

“Wars Do Not Make One Great”: Race, Empire, and Orientalism in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*

by
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Joseph Orosco

This project explores how science fiction can be used to examine social justice issues in our contemporary world. I will explore two case studies from the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* television series through a framework of race, empire, and orientalism. Walidah Imarisha’s notion of “visionary fiction” is utilized as a lens to explore how speculative fiction can serve as a tool to understand critical real world issues, and how *The Clone Wars* allows audiences to envision more just futures. These case studies surround the oppression faced by alien communities in *The Clone Wars* and are connected to issues of empire and racial inequality experienced by Muslims and Black people in the United States.

The first case study uses Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as a framework to discuss the roots of Islamophobia, empire, the “clash of civilizations”. I connect Said’s work to the treatment of the Talz, an indigenous alien race in *The Clone Wars*, who face settler-colonial violence and ethnic cleansing from the Pantorans, a group represented by the Republic. I go on to contend how the dehumanization targeting alien communities manifests itself in systematic racism on Coruscant, the capital of the Republic. My second case study will examine the treatment of Ahsoka Tano, a female non-human character, under the Republic’s criminal justice system. Here, I will suggest that the injustices she faces mirror those facing Muslims and Black communities in the United States as a result of a criminal justice system that often presumes them guilty. Overall, these themes allow audiences to understand how *The Clone Wars* shows how an institution with democratic values, such as the Republic, ultimately transitions into the authoritarian Galactic Empire.

Key Words: Star Wars, Racial Justice, Orientalism, Critical Race Theory, Race, Empire, Science Fiction, War, The Clone Wars, Edward Said, Walidah Imarisha, Islamophobia

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Mohammed Shakibnia, Author

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“Wars do not make one great.”

Jedi Master Yoda, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*

Introduction

In this project, I will examine the animated series, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, as a lens for understanding social justice issues in our contemporary society. I will argue that by using visionary fiction to analyze the *Star Wars* universe, audiences are able to see how it incorporates realizations of empire, race, and class, while also shedding light on concepts of corruption and greed that can pave the path to warfare and authoritarianism. *Star Wars's* value in conceptualizing concepts such as empire and war is by demonstrating to its viewers the insidious oppressive forces in our society that continue to operate, the devastating repercussions war creates, and what leads for the conditions of it to arise. *The Clone Wars* can serve as a tool to not only examine communities that are most impacted by issues of racial inequality and empire, but challenge us to think about how to restructure our society that centers and uplifts the most vulnerable.

In particular, this project will examine the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* television series through a framework of racialization, colonialism, and imperialism directed at alien communities, connecting the dehumanization of alien races in the *Star Wars* universe to negative perceptions targeting people of color. Through this lens, I will explore how *The Clone Wars* can be used as a way to analyze the origins of Islamophobia in the West and the legacies of institutional racism targeting Black communities.

In the second chapter, “The Cultural Relevance of *Star Wars*”, I will describe the cultural value of *Star Wars* and the deep political themes that inspired its creation. This section will delve into the vast popularity of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* as a television series and explain why it is worth paying attention to. The third chapter will examine the framework and theoretical tools my

thesis will use to understand the *Star Wars* universe through a social justice lens. Here, I will preview the work of Walidah Imarisha's framework of visionary fiction, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and the contributions of scholars such as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Cornel West, Khaled Beydoun, and Deepa Kumar, who explore issues of empire and racial justice in their work. In the fourth chapter, I will discuss the first case study, from the season one episode "Trespass," arguably one of *The Clone Wars*'s most compelling episodes that provides a lens through themes of hyper-nationalism and imperialism prevalent in the *Star Wars* universe. I will examine the treatment of an indigenous alien race, known as the Talz, at the hands of the Chairman Cho and the Pantorans, a planet home to the Republic. The Pantoran leadership is responsible for racializing the Talz as being inferior, savage, barbaric, and uncivilized in contrast to themselves as superior and advanced. According to Chairman Cho, this justification is given for his orders to forcibly remove and exterminate the Talz from their native community on Orto Plutonia. The case study will explain how Cho's position mirrors one embodying a "clash of civilizations" between the Pantorans, as a planet allegiant to the Republic, and the Talz, who are portrayed by Cho as being foreign and unworthy of equal treatment. Further, I will examine how these negative portrayals of alien communities permeate into the social, racial, and economic inequalities present within the heart of the Republic on Coruscant, often portrayed on show as being the bastion of liberalism and democracy.

In chapter five, I will present a second case study that investigates the criminalization of Ahsoka Tano under the Republic's criminal justice system on the planet Coruscant. As one of the *Clone Wars*'s most prominent female characters and identifying as Togruta, a non-human species, Ahsoka's experiences in the *Clone Wars* series are similar to those experienced by Black Americans and Muslims in the United States, particularly at the hands of a judicial system that

often presumes them guilty. I will first explain how conditions for increased militarism and empire began with a “might makes right” ideology dating back to ancient Greek philosopher Socrates in his dialogue with Thrasymachus. Then, I will argue that treatment of Ahsoka and alien communities are similar to effects of legislation such as the “War on Drugs” created during the 1950s and “War on Terror” policies enacted post 9/11 in the United States, which continue to disproportionately racially profile, incarcerate, surveil, and police Muslims and Black Americans. I will analyze episodes from season five of *The Clone Wars*, where Ahsoka is unjustly targeted by the military officer Admiral Tarkin for allegedly committing a bombing at the Jedi Temple on Coruscant. Throughout the episode arc, Tarkin argues a need for military might and “law and order” to win the Clone Wars. I will go on to explain how his “might makes right” philosophy serves to disproportionately demonize and criminalize vulnerable alien communities on Coruscant. With this case as the focal point, I will explore the show’s portrayal of the Republic’s increasing militarism as a foreshadowing of the Galactic Empire, and how this ultimately gave way to the resulting systematic racism, enslavement, and subjugation of alien races in the *Star Wars* universe.

The Cultural Relevance of *Star Wars*

The *Star Wars* movies are well known for its explicit commentary on issues relating to empire. In a 2018 interview with AMC, *Star Wars* creator George Lucas asserted that his story behind the original *Star Wars* films was largely influenced by the Vietnam War, where the United States was situated as the powerful, colonial force, known as the Empire, and the rebel alliance was mirrored as the Vietcong fighting against it (Wicklow). The movies are emblematic of themes of rebellion, where a rag-tag, multi-racial, and working-class coalition of rebels organize through collective struggle to overthrow the fascist human-supremacist Galactic Empire. Lucas noted that his academic background in anthropology and familiarity with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* allowed for him to incorporate these anti-authoritarian themes. For Lucas, *Star Wars* remains an inherently political text, intended to include deep social and political messages for audiences to think about.

