸς βίος, 10.19.4, cf. 10.17.6). Dionysius’ and Livy’s retelling of Cincinnatus’ tale suggest that this performance of masculinity, doing one’s own plowing, is inexplicable if Cincinnatus has not suffered some reversal of fortune. However, the plowing episode is as much the central core of the story as Cincinnatus’ voluntary stepping down from power when the national emergency is passed and his authority no longer benefits his country. The plowing is the explanation and signifier of his military and moral excellence, both the reason why he leads armies against invaders and why he declines absolute power. (Schultze 2007)

The agrarian narrative of Cincinnatus caught the imagination of the men of the nascent U.S. The comparison between Cincinnatus’ return to his plough and George Washington’s return to Mt. Vernon, a wealthy Virginia estate with five farms ranging from 400 to 1200 acres, a three-floor mansion, and over three hundred slaves, was

irresistible. As early as 1788, the Virginia General Assembly commissioned a statue of George Washington by the French neoclassical sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon. The result shows Washington putting aside uniform, officer's sword, and fasces – the Roman symbols of the power to make war and carry out capital punishments against citizens. The statue thus is a subtle portrayal of Washington as a Cincinnatus, who puts the things of war and dictatorship just beyond his own reach.

Washington as Cincinnatus became a standard narrative in the visual-arts mythologizing of the general (Wills 1984). Contemporaries interpreted the rhetorical deployment of Cincinnatus as a move towards hereditary aristocracy. The Order of the Cincinnati was founded after the War of 1812. Members were officers and officers' sons, and membership hereditary. Washington himself was a member. However, the order became immediately unpopular: critics saw it as a means of creating an aristocracy like that of England's. Cincinnatus as rhetoric stood for conservative causes. The abjurement of power and the morality of the aristocracy legitimize their continued holding of power. The agricultural aspects of the Cincinnatus narrative support the aristocratic control of the state, because Cincinnatus' farming constitutes and proves that morality that makes him an excellent leader.

### The Farmer as Ideal Citizen of the Republic in the United States

Morrill's portrayal of his schools as the antithesis of the classical education still draws on a map of the political imaginary rooted in the conservative traditions of democratic Athens and the Roman republic. Here, I demonstrate in two snapshots of agrarian rhetorics in U.S. politics the reception and reinvention of the farmer as the ideal

citizen of the republic, in the works of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. As has been demonstrated by the classical rhetorics of this kind, this discourse is conservative, always implicitly shutting out the landless poor of the city. However, the use of classical-reception rhetorics does not preclude reinvention. The ancient constructions of the farmer as ideal citizen on which U.S. agrarian rhetorics draw depict gentlemen farmers. However, the American incarnation of the imagined farmer has been decidedly yeoman, a rustic myth, separate from farming in the sense that Jefferson and Washington were farmers. Still, this shift from the aristocrat to the yeoman does not alter the conservatism of political agrarianism.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and third president of the United States, was himself a formidable classics scholar, and deeply embraced the moral superiority of the farmer as the ideal citizen of a republic. The imagined farmer himself is a figure of manly and rustic independent simplicity, not a man molded by higher education. Yet the origins of this political-agrarian fantasy are rooted in conservative political rhetorics of ancient political thought. Jefferson's most famous statement of these views appears in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, begun c. 1781 and published 1785, composed for a readership of leading Philadelphia politicians and to offer the French a portrait of their new ally (Yarborough 2006: xvi). Jefferson frames his economic policy in bucolics, casting the landed farmer as the sole truly moral citizen of a republic, and declaring this his reason for declining to threaten French and European industry with U.S. competition:

But we have an *immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman*. Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one

half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other? *Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.* It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who *not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers.* Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. This, the natural progress, and consequence of the arts, has sometimes perhaps been retarded by accidental circumstances: but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. *While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff.* Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our workshops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles. The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government. *The mobs of great cities add just so*

*much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.* (Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, Query XIX, reproduced in Yarbrough 2006, 132-133. Italics mine.)

Jefferson's lionization of the yeoman farmer, juxtaposed against the urban worker, as the only kind of citizen capable of "preserv[ing] a republic in vigor"<sup>12</sup> illustrates the inherent conservatism of this political ideology. This agrarian fantasy, designed to assuage French suspicions of economic competition from this nation, reveals that Jefferson's map of citizenship and labor overlaps with that of the oligarchical Athenian, for example in his horror of the occupations Plato and Xenophon would have called banausic – working at a work-bench, or employed in cloth production – and of the political power of the urban "mobs." While Morrill, and before him, Andrew Jackson, used the yeoman farmer as the antithesis of the traditional education, the rhetorics used to define the farmer as the ideal citizen come from the conservative political imaginary of the classical world – in short, from that same education which they defy, and the discourses taught in it.

Jefferson's talk of farmers' independence, of their reliance only on heaven, soil, and their own industry, seems, from our perspective, extremely odd, given that his farms were run by slaves. We may suppose that perhaps he did not count himself a husbandman, a reasonable premise given that at the time of publication, he was in Philadelphia as a congressman, and not at Monticello behind a plough. In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, the fact that the farm is primarily run by slaves (e.g. Xen. *Oec.* XII.1 ff.)

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<sup>12</sup> Note the similarity to Morrill's claim that his graduates would "sustain American institutions with American vigor" (Morrill 1858).

does not preclude the labor of farming from making a man outwardly handsome and building his citizen virtue, in contrast with the banausic laborer, whose sedentary occupation makes him shirk the exertion of defending his country (Xen. *Oec.* VI.4-11). Jefferson, however, elides the possibility of slave labor entirely: his yeoman is a single man before god and land, economically and physically a lone agent. Nor does Jefferson's farmer seem a gentleman, like Ischomachus or Cincinnatus. The farmer's physical, political and economic independence is absolute, but he is only elite in the sense that he owns land, and enjoys the cultural privilege of the male colonizer (namely, his theorized right to that land which recently belonged to Native Americans). This classical-reception rhetoric continues to morph from Xenophon's philosophizing estate-holder to the rustic popular hero found in the rhetoric of Andrew Jackson, and later, in Morrill's manly and vigorous students, whose education would (their parents hoped) groom them to be farmers, not members of the professional classes.

Andrew Jackson's version of the citizen farmer was aggressively anti-intellectual and populist, and his claim that superiority of talent, intelligence and wealth should play no role in government diverged sharply from Jeffersonian democracy (Ashworth 1983: 13). However, his agrarian rhetoric, though ostensibly populist, retained its classical roots, albeit reinvented and combined with new narratives from the frontier, and (ergo) its underlying conservatism. It was good politics to play to the literal majority of voters (Ashworth 1983: 21-22). In 1837, when Jackson left office, farms produced seventy percent of products traded, and eighty percent of the citizen population worked on them. These workers did not include those slaves engaged in agricultural labor. But this play took the form of a mythologizing narrative constructing the farmer as the quintessential

citizen of the republic, a narrative which has roots in the classical tradition and in the reception of that tradition, from which Jefferson also draws. Consider the following excerpts from the *Democratic Review* in December 1839, as quoted in Ashworth 1983 (22-23):

For the farmer was 'less dependent on the hourly aid of others, in the regular routine of his life, as likewise on their opinions, their example, their influence'. ... For while 'tenantry is unfavorable to freedom, the freeholder', by contrast, 'is the natural supporter of a free government'. His interest was to improve the land upon which he lived and which he owned. Hence it could be said that 'to live' the farmer 'must labor', and 'hence does he better appreciate the true worth and dignity of labor'.

The farmer may not be a gentleman, but his physical and economic independence were the nurses of his virtue. This independence, however, is a gendered, raced, and conservative political ideal, requiring a strong body, implicitly male and white, and the possession of land. Politicized autonomous manhood, embodied in the act of plowing, is a conservative rhetoric in itself: it implies literal possession of land, and privileges the physical strength of the able-bodied male as the criterion which qualifies a worthy political actor. Jackson's ostensibly populist rhetoric did not escape the elitism of its origins.

Jacksonian agrarianism was unusual in its inclusion of "mechanics," who sound like the *banausikoi* despised by Xenophon. For the narrative of the Jacksonian democracy, the imagined city is not the landless, urban "mob", but merchants and bankers, holders of disproportionate political power. Does this, then, make Jackson's

agrarianism progressive? His proposal to extend the enfranchise the white, citizen man, regardless of his income, is progressive compared to the existing property-based restrictions on voting when he was elected in 1839. That does not mean that the rhetorical weapons used for this cause were progressive. Rather, the infant democratic party used a rhetoric whose power lay precisely in its familiar conservatism: its lionization of the frontier farmer's western economic and physical autonomy, and its obscuring of the government subsidy (military conquest, forced removal of Native Americans) and/or slave labor that sustained that economic "independence." Jackson championed the imagined economic and physical autonomy of the frontier farmer, even though this farmer's economic position was created for him by the government, in the form of military imperialistic oppression of the Native Americans who had been driven off of it. (Ashworth 1983: 87-125)

Jacksonian rhetorics were also conservative in the sense that were simply against cultural change. In an economy already shifting, Jackson sought to dismantle the financial tools that facilitated it: he disbanded the Second National Bank. He saw it as serving the cities, the rich, and not the pioneers who elected him, and more crucially, he saw a national financial organization as strengthening the federal government against states' rights. Agrarianism as a political rhetoric always exists in opposition to an imagined city; for Jackson and his allies, that city was the bank, and the economic activities it supported. He used the imagined moral superiority of the citizen farmer as a support for policies which subsidized the frontier and the men who farmed it.

The imperialist consequences of this rhetoric about middling citizens in a republic are hinted at in this text, in the form of Jefferson's predicating this republican ideal on the



“immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman.” The verb choice implies that the land is a woman waiting invitingly to be made productive through the farmer’s agency and labor. This gendered construction matches with a conquered land, an imperialized land, although the conquered, the Native peoples from whom it was taken, are absent from the relationship.<sup>13</sup> But that silence should not hide the reality that agrarian rhetorics correspond with very real policies concerning the North American frontier.

In 1803, Jefferson doubled the size of the nation, pushing back the frontier for his husbandmen, and summarily providing an agrarian alternative to the commerce-based financial plans of his rival, Alexander Hamilton (McDonald 2011: 174-175). As a general, Andrew Jackson personally fought and killed the Cherokees, Seminoles, Creeks, and Shawnees (including the orator Tecumseh) to give White settlers their land. The Indian Removal Act, although beyond Jackson’s legal authority, forcibly removed Native Americans in the space of the Louisiana Purchase to west of the Mississippi River. As an example of the suffering this caused, the Cherokee were forced to march from their ancestral lands in what is now Georgia 900 miles to what is now Oklahoma. Sixteen thousand people were compelled to make this trip, and four thousand died, twenty-five percent. In Jackson’s 1830 Indian Removal Message to Congress, he stated, “[the Act] will relieve the whole state of Mississippi and the western part of Alabama of Indian occupancy, and enable those states to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power.”