In Lucas's prequel trilogy, the stories once again explored clear political themes. They revolve around the political manipulation of Palpatine, the Supreme Chancellor of the Republic, who through his role took advantage of the Republic's processes to expand his powers during the long conflict known as the Clone Wars. These ideas parallel the expansion of presidential powers during the Vietnam War, the authorization of war powers to the executive branch during the U.S. and NATO led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and measures to increase surveillance targeting Muslims post 9/11. These themes are examined in Christopher Deis's "May the Force (Not) Be with You: Race Critical Readings and the *Star Wars* Universe", where he notes that the Prequel trilogy used symbolism, metaphor, and narrative to communicate Lucas's warnings about a post-9/11 era, where freedom and democracy are challenged from outside in the form of terrorism and the rise of militarism (Deis, 98). This is exemplified in the confrontation between

Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader on the planet Mustafar in *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (2005), where the newly appointed Sith lord tells his old master “you are either with me, or my enemy,” echoing the doctrine put forward by President Bush, when he declared that “you are either with us, or against us,” in the fight against international terrorism post 9/11.

The television series, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, based between episode two, *Attack of the Clones* (2002), and three, *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), expanded on these political parallels and put a spotlight on the human costs of war, and the growth of the military-industrial complex when the Republic purchases a clone army to expand the Clone Wars. Additionally, the series touches on the influence of corporate interests, the corruption of the elites in the banking industry, and their ties to the Republic's legislative system, which would go to lengths to preserve the war in order to maintain their profits off the conflict. In the series, the show highlights the devastating damage war does: spreading colonialism, imperialism, and oppression under the mantra of “national security” and “freedom.”

Released in 2008, the animated CG series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* began airing to the *Star Wars* audience on the television channel Cartoon Network. Due to its vast popularity and impact as one of the most influential pop culture science fiction franchises in our society today, I discuss why *The Clone Wars*'s role in critically examining some of society's most pressing social issues is of particular importance. Even despite viewership intended to reach a younger audience, the series helped redefine the complexity of content an animated series can have. It touched on serious philosophical, moral, and ethical questions relating to the role of systems of power and oppression through the treatment of marginalized communities, economic justice, authoritarianism, war and the justification of violence. The series didn't just serve to explore the prequel era's *Star Wars* universe in more depth; *The Clone Wars* confronted its audience with

critical questions on how our society should function and provided possible alternatives for how we can create a more just futures.

In James Floyd's "Begun the Clone Wars Has!", he notes how the series challenged the very meaning of war and conflict: "rather than making the show wholly about the vicarious thrill of war, the writers found ways to combine exciting space battles and lightsaber duels with tales about its consequences-- the lives lost and those irrevocably damaged" (73). The series even went beyond showing the devastating effects of war, presenting its audience alternatives to calls for military action and peaceful resolutions to limit it. By touching on some of the most crucial socio-political issues of our time, *The Clone Wars* presses its audience to make these connections and take a moral stance on what direction our society should take. As author of *Star Wars in the Public Square: The Clone Wars as Political Dialogue* Derek Sweet writes, "indirectly, then, the speculative viewpoints of science fiction enter the public imagination" and thus it becomes "part of the broader political conversation" (38).

According to Cartoon Network, which first broadcasted *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, the show became the most-watched series premiere in the broadcasting company's history, averaging over 3 million total viewers. Under the leadership of supervising director Dave Filoni, the show went on to receive numerous awards as "the highest-rated sci-fi animation on television" at the San Diego Comic-Con in 2010 (D'Orazio). It also went on to receive an Emmy award in 2014 and 2015 for Outstanding Directing in an Animated Program. During production of its sixth season following the purchase of the *Star Wars* franchise by Disney, the show began to wind down despite its awards and growing loyal audience. In 2018, Filoni made a surprise announcement that *The Clone Wars* would be revived due to its immense fan popularity. According to Filoni, after years of hashtags with #SaveTheCloneWars "not a week that went by

without a plea to save *The Clone Wars*.” The hashtag “#CloneWarsSaved” was ultimately announced confirming its expected release in 2020 on Disney’s streaming service (Martinelli). This indicates that the show’s enduring legacy, including its devotion to addressing timeless social issues, remains not only popular and relevant to its younger audiences, but to much of *Star Wars*’s general fan base as well.

Theoretical Sources and Framework

The term visionary fiction was developed by educator, writer, public scholar and spoken word artist Walidah Imarisha to help audiences use the genre of speculative fiction, such as sci-fi, fantasy, and horror as a lens to build more just futures (“What Is Visionary Fiction?”). For Imarisha, these alternate universes can be used to understand systems of systematic injustices and existing power structures in our society. When applied to make sense of issues facing society today, visionary fiction allows audiences to also imagine alternate futures different from the horrors of violence, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression. In a 2016 interview with *Exterminating Angel Press*, Imarisha explained how visionary fiction can not only be used as tool to imagine possibilities out of what exists in our current world today, but creating them through direct action organizing. By conceptualizing a society that is “so-called impossible,” such as a world without oppression, colonization, imperialism, and war, it allows organizers to transcend their vision into the real world, where through people can create that reality. She goes on to explain that “when we free our imaginations, we question everything... we recognize none of this is fixed, everything is stardust, and we have the strength to cast it however we will.”

This vision is evident in Imarisha’s science fiction and social justice workshops, where she uses sci-fi as a way for people who may not be familiar with contemporary social justice issues or direct action tactics to familiarize themselves with it. In her workshops, Imarisha allows for participants to explore social justice issues within their favorite speculative universes, whether being *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Harry Potter*, *Willy Wonka*, or *Battlestar Galactica*. In these universes, she urges participants to analyze their beloved pop culture fandoms through a lens of race, class, gender, resistance, and oppression, where they are to recognize the most oppressed communities within these universes and collectively work together to come up with direct action

tactics that they can use as a means of liberation from their oppressor. While audiences are taught to think creatively within the speculative fiction of their choosing, Imarisha creates parallels to contemporary social justice issues in our world; in particular, she references ongoing challenges facing Black youth in Ferguson, the dehumanization of Black lives in America at the hands of an unjust police and prison system, and how these are related to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Imarisha's value of visionary fiction has also made its way into college classrooms as a form of critical pedagogy. In a peace studies course taught by professor of philosophy and director of the Peace Studies Program at Oregon State University, Joseph Orosco, he begins the term by teaching students about critical contemporary issues, including violence against women, global poverty, environmental justice, and the causes of conflict and war. Orosco then goes on to explore ways of practically engaging in direct action tactics to create meaningful, positive social change to help fight against these problems. By the end of the term, students are asked to create a social justice campaign aimed at tackling a certain injustice facing them, whether it be rising student tuition at college campuses, to issues of climate change and environmental justice. One of the ways how this course expanded off the science fiction and social justice workshops facilitated by Imarisha was by using the television series *FutureStates*, which directly touched upon issues of the intersections of xenophobia, racism, and sexism in a futuristic setting. Students were asked to identify the power relationship in the particular episode they watched, such as who was in control and what sort of power they wielded. They went on to identify the most marginalized group being targeted, and then finally were tasked with imagining the direct action strategy the oppressed group should take to liberate themselves from the power relationship present. The experiment turned out to be a success, as students were impacted by the

episodes they watched, and it gave them the tools to understand complex social justice issues in the world today.