The politicians who use the fantasy of political agrarianism applied (and apply) the government’s agency and money (including the tax dollars from cities) to support the myth of the farmer’s physical and economic independence. This willingness to recreate

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<sup>13</sup> For Jefferson’s writings and policies regarding Native peoples, see Cogliano 2011: 237-241.

an ideological construct at great expense demonstrates how important a significant number of leaders and voters found this narrative, and its physical realization in the actions of the government. Its power is not abstract, but all too concrete, not least for the Native Americans whose lives and cultures were pulled up by the roots.

### Conclusion

In sum, having explored both the ancient and nineteenth-century reception rhetorics of Sparta, and of the citizen-soldier-farmer, I have suggested that Morrill's progressive project is supported by at least three conservative rhetorics: first, the essentialist superiority of the Spartiates, and their fellow heirs in contemporary reception; second, farming as a nationalistic means of building masculinity and citizenship together; and third, a classicism that makes up both of these rhetorics, and to which Morrill paradoxically sets himself in (partial) opposition by the very invocation of Spartans. It should not surprise us that Morrill appeals to an audience of congressmen with conservative rhetorics. How better to persuade such a group to one's progressive cause, than to clothe it in traditional and familiar rhetorical garb? Does the conservatism of Morrill's rhetoric here, before the House of Representatives, have any consequence for the progressive reality of his cause? Not every rhetoric pertaining to an institution is equally felt in the lived experience of it. However, I argue that conservative rhetorics inevitably limit the inclusivity of a progressive cause. The children of Michigan farmers, while no elites, were not the landless poor – the school became a vehicle for one stable economic class to rise.

But since then, Michigan State University, like other schools, has raised the bar for what it means to be progressive. In such an academy – an institution where extremely intelligent, motivated, and carefully trained people work to promote racial, gender, and economic equality and mobility (in short, like many other progressive college campuses) – do we still bring unwanted messages along when we repurpose historical rhetorics with compromising pasts? In the next chapters, I further explore the meaning and consequences of living in the same space with conservative rhetorics, and having them signify and support one's progressive ideas and causes, on the campus of the then-newly-christened Michigan State University.

## **Section IV.**

### **The Spartan Mirage in the Visual Rhetorics of Michigan State University**

In 1932, six years after George Alderton, sports editor of the Lansing State Journal, defied the results of his own competition and rechristened the Aggies of the Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science as Spartans, the athletic director, Ralph Young, began a campaign to create a statue of a Spartan to grace the campus. He was inspired by the 1930 Trojan statue at the University of Southern California, a dynamic neoclassical marble with improbable musculature and brandishing his sword, by Los Angeles sculptor Roger Noble Burnham.<sup>14</sup> Early attempts by students to create the statue failed, and their designs, their intended visual rhetorics about their college, have sadly been lost. In 1941, the year Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II, John Hannah assumed the college presidency, he approached a recent hire in the fine arts, Professor Leonard Jungswirth, to bring the project to fruition (fig. A-1).

This section is a study of the essentialist ideologies of racial superiority behind the aesthetics of the Michigan State University Spartan. I argue that the artistic choices made in the construction of the statue belong together with those made on behalf of larger ideological and political narratives, namely German National Socialism and Italian

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<sup>14</sup> The name of Trojans for the USC football team was also instituted by a sportswriter, Owen Bird of the Los Angeles Times, in 1912. This suggests that the classical reception in the mainstream imaginary of popular sports culture has been influential in shaping football-related classical reception on university campuses. ("USC Traditions")

Fascism. It is not that the statue's rhetorical meaning is to identify the Michigan State College Spartans with Nazis. Rather, the art of Nazism and fascism aims to achieve similar rhetorical goals – group loyalty and unity, or nationalism, through messages of essentialist, gendered superiority – and was created in the same time period by artists with similar training. It becomes common sense for German-educated artists working in within a decade of one another, albeit on different continents and opposite sides of World War II, to use the same visual and stylistic tools, and the same subject matter and medium, to do the same rhetorical work.

Many students would argue that the Spartan and Nazism have nothing to do with one another in the minds of myriad football fans, and therefore the exclusionary rhetorical impact of the Spartan has been neutralized. To which I reply: are we culturally so different that we cannot read such a message, even if we do not know who wrote it, or where else such writings appear? I have claimed in this piece that the history of a rhetoric is never completely erased from our culture (e.g. Western culture, the culture of higher education) by mere time – or rather even that exclusionary rhetorics are used and re-used *because* their meanings have continued power, familiarity and relevance. Recall that exclusionary rhetorics have powerful appeal if one views oneself as an insider, if membership feels emotionally true – in sum, nationalism's appeal runs deep.

Those who might suggest that the imposing, nine foot-figure in the roundabout outside the stadium is unimportant or outdated in the campus' self-description should recall that it was rededicated in bronze, with pomp, ceremony and speeches, during Michigan State Madness (a basketball event) October 2005. In addition, the statue's placement near the Beal Street entrance makes it a visual preparation for the stadium as

one enters from the northwest; the Spartan is symbolically repeated by the gigantic Spartan helmet adorning the stadium itself (fig. A-2). The statue plays a significant role in the university's rhetorical framing of itself to the audience of approximately seventy-five thousand fans who attend each football game. The currency of this statue was reaffirmed in 1988 and 2005, and is continually reaffirmed. This is not a rhetoric neglected, but one with an active function in the university. (Russell 2015, "Spartan Stadium").

That new hire who received Hannah's commission, Leonard Jungswirth, was a local. His B.A. was from the University of Detroit, and he went on to study at the Academy of Applied Art and the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, from 1929 to 1933. I will argue that his time in Munich, and the political and artistic climate of Munich in this crucial historical period, influenced Jungswirth's stylistic choices for his outsized Spartan. This beginning to his training and career also made it impossible that he was unaware of the correspondence between the neoclassical sculpture of the period, and the politics behind it, especially in Munich. He returned to Michigan to teach at Wayne State, where he ultimately earned his M.S. (Russell 2015).

I am arguing for Jungswirth's literacy in Nazism and its connection with contemporary German neoclassicism. There is no evidence for his espousal of these ideas. Jungswirth was not, by any report, politically affiliated with Nazism. He left Germany in 1933 after four years' study, in the same year that Hitler assumed control of the national government (Russell 2015). Since he took no degree, there is no reason to believe his time at the Academy should have ended there for academic reasons. Thus it seems likely that the political climate influenced his decision to return. By 1943, when

the statue was designed, the United States was at war, and, even if he were a supporter of Nazism (which there is every reason to suppose he was not – not least because he was Catholic), a man with a German last name voicing support for Nazism in public would have been socially untenable. In short, the question of whether or not he sympathized with the Nazis is unanswerable, and ultimately, irrelevant. However, his training would make him literate in the visual rhetorics which correlated with Nazi and Fascist ideologies. In short, the design of the statue has a rhetorical message comparable to a group of works symbolizing an ideology of nationalism, essentialist and racial superiority, and victory in contest, athletic and military.

While only Jungswirth had his artistic training in Germany, all the people involved with the design, funding, and creation of the statue, existed in a cultural space which gave them familiarity with essentialist racial ideologies. The United States in this period was not alien to these modes of thinking. For example, in 1923, the college hired Prof. Harrison R. Hunt, a noted eugenicist, into the Biology Department, where he was chair, and where he remained an influential member of the department until the 1960's (Kuhn 1955: 298). If Nazism itself were, by 1943, odious to most U.S. citizens, the concept of racial exceptionalism was not. If a visual rhetoric communicated a message of nationalist, racial exceptionalism, this would have blended, rather than clashed, with U.S. culture at large, and as reflected in the university as part of the larger mainstream culture.

What, then, do we do with this knowledge? Even on a campus of scholars, this historical and aesthetic connection is neither widely known nor publicized, and the statue's primary meaning pertains to school pride and solidarity surrounding the football team. A comprehensive exploration of the ideology and visual rhetorics of United States

football, and their attendant economic and cultural significance in the university, are beyond the scope of this project. That said, I suggest that football-fueled school pride is a social and emotional nexus comparable to nationalism, and the same visual rhetorics serve both. Similarly, the statue argues for the essential superiority of the university's athletes, *qua* their status as Spartans, like him. He represents both a celebration of and inspiration for athletic victory in contest. The Spartan, situated as he always has been before the football stadium, is the focus of fans' affection and University of Michigan rivalry. Its symbolism of victory is best demonstrated by the continual pranks to which rival fans have subjected it. The statue has needed regular cleanings due to vandalism with blue and gold paint and large M's since its inception, and this contributed to the structural damage which led to the original statue's retirement indoors, to be replaced outdoors by the present bronze. My goal in this piece is to investigate the historical and present visual rhetorics in the 1943-1945 terracotta / bronze Spartan, and then to explore how that past, encapsulated in the statue's rhetorical meaning, influences the university's present.

### The Spartan: Neoclassicism, Nationalism, Masculinity, and Essentialist Narratives of Superiority

The Spartan was originally made from terracotta, with a salt glaze, and fired locally. He was supposed to be a bronze, but could not be because metal had gone to the war effort. Now recast as a bronze, the statue is far lighter; the original was 6,600 lb. and the current one, made in 2005, is only 1,500 lb. The result makes the Spartan look even more like German bronzes of similar subject matter. He stands over nine feet, and on a



base approximately six feet tall, decorated with small reliefs of athletes, for example football players, runners, riders and swimmers. He shares with other neoclassical statuary markers of genre: He is nearly nude, wearing a small pair of shorts, and almost certainly would be nude if he were not on a college campus. (Tommy Trojan is likewise scantily clad, and also would most likely not wear clothes if male genitalia were more acceptable on campus.) The statue carries the Spartiate's helmet and red cloak. His lack of beard reflects both the style of the age in which he was created, and neo/classical images of youths, in which a beardless face graces a mature body, with carefully articulated musculature.<sup>15</sup> (Russell 2015)

The Spartan draws on a specific neoclassicism, a genre of 1930's monumental nudes used to symbolize the athletic (and military) might of the institution. The neoclassicism of the Spartan, and indeed of all the male figures discussed below, defines the institution as legitimate heir to the western tradition, and embodies that tradition in an agonistic, physically imposing, gigantic male. But it also corresponds to specific political, ideological, and aesthetic movements in these decades.