Visionary fiction can be a particularly valuable to examine the rise of empire and its treatment of colonized people. In Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, he explained that narratives, media, and storytelling are central to portraying how communities impacted by empire are perceived globally. For him, stories can be the method in which colonized people "use to assert their own identity and existence of their own history" (Wetmore Jr., 29). According to Said, "the facts of empire are associated with eccentric or acceptable human-beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities like emigration, money making, and sexual adventure...". Therefore, the racialized "Other" in speculative fiction universes can be a symbolic tool for understanding the nature of imperial power relationships in the contemporary world. Said's *Orientalism* will be a piece that I use frequently in my first case study, as his work discusses the rise of empire in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, which has been responsible for dehumanizing and "otherizing" Muslim communities in those regions. Deepa Kumar's *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* and Khaled Beydoun's *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* will be used in this section to help make sense of Said's work.

My second case study draws from the philosopher Cornel West, who in his prominent book *Democracy Matters*, engages in deep analysis of the conditions that lead to the erosion of democratic values and pave the path for authoritarianism. West's book points to three antidemocratic dogmas that have driven United States toward the formation of an empire. These include what he describes as "free market fundamentalism", "aggressive militarism", and "insidious authoritarianism". For the purposes of this case study, I will include West's

philosophical underpinnings towards the rise of American militarism, particularly drawing from his analysis of Plato's *Republic* and the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachus over a "might makes right" ideology. West's work allows for an important perspective considering how militancy and authoritarian attitudes can be used to justify notions of safety and national security. Next, I will draw from Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, a scholar of African American studies at Princeton University, who discusses impacts of the "War on Drugs" era policies, mass incarceration, and their disproportionate impact in criminalizing Black communities in the United States. Her work analyzes the formation of social movements that helped aid in the Black liberation struggle against forms of structural racism and white supremacy. I will connect her analysis of institutional racism to the impacts of anti-alien discrimination facing Ahsoka Tano in the second case study. Along with Taylor, I will once again include Deepa Kumar's *Islamophobia and Empire* in this chapter, which discusses how Islamophobia has manifested itself into modern-day policies facing Muslim Americans following 9/11. Kumar provides an understanding of how Muslims became a target of state surveillance, policing based on their religious and racial identities, and even a national registry system because of the conflation between Islam and terrorism.

Star Wars's Clash of Civilizations in "Trespass"

In the first case study, I will begin by outlining the main themes in Edward Said's *Orientalism* and how this is connected to issues of empire and the roots of Islamophobia. I will then establish how this theory became mainstream in the "clash of civilizations" narrative manufactured between the West and Islam by prominent American historians, such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. This background will allow for understanding how the "clash of civilizations" mirrors one found in the *Clone Wars* episode "Trespass". Next, I will explain the story in "Trespass", which revolves around a condemnation of colonialism and how alien races became racialized as inferior in the *Star Wars* universe. The goal of this case study will be to assert that *The Clone Wars* explicitly denounces the bigotry targeting the Talz, communicates the dangers of imperialism, and gives warning to how the Republic and Jedi became complicit in creating the conditions that lead to authoritarianism.

In Edward Said's *Orientalism*, he argued that wrote that representations of the Middle East and Muslim communities have been largely influenced by Western academics, who would visit the region and interpret its languages, culture, art, and bring this long line of discourse back to Europe and the United States. This funnel of intellectual thought would propose that the West was locked in a cultural, civilization, and military crusade against Islam (Beydoun, 51). Knowledge of "the Orient", a region made up of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, became widespread in the context of European colonization throughout the 19th and 20th centuries following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. During this era, European powers drew arbitrary borders creating nation-states such as Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, and Palestine. University departments began investing resources to research the region, dedicating their careers

to learning “the East’s” languages and translating written works, ultimately immersing study of the Orient as a systematic school of thought in the West (Kumar, 26).

Rather than allowing for the people of the region to center their own experiences and knowledge, these interpretations came from a largely distant perspective, susceptible to dangerous misrepresentations and generalizations. According to Said, Western accounts of the diverse cultural traditions served to displace the agency of those who were written about and replaced their voice in the world. This power to control the narrative allowed for those in the Orient to be cast and constructed as inferior, subhuman, unassimilable, and violent in the eyes of the West (Beydoun, 51). It also established the misconception that people from the region were intellectually incapable of speaking for themselves and their own communities, fueling a white savior mentality toward Muslims and Middle East. Knowingly or not, Orientalists produced a compilation of knowledge at the expense of people within the Orient that facilitated the basis for colonial projects and unrelenting political, social, cultural and economic domination. This emphasis on cultural differences marked a shift from scientific justifications for racial oppression, leading to the creation of an “imperialist superiority complex” for the West (Kumar, 30).

In Deepa Kumar’s *Islamophobia and Politics of Empire*, she explains that this culture war ethos became a widely accepted theory in the 19th century, as human society was classified and ranked into separate civilizations, driven by their own “set of core values” (30). In particular, the West was considered to have certain qualities unique from other civilizations, placing an emphasis on “freedom, law, rationality, science, progress, intellectual curiosity, and the spirit of invention, adventure and enterprise” (30). “Islamic civilization,” on the other hand, would continue to be described as “premodern, backward, primitive, despotic, static, undemocratic, and

rigid.” These representations were reinforced by disparaging the “Muslim mind” as being regressive and monolithic. Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” epitomized this notion, as he wrote of the West’s responsibility to “civilize and tame” the unruliness of people from “the East.” According to Kipling, it was the West’s virtues that made it superior from non-white people of the world, justifying its duty to expand empire through civilization and industry.