The Third Reich was explicit about the political significance of its art. From 1937 on, the state hosted Days of German Art, with parades depicting the history of the Reich as a culmination of all Western history. The Academy of Art in Munich issued a summary of Hitler's rhetoric when it awarded him a medal inscribed, "... [Hitler's] prophetic plans have given art its own talk, to be the language of the people," (quoted Adam 1992: 115). In other words, art was the visual language – the visual rhetoric – of the Third Reich.

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<sup>15</sup> A mature Spartan would have coiffed, long curls and beard, reflecting aristocratic hairstyles throughout classical Greece.

To illustrate the similarity of rhetorical purpose, genre, medium, and style between the architectural statuary of the Third Reich and Jungwirth's Spartan, I will focus primarily on *Die Wehrmacht* and *Die Partei* ("Military Power" and "The [Nazi] Party") by Arno Breker, created to adorn the courtyard entrance to Albert Speer's New Reich Chancellery Building, commissioned by Adolf Hitler in 1938.<sup>16</sup> Given the challenging past of these images, and the current political uses of the German Nazi past, I am reluctant to offer yet another venue of access to them via this thesis. The statues, and their architectural home, were destroyed when the Allies took Berlin. I must ask readers to find these images via the Bundesarchiv Bild, the German national archive; further information is provided in the note below.<sup>17</sup> The Chancellery statuary framed the entrance to Hitler's primary government building (e.g. his offices, his bunker) in Berlin; its centrality was rivaled only by the Führer Building in Munich (a reminder of the importance of Munich in the political development of Nazism). The two architectural pieces are lost, as was most of Breker's work for the Third Reich, though there are surviving pieces, including some of the large, neo-classical bronzes which stood for Nazi ideology.

*Die Partei* is a nude male, with extremely square, broad shoulders, holding a torch, clean-shaven with short hair, and looking at a far point with a grim, hard expression. *Die Wehrmacht* is comparably posed, but holds a sword. Breker, having trained at Dusseldorf from the time he was twenty, taught as a professor of art in Berlin

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<sup>16</sup> The art generated in Mussolini's Fascist Italy and Hitler's Germany to woo the 1936 Olympics (Berlin won out) shares with the Michigan State Spartan the entwining of athletics with nationalism. I have chosen not to review these pieces because the stylistic similarities are comparable to those in the pieces I do describe. For further discussion of the connection between athletics, the Olympics, and the statuary of these two dictatorships, see Mangan 2014, *Shaping the Superman: Fascist Body as Political Icon*.

<sup>17</sup> The images of the statues can be viewed at [bild.bundesarchiv.de](http://bild.bundesarchiv.de), by searching for "Breker" in the provided search entry box. The image identification numbers are: *Die Wehrmacht*, Bild 183-E00420; *Die Partei*, Bild 183-H27141; statues *in situ* on Chancellery Building, Bild 183-E00406.

under the new regime, where he received a private house, grounds, and studio as a gift from Hitler. There is no reason to think his career intersected with that of Jungswirth; they both simply worked and trained in the same nation within a decade of one another. Breker's statuary was explicitly intended to support a nationalist rhetoric claiming essentialist superiority, and the similarity of the rhetorical purpose prompted a like visual rhetoric in the Michigan State College Spartan, with common stylistic and generic elements. (Adam 1992: 115)

In genre, the Spartan and the bronzes of 1930's Germany and Italy are primarily neoclassical, and yet they have not the stylistic features of classical or neoclassical statues of youths. They are of a piece with each other, and not with the canonical masterpieces of classical or Renaissance neoclassical art. The lines of the bodies do not emulate the sinuous grace of Michelangelo's David (1501-1504, Florence), and Polykleitos' Doryphoros, or "spear-carrier" (lost original by Polykleitos of Argos, c. 440-420 B.C.E.; Roman copy from Pompeii *ante* 79 C.E.), who float in balanced *contrapposto* motion. The shoulders of the Spartan, like the Breker works, are squared to the front, with an exaggerated breadth and a triangular upper torso. The David fixes his gaze on a far goal, presumably Goliath, and he is not smiling, yet his face has an elegant and youthful softness; the Doryphoros' face is at rest and introspective, corresponding to his attitude. Not for the narratives of the depicted character(s?) alone have the Doryphoros, perhaps an Achilles, and the David been identified as idealized objects of male homoerotic desire. Both faces are inviting without betraying consciousness of being so. They have not the imperious command of Jungswirth's and Breker's bronzes. The 1930's German pieces and the Michigan State Spartan have similar countenances: gaze set far, but square jaws

set, faces hard, even intimidating and challenging an opponent. The neoclassicism of the 1930's monumental (semi/) nudes is one of genre rather than style. They are hypermasculine, confrontational in posture and facial expression. The classical nude and the 1930's works were created to reinforce the classed, gendered, and agonistic societies that produced them, to suggest that the inequalities of the social world were backed by a deeper, 'natural' truth. Small wonder that the classical visual rhetoric of the physically ideal male nude should be so readily taken up by later societies eager to justify social inequality. However, stylistically, the 1930's pieces do so in a distinct fashion. They are not just neoclassical, but reflect a common stylistic expression of a common masculine ideal and rhetorical message.

Jungswirth, growing as an artist in the political atmosphere of early 1930's Munich, may have picked up on another feature of Germans' self-imagining. Germans had shown themselves eager laconophiles for a hundred years, and the Nazis most certainly thought of themselves as Spartans. Not unappealing for the National Socialists, perhaps, was Sparta's legendary combination of eugenic practices, exposing "unfit" infants and training super-warriors. Richard Walther Darré, appointed Minister of Agriculture for the National Socialist Party in 1933, had published two volumes (1929 and 1930) which associated Spartan state-governed control of agriculture and agricultural economy with a broader belief in the beneficiality of the European (Aryan) farming peasantry (Hodkinson 2010: 302). Bizarrely, he reproduced Justin S. Morrill's strange farming Spartans, amalgamating two icons of autonomous, moral, Western masculinity, the yeoman farmer and the unyielding soldier, without respect for the historical bizarreness of this combination. Germans had long admired Leonidas' courageous and

futile last stand at Thermopylae, and saw themselves as the warlike leaders of the Nordic Aryan race, just as the Spartans were the militaristic leaders (imperial colonial power) of the Dorians. While it is not inevitable that Jungswirth was conscious of contemporary German appropriations of Sparta, if he were, the familiarity of the rhetorical move might have led to his deployment of visual rhetorics so similar to those of the German National Socialists. (Hodkinson 2010: 297-342).

While the Spartan has an unusual degree of German influence, because of Jungswirth's training, the conservative, exclusionary rhetorics it imitates are rather part of its time, commonplaces, not anomalies. Germany's aesthetic expression of racial ideology was not the only such game in town: scientists and the mainstream (White?) public United States were likewise keenly interested in eugenics, and the newly popular streamlining of architecture and sculpture were aesthetic expressions of this racial/ableist ideology, an artistic rendering of a wish to put into practice a modernism consisting of economic, biological, mechanical and architectural efficiency. At the Chicago World Fair in 1933, the Hall of Science displayed eugenics as a means of biologically reducing the 'waste' for an efficient population, just as the architectural exhibits showed streamlined and efficient design (Cogdell 2004:84-95). In 1934, the prestigious designer Egmont Arens linked evolution and survival of the fittest with economic success and streamlined design, which, he claimed, reflected a "national state of mind" indicating "scientific efficiency," (quoted Cogdell 2004: 91).<sup>18</sup> While the Spartan draws more heavily on the Third Reich's artistic expression of masculinity and essentialism, the Trojan Shrine at USC draws equally from both aesthetic traditions, showing how well-suited these

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<sup>18</sup> Note that the idea of applying science, including Darwinism, to society was not precisely conservative, but appealed to intellectuals who might generally be characterized as 'forward-thinking' and progressive.

aesthetic ideologies were to communicate the rhetorical messages of art symbolizing college football teams.

The subject matter of the two statues, and the neoclassical genre, support the similarity of their rhetorical purpose. The Trojan's face draws on a different set of images, however. He does not have the domineering scowl which Breker's politicized male nudes and the Spartan share. Although the Trojan is charging an invisible attacker with a sword, his face is striving and hopeful, without the heavy jaw or challenge of the contemporary statues. The Trojan was modeled on the features of actual football players, and he looks more like a youth about to catch a football than a warrior preparing to impale an enemy. In the end, this unique aspect of the Trojan reminds us that the Spartan and the Trojan, if their rhetorical *messages* are like that of Breker's art, their rhetorical *goals* belong to different contexts: to inspire college football fans to solidarity, ticket purchase, and alumni donations.

I am not arguing that the statuary of these two universities comes from dark, hidden and sinister forces. Rather, I am suggesting that works with similar rhetorical messages employed comparable visual rhetorics to reach those aims. Those visual rhetorics were the aesthetic partners of nationalistic, essentialist, and social-Darwinist ideologies which at the time *held broad appeal*. As such, their expression in art would not be jarring, but would blend with the aesthetic principles displayed everywhere in mainstream culture. They were never meant to shock, and were always meant to persuade by echoing and reaffirming the dominant culture.

But what remains of those exclusionary rhetorics, the cultural context for the aesthetics of these statues? The surviving works of Arno Breker, and whether and how to

represent them to the public, rightly remain controversial. However, the Spartan, like the Trojan, is a living symbol of an institution – a university which enacts tremendous effort, bureaucratic and academic, towards building a multicultural, inclusive, socially just society. Moreover, the statue is the focus of a deep emotional investment on the part of the students and the university’s sports fans, including the alumni and trustees, and, for this reason, an equally profound economic investment on the part of the university. How do we take these rhetorical truths of the university, and yoke them with the exclusionary rhetorics that come down to us embedded in the institution where we live and work?

#### Rebranding the Spartan: “Sparty” and the Spartan Crest Poster Campaign

The university recognized the limitations of the Spartan as a brand ‘speaking for’ a progressive institution. In recent decades, Michigan State University has used the “Gruff” Spartan, also called “Sparty,” for institutional branding. This is a friendly cartoon and corresponding plush-costume mascot, who attends parties and school events for a fee, and adorns university paraphernalia and student service centers. Those familiar with the Spartan Mirage can appreciate the humor of the Sparty Café and Spartan Counseling Center, given the Spartans’ famously unpleasant cuisine, called black broth, and the extreme emotional commitment to the state above self and family evident in Plutarch’s *Sayings of Spartan Women*, in his *Moralia*.