Most importantly, Orientalism conflated Islam and Middle East, while drawing a firm line in the sand between the West and “the Orient.” In Khaled Beydoun’s *American Islamophobia*, he writes that the fundamental goal of Orientalism was to cast the Muslim world as being “the mirror opposite of the West” (52). In turn, this paradigm served to elevate the Western world and define Europe as its contrasting “image, idea, personality and experience.” The demonization of Muslims and the Middle East would make its way into the imagination of Western society, and become embedded within attitudes toward Muslim majority nations and immigrants as the non-European Other. Consequently, this allowed Muslims to be racialized and constructed into a distinct “race,” heavily based on the assumption of “looking Middle Eastern” and assigned as being a suspect population harboring violent impulses deemed to be natural and deserving of discrimination. As Beydoun writes, this approach would be used to justify destructive political engagements with Middle Eastern countries, conflate Muslim identity with terror, and create the groundwork for a “clash of civilizations” between the West and East.

The “clash of civilizations” thesis was initially presented in the work of the Bernard Lewis, the Princeton professor of history who dedicated his life to studying Islam and Middle East. In his 1990 Atlantic article “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” Lewis argued that there is rising issue within the Muslim world that would threaten the West. He writes that “at first the Muslim response to Western civilization was one of admiration and emulation—an immense respect for

the achievements of the West, and a desire to imitate and adopt them. The desire arose from a keen and growing awareness of the weakness, poverty, and backwardness of the Islamic world as compared with the advancing West” (Lewis). Matching the narrative presented by Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden,” Lewis suggests that the only way for “Islamic world” (a term used to essentialize a growing, dynamic, and complex group of people) to advance was through Western supervision and intervention. For Lewis, Muslim cultural practices were innately inferior and decrepit, leaving them in darkness without the help of a Western savior. He would leave a legacy by publishing numerous titles of books drawing the West and Islam as against each other, such as *The Middle East and the West* (1964), *Islam and the West* (1994), *Cultures in Conflict* (1996), *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (2001), and *What Went Wrong* (2003).

The “clash of civilizations” would later be rearticulated in the work of Harvard professor of political science and former national security foreign policy advisor Samuel Huntington, a leading theorist of Orientalist scholarship who took the mantle from Lewis and popularized the framework. Throughout his career, Huntington used the Orientalist colonial gaze to write about communities of color. In his article “The Clash of Civilizations?” featured in *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington proposed that the greatest threat to West would be “Islamic Civilization”. He later developed this theory into a book which became widely popularized during intensified fears post-9/11, declaring that “the fundamental problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. *It is Islam*, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power” (Huntington, 217). Huntington insisted that the most pressing issue of future will be between the West and “Islam,” drawing a line in the sand between largely American and European values and the Muslim world. This assertion included the whole of Islam, a faith practiced globally by 1.8 billion people, which he declared

as being barbaric, savage, and purveyors of terrorism and suspicion. He went on to write that “Islam’s borders are bloody, along with its innards,” perpetuating stereotypes that would racialize and reinforce Muslims as backward and everything that Western society is not.

Additionally, Huntington’s work was widespread and permeated strongly into the very mindset of everyday Americans. His theory was broadly assigned to undergraduate and graduate courses across the country, became a New York Times best-seller, and systematically “steered policy on both the international and domestic points” (Beydoun, 80). It is critical to understand that this ideology was not fringe, but manifested itself widely throughout the United States imagination both institutionally through law and privately in the homes of Americans. This framework for understanding Islam would also manifest itself in policy and rhetoric from presidential administrations. Most recently, President Trump’s declaration that “Islam hates us,” followed by his successful third attempt to pass the Muslim Ban (a selling-point in his 2016 election campaign), are promulgated on the notion that Islam is an inherent threat to the West.

Orientalist scholars like Lewis and Huntington, however, failed to mention the history of Muslim influence on the Iberian Peninsula in Al-Andulus who preserved and expanded the work of Western thinkers, while making contributions in areas of pharmacology, medicine, philosophy, art, mathematics or political theory. The work of Muslim philosophers and poets such as Avicenna, Ibn-Khaldun, Rumi, Hafez, al-Ghazali, and al-Farabi, that have shaped the epistemological foundations of our world today all go unmentioned in a pursuit to vilify Islam. Furthermore, scholars have noted that as many as thirty percent of African slaves forcibly taken during the transatlantic slave trade were Muslim, indicating that Islam has always been a part of America’s religious history (Khan). While facing forced assimilation and cultural erasure, enslaved African Muslims left numerous documented written accounts of their experiences in

America through letters, autobiographies, and diaries (Amon). What remains clear is that Islam was never foreign to the West as Huntington and Lewis have asserted, but deeply part of its legacy dating back to centuries ago.

Overall, ramifications of racist tropes and stereotypes used to dehumanize these groups is still pervasive today throughout our institutions, systems of government, and legal systems. I believe that Edward Said's contributions can not only be very useful in analyzing the racialization, colonization and imperialism faced by those from the Middle East, but also in explaining shared interlinked struggles and treatment other communities of color face in our contemporary world. Most importantly, we must understand how many of these tropes came from academia, as presented in the work of Huntington and Lewis. Instead of repeating these same mistakes, it's vital that communities are color can elevate their own narratives and stories, especially in academic spaces.

A similar "clash of civilizations" narrative is expressed by the Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker and the Pantoran leader Chairman Cho in "Trespass". The episode begins when Anakin Skywalker and Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi investigate the disappearance of a clone security force on the seemingly ice-barren desolate world of Orto Plutonia. The two Jedi are accompanied with Chairman Cho and Senator Riyo Chuchi of the nearby moon of Pantora, represented by the Republic. The group discover that both the armed occupying Republic and Separatist outposts had provoked the Talz and were defeated by them, as the indigenous community insisted on being left alone on their planet. When Skywalker and Kenobi make their way to diplomatically engage with the Talz after discovering them on their home world, Skywalker immediately reaches for his lightsaber in defense before even communicating to them. Kenobi tells Skywalker to hold steady, and that "they are only curious," a view

understandable from a community already under threat from Republic and Separatist invading forces. Skywalker then suggests that the two should have brought C-3PO and R2-D2 (two Republic service droids) along to assist in translating, asking Kenobi how he plans on “communicating with *these things*.” Instead of regarding the Talz as sentient beings with genuine emotions, Skywalker contends that they are the “Other,” entirely different from “us,” situated as the rational and civilized Republic and Jedi. While Obi-Wan insists that Anakin have patience, hinting that the Talz could be smarter than either of them, Skywalker’s attitude exemplifies one similar to that of the Republic in how it systematically treats alien races. Obi-Wan and Anakin enter inside the Talz hut to explore potential solutions with the Chieftain, Thi-Sen. After having continued difficulty communicating, Anakin draws a caricature of two beings, a Talz and a human as shaking hands in symbolism of peace and diplomacy. This meant that the Jedi and Talz came to a mutual understanding that the Pantorans and the Republic would leave the planet. As both Skywalker and Kenobi walk out, it’s clear that Thi-Sen and the Talz understood their message, ignoring Obi-Wan’s outreached hand, instead embracing the Jedi Master in a warm and appreciative hug.