Sparty’s jaw is still square, but his big head and large eyes give him the proportions of a toddler, or a cartoon in the style of Yosemite Sam and Elmer Fudd. His outfit is that of a Roman Centurion, in green and white. His appearance and role in university branding deserve a deeper analysis than I will offer here, because such a study

must be contextualized in the cultures and economics of American college football. In fact, he shares multiple stylistic features with other football mascots, such as the muscular arms and outsized head, which can be seen on Joe Bruin of UCLA (a bear), and the Boilermaker of Purdue University (depicted in costume with the actor's actual arms and a huge, plastic mask). But is he inclusive? It is possible for anyone of any skin color to perform Sparty: the plush, fair skin hides the actor completely, which is not true of the Purdue Boilermaker, or the fighting Irishman of Notre Dame. But that raises another question: What problems, if any, arise when a symbol that is white, western and male is made to stand for everyone, because of the circumstances of history? When a Black student gains access to a symbol of common belonging by literally putting on (or cheering for, or playing sports for) a costume with plush White skin, what does that mean for symbolic inclusion? Again, we are faced with the historical baggage of the institution, and how to negotiate it.

Sparty represents an effort to create a personable incarnation of the university, a friend to and protector of students. A bronze Sparty, unveiled in 2016 and now sitting on a bench in the Student Union, is interactive: students and fans can sit with him, and have their pictures taken (fig. A-3). Above all, the creation of Sparty and this statue are a recognition and problematization of the original statue, and, by implication, of the Spartan as a symbol.

Let us turn to another university branding project, a poster campaign with the tagline, "Spartans will." From banner posters along the north edge of the main campus to an in-flight magazine, the campaign frames the so-named "Spartans" – faculty, staff, students and alumni ("Graphic elements"). But the images, both in the examples given in



the branding website and in the actual posters, place the helmet on individuals actively chosen to surprise: not people who match the Spartan statue – white, male, athletic – but people who contradict that template. On the branding website, the examples of how to use the branding element depict: a black woman artist dancing as a butterfly in a neon-orange-and-green dress; a young, slim, dark-bearded white man in a grey cardigan sweater, chin in hand in a “thinking” posture, standing before a whiteboard of chemical equations; a thirty-something white woman with straight auburn hair, in glasses and a suit with the caption, “game changer: zapping nuclear waste,”; an evidently white, male farmer (from the back), denim overall straps visible, contemplating crops in a greenhouse; and a young, smiling black woman, at ease and confident, simply standing on a green lawn in a low-cut, casual red dress. Each sports the crest of a Spartan helmet on their heads. Either their gender and racial identities, or their activities, such as chemistry, construct a contradiction in terms: a narrative both of classical (Spartan) reception and of inclusion.

The narrative goes beyond simple diversity of gender and racial identity. The grouping of activities (and the combination of activities and identity) is also a careful construction of the school. The photos seek contradictions among the militaristic, hypermasculine Spartan mirage, viewer expectations of the activities done in the “traditional” university, and the gender and racial identity of university students. For example, the white woman in glasses and office wear is not expected to belong with the nuclear physics program because of her gender, nor with the Spartan mirage, because of the academic nature of her work. Yet the bold, white letters across the image, “Game Changer,” metaphorically link the woman with sport, with the nexus of athletics and

muscular masculinity that has constituted the school's primary reception of the Spartan mirage, through the lens of football. Likewise, she "zaps" nuclear waste: her activities are described as if she shoots the enemy nuclear waste with a ray gun. The language makes her a space-age Spartan, assimilating her to the Spartan Mirage explicitly in spite of her activity and gender.

In the final photo described above, the African-American woman (from youth and dress, a student) looks smilingly confident and at ease on the green lawns that stand for elite higher education. Her wearing of the crest means that in this space, she can have the status of White, Western, elite education. The meaning of the crest here is primarily to classicize, to incorporate into the classical tradition and traditional higher-education model. The farmer is involved in a practical skill not normally incorporated into the traditional university curriculum, a pleasant reminder of the impetus behind the founding of this school and the other land-grant colleges. By allotting him a crest, the image validates his activities as legitimate scholarship. Thus the images slide between the Spartan crest as signifying the prestige of the traditional education, the Spartan Mirage, and a combination of the two. Dickinson's "Redbloods and Mollycoddles" echoes in the posters, as well. The white, male chemist, engaged in calculations and contemplation, carries the slogan, "who will? Spartans will." This image masculinizes the mollycoddle: the science geek takes on the mantle of the Spartan mirage. The effect is to anoint the university with the cultural authority of both; it offers Sparta and Athens at the same time.

In Gillian Rose's discussion of how to analyze images, she borrows an example from Paul Gilroy which relies on the same kind of social visual "contradiction," a picture

which rhetorically violates social expectations and stereotypes. The example she analyzes is of a Black man in a suit, a British Conservative Political Party poster from 1983, captioned, “Labour says he’s Black. Tories say he’s British,” (Rose 2001: 11). There are two rhetorical messages at work concerning the stereotypes violated. The first is that the image depends on stereotypes, and thus can be understood to perpetuate the very ideas it seeks to violate. Is cultural acceptance in higher education reached when a Black woman dancing is identified as collegiate, and this fact is framed as a *surprise*, or when that same woman and her art are *normalized* within the academy? The second point made by Gilroy is that the British poster erases Blackness, by presenting Blackness and Britishness as alternatives. Again, the rhetorical work of the image implicitly perpetuates binary definitions of stereotypes even in the act of explicitly violating them. The Spartan-crest branding campaign creators, like the rest of the university, surely take pride in the campus’ racial and economic diversity, as well as the variety of subjects that students can pursue there. Their progressive message is complicated by the conservative rhetorics of higher education and of this university specifically (e.g. the Spartan crest) which they have inherited.