When Kenobi, Skywalker, Chairman Cho, and Senator Chuchi discuss their initial meeting with the Talz and intentions to peacefully negotiate an agreement between the two parties, Cho is dismayed at the prospects for a peaceful resolution. He describes the Talz as being “dangerous” and “savage,” deserving of being “subdued” by any means necessary, explicitly implying methods of violence and lethal force. Kenobi conveys to the group that Orto Plutonia is an inhabited planet and home to the indigenous population. In response, Cho declares that this is “impossible,” and that “*whoever they are, they belong to us*.” He goes on to order the two Jedi to bring along Captain Rex and his men to attack the Talz. Skywalker suggests that doing this

would result in a betray of trust, exclaiming that as the two Jedi had given their word that there would be a non-violent resolution and no further militarization. Cho vindictively responds:

“These creatures are little more than animals... You can’t lie to an animal! They can’t be trusted. It is obvious these creatures are not covered by the Convention of Civilized Systems.”

Senator Chuchi corrects Cho, telling him that because the Jedi were able to communicate with the Talz, the population’s status within the Convention of Civilized Systems would be in doubt. Not only does Cho entirely dismiss Chuchi’s voice of reason, he alludes to his authority as an experienced and “exalted” Chairman to set the bar of what “being civilized” means. Thus, Cho presents the Talz and their cultural values as primitive, animalistic and not worthy of recognition, while Pantora and Republic status are exceptional and all that is good.

Cho subsequently declared war against the Talz, once again deriding them as savage and unworthy of recognition. Though Kenobi and Skywalker advised Rex to only protect the Chairman until they would be able to override his orders, Rex’s forces were overpowered by the Talz’ aptitude for combat. In his final words to Senator Chuchi, who had petitioned to the Pantoran assembly in purpose of declaring the Chairman’s actions as “out of order,” Cho ordered her to “destroy the Talz.” However, in the end, the Talz were officially recognized as a free and equal people with dignity and a right to self-determination. Indeed, Cho embarked an Orientalist “clash of civilizations” narrative between the Talz and the Republic itself, similar to the white supremacist framework presented by Lewis and Huntington in their analysis of Islam.

While Chairman Cho’s ideology toward the Talz is condemned by Senator Chuchi and Kenobi, my point is that this racialization of an alien species is not fringe or an isolated incident, but has manifested itself into the systematic racism of predominantly alien communities on Coruscant. Though the Republic considers itself to represent values of equality and dignity

among all sentient beings, it is devoid of any non-human admirals within its leadership, maintains horrific conditions and brutal militarization in the Coruscant underworld which is disproportionately made up of alien races. Moreover, the Republic's detention centers appear to be overwhelmingly made up of non-humans and related to the extreme policing of underworld and non-human communities. This next section of the chapter will explore in more detail the conditions that alien races became vulnerable to in the underworld. With resulting criminalization of alien species, who have been racialized as being more prone to crime, unruliness, disorder and inferiority, I discuss that these characterizations are the conditions which led to the experiences of Ahsoka Tano in case study two and her swift presumption of guilt following the Jedi Temple bombing.

Coruscant and Institutional Racism

One of the main examples of institutional racism that manifests itself in the *Star Wars* universe is through the conditions depicted on the Republic's capital, Coruscant. The city of Coruscant is described as both being an industrial and political hub to the Republic and is considered to be the most populated planet under its jurisdiction. In Carl Silvio's "The *Star Wars* Trilogies and Global Capitalism," he asserts that in many ways the city of Coruscant, which is pictured numerous times throughout the *Star Wars* prequel films and *The Clone Wars*, serves as a visually stunning and "conceptually perfect metaphor" for the advancing "positive aspects of global capital" (Silvio, 68). He writes that in a globalized world promoted by the Republic, Coruscant literalizes the experience of the booming economy in a capitalistic society. Silvio argues that this assertion is similar to the description of an ideal capitalistic city as described by Henri Lefebvre, where "capitalism and neo-capitalism have produced an abstract space that is a reflection of the world of business on both a national and international level, as well as the power

of money and politiqe of the state. This abstract space depends on vast networks of banks, businesses, and great centers of production. There is also the spatial intervention of highways, airports and information networks. In this space, the cradle of accumulation, the place of richness, the subject of history and the center of historical space, in other words, the city, has exploded” (69). Silvio’s analysis of Coruscant certainly is accurate, particularly in the way that the Republic advertises the city as the quintessence of prosperity despite the disastrous cost of the war waging in the galaxy.

Although on the surface representations of Coruscant were filled with images of prosperity and stability in the midst of military conflict, depictions below the planet, known as “the underworld,” remain entirely the opposite. Beneath of the veneer of a glittering sphere, the world descends into thousands of levels of darkness, home to billions of residents living in poverty, polluted air, and rampant crime. These conditions are continually shown throughout *The Clone Wars*, indicating the damaging impacts of a war fought in the name of national security while filling the pockets of weapons producers and corporate interests lobbying to escalate the conflict.

Moreover, the impacts of the war certainly are depicted to impact communities along racial lines, as the underworld is mostly populated with a wide array of alien species home to the Republic. The escalation of the Clone Wars, compounded with increasing wealth and income inequality in the Republic, is shown to have devastated these communities which are left without basic government services. Working class immigrants who came to Coruscant expecting a better future for themselves and their families are segregated into the subterranean realms of the planet. The effects of perpetual conditions of extreme poverty without basic living needs being met is shown to result in widespread crime throughout the underworld, leaving its citizens to resort to

theft and crime in order to afford food or a place to live. In turn, these conditions lead to almost complete disassociation from the centrality of the Republic, such as the political process or the Jedi Order. In fact, *The Clone Wars* indicates that it is only when the Jedi have intel to pursue a criminal investigation they involve themselves in the underworld. In a season two episode, “Lethal Trackdown,” Padawan Ahsoka and Jedi Master Plo Koon surge into the levels of the underworld in to gather information on the whereabouts of the rogue bounty hunter, Boba Fett. While the two enter into a club and bar, Plo Koon asks the bartender, who is also an alien, for information regarding the whereabouts of Fett. The dialogue goes:

Plo Koon: “I need some... information.”

Bartender: “We’re not selling that here, pal.”

Plo Koon: reveals his lightsaber by setting it down on the bar table

*Bartender: “Hmm... been a while since we had one of you down here. Aren’t you a bit busy with your war to be bothering **with the likes of us?** ”*

*Plo Koon: **sarcastically replies** “We are never too busy for the citizens the Republic.”*

These lines of dialogue between the Jedi Master and bartender indicates the fractured relationship between an entity such as the Jedi Order, which are supposed to be protectors of peace and dignity of the Galactic Republic’s citizens, including those part of the underworld. Even to the Republic, made up of a diverse and multicultural coalition of various species, it is evident that the people from the underworld become an afterthought to their concerns. The episode quickly moves to the next scene and shows Ahsoka focusing intently listening to other conversations in the room, hoping to hear a clue about Fett. She first hears another alien in the bar, who is in a conversation with another complaining “that the war is killing him,” as his business has gone under, and asks for another round of drinks to cope.

In addition to economic disparities created by the war, residents of the underworld are vulnerable to horrific environment conditions, forced to breathe toxic fumes as a result of a “millennia of vehicle and factory waste” produced by the city’s industrial sector on the surface (Bray, et, al., 198). In another season two episode “Lightsaber Lost,” the plot begins as Anakin Skywalker and his Padawan Ahsoka are sent in what is described as “the treacherous gangster havens” to search for a black-market arms dealer. In the dark imagery of the underworld, the episode evokes a community that is criminal, dirty, and overwhelmed with pollution and waste. As Ahsoka walks with Anakin, she passes a Quarren resident on the street coughing incessantly due to sickness. Ahsoka grimaces, but it’s clear that this is the reality of many of the underworlds citizens, particularly for those who are poor and non-human.

In the most recent season of the Clone Wars, released in February of 2020, the episodes once again touched saliently on themes of poverty, economic insecurity, and the failure of the Jedi to address these issues. This episode arc begins with Ahsoka Tano’s speeder bike crashing and falling to the underlevels of Coruscant. She immediately is met with help from Trace Martez, a young mechanic who owns her own business, struggling desperately to make ends meet during the galaxy’s endless conflict. While receiving assistance with her speeder bike, Trace mentions how the Jedi are busy “running around fighting wars” instead of being concerned with the violence of poverty and class warfare against its most vulnerable. This, according to Trace and her sister, Rafa, who helps her with their family business, is why so many communities have become disillusioned with the Jedi, Republic, and what they stand for.

A similar conclusion can be reached with the state of American politics. With 40 percent of Americans unable to afford an unexpected four-hundred-dollar emergency, and 78 percent of the population barely scraping by, living paycheck to paycheck, confidence in American

institutions has plummeted (Friedman, Youn). This financial suffering has largely been attributed to decades of stagnating wages accounted for inflation, a poor and expensive American public healthcare system that leaves millions uninsured and underinsured, and the skyrocketing costs of student debt throughout the United States. Similar to how alien races are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of wealth inequality and a lack of prioritization of social welfare spending, people of color in the United States face similar issues and wide racial inequalities. Due to legacies of white supremacy, Jim Crow, and redlining, Black families in the United States have just one-tenth of the wealth of a typical white family (Ivanova). Because of such policies, Black Americans and communities of color also face a higher burden of student debt, less funding for public schools, worse access to healthcare, and less access to financial services than their white counterparts (Lombardo).

Instead of dealing with the pervasive level of systematic injustices that the audience sees in the underworld, the Jedi are preoccupied with doing whatever is necessary to win a war. This scene can certainly be read in a way that interrogates the genuine legitimacy of the Jedi in the role they take. Even though the Jedi are considered a protector of peace and dignity, they escalate the war, serving as military generals only concerned with their own interests and not those of the planet's most marginalized communities. Not only does the episode bring to light many of the real repercussions of war promulgated at the hands of predatory capitalism, but it shows how the Jedi and Republic as an institution entrusted with safeguarding the common good have lost their way the beginning they involved themselves in the conflict. These not too distant conditions from our real world should remind us that our governmental structures should prioritize the well-being of vulnerable people, particularly through an anti-racist lens that aims to advance their quality of life.

Overall, the case study from this chapter demonstrates the horrific impacts of war, particularly in the ways that it carries out violence against racialized groups through settler-colonialism. The lesson learned from this episode is that the aggression and brutality of Chairman Cho, the Jedi's indifference to his actions, and the innocent lives lost were completely unnecessary. While Cho's mindset was one of seeing the Talz as inferior, Senator Chuchi's call for diplomacy, non-violence, and self-determination for the Talz was successful and allowed for the conflict to be resolved. Chuchi saw the Talz as people worthy of equal treatment, value, and respect, presenting an alternative vision to audiences that condemns the violence of settler-colonialism and the imperial gaze from Cho. Moreover, the ways these stereotypes impact alien races are shown permeate into the systematic racism evident in the Republic on Coruscant, relegating them into the conditions this chapter explored in the underworld. These racial inequalities reveal to audiences the insidious steps that lead to the formation of the empire, and destruction of the Republic's democratic institutions.

Ahsoka Tano, The Presumption of Guilt, and Institutional Racism

To begin this case study, I will first establish that increasing militarism is a prominent theme that ultimately leads to the transition of the Galactic Republic to the Empire in the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy. I will draw examples from *The Clone Wars* by using the Jedi Temple Bombing and Citadel episodes as a case study for my exploration of these connections. I will conclude this section by contending that the treatment of Ahsoka Tano, the injustices in the Republic's criminal justice system, and emphasis on militarism in the Republic are emblematic of the transition to authoritarianism and downfall of the Republic.

The main character in the episode arc responsible for prosecuting Ahsoka is Admiral Tarkin, a military officer in the Republic who strongly advocates for an increase in militarism,

“law and order”, and “might makes right” to successfully win the Clone Wars against the Separatist Alliance. Similar views are expressed in Plato’s *Republic* through the Sophist Thrasymachus, who argues with Socrates that “might makes right” is the necessary pathway for strong leadership and government policy. In Cornel West’s *Democracy Matters*, he writes that the guiding philosophy for Thrasymachus was one that “mocks truth, integrity, and principle”, claiming that power, might, and direct force are better alternatives to governing (West, 30). According to Thrasymachus, raw power is necessary to uphold and protect communities of people, maintain national security, and prosperity for society. While in the same era the philosopher Socrates maintained that the role of “gadflies” who call truth to wealth, power, and corruption are imperative to sustaining a healthy and just form of government, Thrasymachus believed that power in the hands of those who are militant and appear strong should be infallible, exempting them from criticism.

West asserts that this constitutes a form of dangerous militarism and “evangelical nihilism” which can lead to the decay of a just democratic society. He connects this to the recent expansion of the U.S. military in the Middle East as an example of American empire justified by domination and power. This paradigm, he argues, is significantly rooted in a dangerous manifestation of nationalism that deems one as being un-American or unpatriotic if they disagree with foreign policy decisions framed to be “protecting our freedom and national security”. As a result of these policies abroad, they have prevented fundamental ideas of justice, human rights, and dignity as being priorities for our foreign policy. In addition, he writes that they have even lead to the curtailment of our civil liberties domestically, notably through the Patriot Act and “War on Terror” post 9/11.