The posters collectively also demonstrate the enduring positive connotations of the Spartan mirage. The university branding rhetoric translates the Spartan mirage into activity, purpose, and effectiveness. Thus the “Spartans will” resists the exclusionary subtext of the rhetoric it invokes. And yet, does that exclusionary subtext still remain, still do the same conservative work that has made it a popular choice for retooling and reuse over more than 2500 years? The brand story, the tale the branding website explains

that it is trying to tell and encourages media producers to quote, is certainly progressive. The branding website retells the history of the university that the brand represents:

There was a political movement afoot to create agricultural colleges all over the United States – institutions of higher learning that would promote both the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes. In short, the country needed colleges to educate the nation’s young to become farmers, engineers, educators, and scientists: people who would build the nation. (“MSU Creation Story”)

This narrative is equally a retelling of history to support the present. The historians (*qua* tellers of history) have emphasized technocratic and social-class narratives, portraying the students as both originating from and destined to perpetuate, professionally, the hard-working middle class. To identify diverse individuals as part of the MSU collective, the present-day product of this history, the university draws on the Spartan crest, its version of the Spartan mirage, to depict the students’ exceptionalism and dynamism. But I question whether that rhetorical move ever completely leaves behind the longer history of the Spartan mirage, and suggest that the university branding, the poster campaign and Sparty alike, betray a consciousness of the limits of inclusion within the rhetorics bequeathed by history. What, then, are the consequences of these limits?

### Conclusion: Reflecting on Repurposed Rhetorics

The aim of this paper is not to answer that question once and for all. Rather, my aim is to invite us, denizens of the university, to continually ask: What are the rhetorics of the institution? What is their history? How is that story retold to serve the needs of the present, and by whom? And, the question I have most often posed: In repurposing a

rhetoric with a long history, does any trace of the old purpose come along with the new? Audre Lorde (1979), responding to her experience at a feminist conference where only two Black women scholars and a single panel dealt with intersectionality and the lives of American women, says:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older—know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (Lorde 2007)

Lorde's claim that the master's tools will never dismantle his house is much quoted, but rarely does the explanation in the next line follow: that, if one wields the master's tools, one does indeed gain power, but power with limitations. Those who depend on this limited power, according to Lorde, are defining the master's house as their support, their source of power, and are therefore resistant to truly discarding a system that does not offer the opportunity to truly change the landscape of power.

Does Lorde's argument suggest, then, that only by finding new tools, outside of the master's purview, will we ever get rid of the ghosts of exclusion? This may be the

case. Indigenous scholars of rhetoric are drawing on a set of rhetorics with equally complex histories, in order to find a set of tools that do not belong to the master (cf. Cole 2011). Ergo my goal is not to provide alternatives to rhetorics with long, dark histories, because others already have done and are continuing to do that work. I seek to illuminate those histories, and to investigate and analyze how they influence the present – for whom, from what different perspectives, and in what different ways. Thus armed, we can effect needed changes in the institution. Nor is it my belief that it is realistic to rid ourselves completely of those rhetorics with dark pasts. As Lourde suggests, many are heavily invested in them, and not just the masters themselves. They are entrenched, they are part of the institution. Rather, I suggest a therapeutic approach, as a first step towards articulating the goals of activism. Let us talk through the past and understand how it created our present. Let us find our own relationships with it, intellectual and emotional, and share our perspectives. Given deep narratives of the past and the institutions it has moulded, and multiple perspectives on their effects, students and faculty alike can invent strategies to implement better rhetorics in the fabric of the institution.

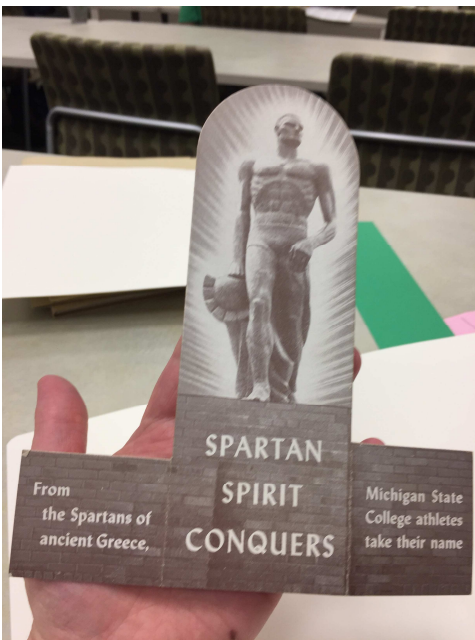
There are myriad perspectives through which to experience the rhetorics of the institution, and only through posing questions to all our students and colleagues will we begin to discover them, to think about the meanings and rhetorics in the university. I do not share an emotional investment in the culture of college football, which fuels the economic engine of the university, not least via alumni and trustees, though I happily accept a salary to which that engine financially contributes. Moreover, as a devout (female) mollicoddle, I do not see myself in narratives, now popular at all institutions of higher education, that insist academic study must be practical, must do something,

implicitly something beyond itself. To me, academic study, no matter how arcane, is always doing something, and always with implications beyond itself. Situating ourselves in the rhetorics of the university is the first step to setting our relationships with the institution and its history on our own terms.

## APPENDIX



## APPENDIX



**Figure A-1 Michigan State University Spartan, bronze (2005) and terracotta (pictured in the original dedication program, 1943).**



**Figure A-2 Panoramic view showing Spartan statue, right, and approach to Spartan Stadium.**



**Figure A-3 Sparty statue in the Michigan State Union.**

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