Similarly, Tarkin's guiding ideology falls under the "might makes right" way of thinking. *Star Wars* viewers were first exposed to Grand Moff Tarkin during the original trilogy, particularly through his role as a military leader in the Galactic Empire and lead officer over the Death Star. Like colonial powers in the past, Tarkin uses the Death Star, a symbol of extreme militarism, as means to intimidate weaker planets into submission to the Empire. He explains that while "regional governors have been given control over their territories" it is "fear" that will keep the systems in line under the Empire's rule (Wetmore, Jr. 51). It is also critical to note that the Empire is portrayed as a homogenous Racial State, as humans are only depicted in imperial settings that take positions of power. Imperial officers resemble Nazi fascist military uniforms, and the interior of infrastructure such as the Death Star is illustrated as gleam, grey, and devoid of any vibrancy, drawing parallels to Nazi institutions.

Tarkin's presence in *The Clone Wars* begins in a season three episode arc where Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Ahsoka Tano, and a squadron of clone troopers led by Captain Rex and Commander Cody are sent on a mission to rescue Jedi Master Even Piell and Admiral Tarkin from a Separatist prison known as the Citadel. The Citadel is described as the most dangerous prison fortress throughout the entire universe filled with innumerable brutal detention cells and lethal traps. It is designed to mass incarcerate, torture, and detain any enemies of the Republic mercilessly without any consideration for due process or justice. In a conversation between Anakin, Tarkin, and Ahsoka during the episode "Counterattack", Tarkin makes it clear that he believes the Jedi are preventing the Republic to do what it takes to win the war and states that it's a pity a facility like the Citadel "didn't fall in Republic military hands". He admires the fortress for its "creative detainment features", foreshadowing his Imperial tendencies and invites the Jedi to challenge his philosophy (Geller). When Ahsoka asks how Tarkin could speak highly

of a facility such as the Citadel, he goes on to criticize “the Jedi way” as holding the Republic back because of the Jedi’s tendency to prioritize diplomacy, social justice, and defensive tactics. This is the initial portrayal of Tarkin’s militaristic thinking where he believes that even despite the horrific cruelty of an institution such as the Citadel, it’s negligent concerns for basic sentient rights and dignity should simply be an afterthought. Tarkin also conveys his loyalty to Chancellor Palpatine continuously throughout the episode arc, showing how highly he regards his leadership and trust in the Republic military. This would be a theme that repeats itself in the Jedi Temple bombing arc when Tarkin and Palpatine both agree publicly during the trial that Ahsoka should be convicted of the crime she didn’t commit.

As explained before, increasing militarism, the transition to the empire, and criminalization of alien species become evident in the underworld on Coruscant in the *Clone Wars*. A deeper analysis of the condition of underworld residents shows that it portrays the dangerous ramifications of a “might makes right” ideology. As the Republic invests more resources into its military bases through tanks, clone soldiers, detention centers, and infrastructure, the Senate has entirely abdicated its responsibility of caring for the most vulnerable members of these communities. Under a society that prioritizes militarism, the weak, poor, and vulnerable become blamed for their suffering as a result of the Republic’s structural racism that forgoes their needs. Instead of providing these needs, *The Clone Wars* shows how the Republic even deploys special underworld police forces as a means of social control. In commentary surrounding an episode arc that investigates a bombing at the Jedi Temple, *The Clone Wars* supervising director Dave Filoni noted how the underworld police were created to “be more intimidating and rougher than their counterparts that policed the upper levels” (“Coruscant Security Force”). While Coruscant security forces on the surface of the planet were

far less militarized, diplomatic, and polished in the form of police droids, the underlevels became susceptible to policing from toughened, authoritative, heavily armed, and mechanical officers in the name of “law and order” enforcement.

This treatment of alien and non-human communities in *Star Wars* is easy to draw a comparison to the criminalization of Black Americans and Muslims in the United States. Due to a strong emphasis on “Law and Order” criminal justice and the “War on Terror” which disproportionately curtailed communities of color through racial profiling and the curtailment of their civil liberties, this function of legal policy perpetuated their demonization, criminalization, and vilification in American society. In Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, she argues that police brutality has always been a consistent badge of inferiority and second class-citizenship against Black Americans. Similar to the policing of working-class alien communities in the underworld, the intersections of race and class exacerbate policing in low-income neighborhoods of color in the United States. Taylor writes that this is not just happening simply because of “vitriol” against African Americans, but mostly due to the police’s function to enforce the rule of the politically powerful and economic elite (108). By concentrating law enforcement in non-human communities cloaked in the mantra of law and order, this only serves to enhance assumptions of criminality and inferiority, embedding them in the very imagination of institutional structures and everyday people.

The militarization of underworld police forces also mirrors policies to heavily arm police when the “War on Terror” policies were announced after 9/11. As a result, elected officials promoted the notion that since police were on the frontlines of fighting this war against Islamic extremism and domestic terrorism, their funding should be dramatically increased. Pentagon records show that “vehicles worth \$15.6 million, aircraft worth \$8.9 million, boats worth \$6.7

million, weapons worth \$110.6 million” were distributed to modern-day police forces across the country (Taylor 121). More recently, in 2012, the military transferred a record \$546 million worth of property to local police departments. Based on the belief that the police need further firepower and “might” to carry out the promises of “law and order” promulgated by the political, legal, and social dialectic, this form of militarization would escalate police brutality and subsequently harm Black people in the United States.

A similar rise of militarism is apparent in *The Clone Wars* when Ahsoka Tano escapes the Republic military base and detention center she was held in. In the season five episode, “The Jedi Who Knew Too Much”, Tarkin is depicted walking to interrogate Ahsoka Tano with two heavily armed red shock troopers at his side. An aggressive rendition of the infamous “Imperial March” looms in the background, indicating a foreshadowing of the authoritarianism, danger, and malevolence that represents the Empire. In the season five director’s cut webisode “Military Might” which examines Tarkin’s character, Dave Filoni backs up this point, saying that Tarkin is representative the “military establishment” and what viewers would later “see in the Empire”. He explains that Tarkin is the one behind the grand facilities and resources to create the mechanism in place to transition to the Empire. For Filoni, Tarkin’s main goal was to consolidate power for himself through military might for nefarious purposes, including if it meant using Republic’s army and weaponry as tools to fulfill it. Filoni goes on to discuss the Republic’s military bases, which are portrayed as covered with red flags waving through the air, while military cruisers, Republic hounds, and tanks mobilize within the base. The red flags, indicative of imagery within the Galactic Empire and First Order in the recent *Star Wars* sequel trilogy, conveys a fascist-like aura of tyranny, oppression, and violence that would come from these authoritarian governments.

The quick presumption of Ahsoka Tano's guilt is heavily connected to not only Tarkin's aversion of the Jedi and his "might makes right" mentality as it relates to militarism, but also is deeply connected to the criminalization of non-human communities. Similar to the plight of Black Americans in the United States, where criminal justice system produces outcomes that are based on race with regard to policing and profiling, incarceration, the death penalty, and criminal sentencing, these themes present themselves in the story (Balko). For example, studies indicate that Black Americans are about five times more likely to be arrested for non-violent drug offenses by law enforcement, and twelve times more likely to be wrongly convicted of drug crimes in the criminal justice system.

Similar themes are presented in *The Clone Wars*, when Tarkin repeatedly dismisses Ahsoka Tano's pleas of innocence, refuses to allow her to gain legal representation when she is first detained and fails to examine the evidence that is in Ahsoka's favor. Even more problematically, he successfully pressures the Jedi to expel Ahsoka from the Jedi Order so he can prosecute her in a "military tribunal", while the infamous Imperial March is again played in the background during the scene. Along with Tarkin's ruthless indictment of Ahsoka and vow to punish her by "penalty of death", the Chancellor (who is supposedly positioned to be a fair arbiter during the trial), suggests to the courtroom that Ahsoka is complicit in a separatist plot.

Overall, the takeaways learned from this case study are that a type of politics which prioritize military might and enforces a racist criminal justice system can lead to the disintegration of a democratic, pluralistic society. While the "might makes right" ideology is often used as a platitude to preserve security and "law and order", *Star Wars* shows it can have harmful impacts on the most vulnerable. This pattern represents the dangers of militarism that foreshadow the rise of imperialism, domination, and ultimately the Racial State created by the

Galactic Empire. The type of leadership that is portrayed from Tarkin in *The Clone Wars* is one that values power and domination over the well-being of its citizens, therefore giving audiences an indication of how avoid the erosion of democratic ways of life.

Conclusion

My main goal with this project was to explain how speculative fiction can be used as a tool to recognize crucial issues facing our society. Due to the popularity of these mediums and the stories that are told, they can be seen not just simply as entertainment, but include possibilities for evoking a political consciousness in people. In my work, I examined the wisdom of Edward Said, who explained the dangers of a “clash of civilizations” narrative and the dehumanization that it creates for communities targeted by the violence of colonialism. This, connected to the disproportionate impact of *The Clone Wars* on indigenous communities and alien races demonstrates who are placed at the forefront of the effects of war. Furthermore, by drawing on the work of Cornel West, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Deepa Kumar, and Khaled Beydoun, connections were made to the treatment of Black Americans and Muslims under the current realities of the American criminal justice system, and how these themes closely relate to inequities facing alien races in the Republic.

For myself, *The Clone Wars* became a vehicle for understanding the political realities of our time, particularly in the ways marginalized identities can be highlighted with the storytelling that is written. Such as in the context of this project, it can allow us to understand the dangers of a growing empire, policies that create racial injustices, and the economic inequalities that continue to grow and inflict suffering on millions of vulnerable people. By centering the narratives of the most invisible who face these realities, my hope is that science fiction stories, like *The Clone Wars*, can help us reevaluate our current political, social, and economic structures to that it opens our imaginations to a more socially just future. While *Star Wars* comprehensively encapsulates more of a dystopian reality that offers warnings to the dangers of injustice, potential

opportunities for further research should be done into analyzing stories that inspire hope, specifically offering a more positive vision for the future.

Moreover, during the unprecedented times we currently face due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, I believe it is a particularly crucial opportunity to use the lens visionary fiction, as explained by Imarisha, for envisioning a better world. The crisis brought on by the coronavirus demonstrates the crucial need for a society that prioritizes collective well-being, strong public programs, and mutual aid. As experts have noted, the United States' public health care system has been the target of neglect for decades, leaving the country unable to adequately deal with the infrastructure necessary to combat the pandemic (Spector). These horrific systemic failures in dealing with crisis situations have also permeated into the U.S. economy, with over 30 million Americans losing their jobs since the onset of the crisis, and nearly forty-percent of vulnerable low-income workers reporting job losses in just March of 2020 (Sachs & Stewart, Animashaun). These destabilizations are estimated to compound in the near future, as economists from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis estimate that absent of major government intervention, the outbreak could lead to forty-seven million jobs lost and an unemployment rate over thirty-percent (Cassidy). Along racial lines, an analysis from researchers at Yale and the University indicated that Black people are over 3.5 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than their white counterparts, while Latinx communities are also almost twice as likely to die from the coronavirus (Hathaway). According to the researchers, these alarming statistics are likely attributed to a wide-array of state policies contributing to racial discrimination and inequities in health outcomes. With the pandemic exposing the deep racial, social, and economic inequities in the United States in all aspects of living, it should remind us that we cannot return to the political status quo and business as usual.

These intense structural weaknesses in our social systems should underscore that there must be a new normal that fundamentally reshapes the way our political structures are prioritized. This means advocating for the implementation of a national healthcare system that guarantees healthcare as a human right, strengthening resources into our public education system, creating government programs to address housing insecurity and homelessness, and providing a universal basic income to improve our collective standard of living. The pandemic also intensifies thinking seriously about alternatives to the horrifying realities of mass incarceration, which has left prisoners, disproportionately Black, Latinx, and low-income vulnerable to grave public health conditions leading to infection (Stillman).

In a crisis such as our own, *The Clone Wars* would tell us that we must reevaluate priorities to create a society that provides dignity and security to all people. The storyline conveys this message in the season three episode “Pursuit of Peace”, as the Republic is faced with a decision to expand the war or provide funds to its social programs that vulnerable citizens have always relied on. In an impassioned speech shown in the episode, Senator Padmé Amidala, a leading progressive voice in the Republic Senate, argues that continuing the war has led to a crisis of increasing income and wealth inequality, poverty, joblessness, and economic disempowerment among the Republic’s citizens. Mirroring the current state of the United States, the Republic was facing a crisis situation, leaving working-class and low-income communities behind without basic government support. Indeed, the lesson we can learn from this story is that the function of our political institutions should be to protect and prioritize its hardest-hit communities with the support they need, such as healthcare, housing, education, and economic opportunities, especially during a national economic crisis such as this one. The possibilities of future public healthcare crises and natural disasters due to existential threats such as climate

change mean that the importance of considering these radical changes are more critical than ever. Speculative fiction stories and narratives can be used as a valuable tool to imagine this version of a better, more equal society that inspires the kind of hope to implement this vision.

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