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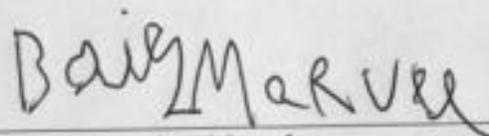
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American Fears: H.P. Lovecraft and The Paranoid Style

By

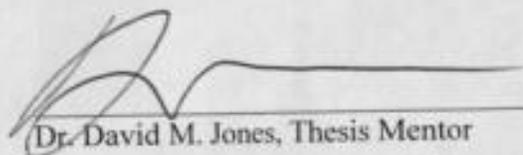
Bailey Charles Hylon Marvel

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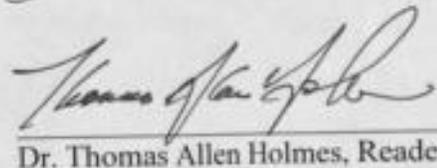
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Dr. Thomas Allen Holmes, Reader

Date

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis mentor Dr. David Jones. I first met Dr. Jones in the fall semester of 2020. It was a Zoom class and he was teaching American Literature to 1865. During class one day he said “America is a terrific and amazing place of near limitless opportunities. America is also a place of countless injustices and a history wrought with prejudice and greed. The key to being a scholar of American history, culture, and literature is to recognize both images of America as true and valid; not matter how disparate they might seem.” When he said those words, I knew I wanted him to be my thesis mentor. I want to thank him for all the help he has provided me through this whole process and for giving this thesis real direction and inspiration. I would also like to thank Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes for taking time out of his busy schedule to help me edit and proofread this thesis, as well as his concise and well thought out comments during the editing process. I would like to thank my friends Avery Lane Leonard and Josh Nave for listening to my thoughts about the subjects of H.P. Lovecraft, the American psyche, and the paranoid style. Josh had actually graduated the year before me and had written a thesis of his own so he was also able to guide and encourage me throughout the process. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me throughout my college career and for supporting me in all my interests...no matter how niche.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to Fear

“Cosmic horror”, “eldritch horror”, and “Lovecraftian horror” all describe a style of horror created by H.P. Lovecraft. Cosmic horror is about grappling with the scale of the universe around you. It is about realizing that everything you know and love is on a small island surrounded by a vast cosmic ocean that contains terrors that you could not possibly conceive. There is a sense of hopelessness, of inevitability in eldritch horror, reinforced by a concept that appears repeatedly throughout Lovecraft’s mythos: The Great Old Ones. The Great Old Ones are a group of alien gods who ruled over the earth in its primordial state. These gods now slumber deep beneath the seas, dreaming, waiting until it is time for them to rise and take the earth back from humanity. The Old Ones are unknowable; everything about them including their misshapen spawn is incomprehensible. To even gaze upon a fraction of their being is to stare into the face of madness itself. The Great Old Ones are madness itself; they are the concept of entropy. To make matters worse some cultists worship these Old Gods. These cultists seek to accelerate their returns in the vain hope of gaining favor with them; these cultists lurk in the shadows, performing all sorts of evil acts against their fellow man.

The protagonists of Lovecraft’s stories never truly succeed at defeating the Old Ones; at best they merely delay the inevitable; at best they survive their encounters with these primordial forces; permanently scarred by forbidden knowledge. Lovecraft wrote many stories that help codify an understanding of cosmic horror. The short story “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928), arguably one of Lovecraft’s most famous works, includes incredibly concise encapsulations of the themes and ideas of Lovecraftian horror.

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

(Lovecraft 36)

In the mythos of Lovecraft, a mythos established over many works, science, and progress will not protect humanity. In the Lovecraftian mythos science and progress is ultimately what will lead to humanity's downfall. Society is doomed to fall; either by madness or by a new dark age. It is a bleak image that Lovecraft paints in his works and one that inspires fear and paranoia. That is the existential dread of Lovecraftian horror.

The ascetics of Lovecraftian horror have helped the sub-genre survive for almost a century. Lovecraftian horror is known for a wet and organic ascetic inspired by Lovecraft's own fear of the sea. The monsters are often ugly, asymmetrical, slimy, and utterly inhuman. Those that do take more human forms tend to represent a perversion of that form. Tentacles, eyeballs, and mouths placed seemingly haphazardly on a sort of gelatinous blob describe a few of Lovecraft's monstrous creations. Some of the horrors Lovecraft would not even describe in great detail stating that his words failed him because of how unfathomable the horrors were.

While Lovecraft was able to establish an influential subgenre of horror, it is vital to also establish that his works are deeply problematic. His short stories, novellas, and even poems involve classist, racist, and xenophobic themes and depictions. To say that Lovecraft was merely

a product of his time is not inaccurate but it does not tell the whole story. Lovecraft was deeply invested in his Anglo-Saxon heritage as well as making sure America maintained a certain level of “purity.” Lovecraft published a magazine named “The Conservative” from 1915 to 1923 in which he wrote about such opinions. In the second issue he writes this about the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915); a film that helped create a positive picture of the Ku Klux Klan in the minds of Americans.

The Negro is fundamentally the biological inferior of all White and even Mongolian races, and the Northern people must occasionally be reminded of the danger which they incur in admitting him too freely to the privileges of society and government... Race prejudice is a gift of Nature, intended to preserve in purity the various divisions of mankind. (Lovecraft 45)

He believed in maintaining England as the United States’ mother country going as far as believing that America should embrace an English style aristocracy as its main form of government. Lovecraft was paranoid about many things, among them were immigrants, miscegenation, and any non-white person.

These fears are shown repeatedly in Lovecraft’s bibliography. In the aforementioned “The Call of Cthulhu,” the cult that worships Cthulhu, one of the Great Old Ones, is made up almost entirely of African- Americans, Native Americans, and those of mixed descent. One of Lovecraft’s novellas: “The Dunwich Horror” (1929) features the Whateley family, an inbred, uneducated, white family from the backwoods of Massachusetts; the patriarch of which also worships one of the Great Old Ones, Yog-Sothoth. The plot of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” (1936) is not at all subtle in its allegory of miscegenation and the “horrors” it brings.

Unfortunately for all that Lovecraft's work has given to the horror genre, from thought-provoking themes to a deeply unsettling aesthetic, it cannot be denied just how interlinked Lovecraft's work is with these problematic elements.

In this way, Lovecraft created a snapshot of American paranoia during the Interwar period. The Eugenics and Nativist movements were both popular during Lovecraft's time. Eugenics was the study of human genetics. It is believed that the social woes of America could be addressed with "proper breeding." Many eugenicists encouraged people to marry for beauty, strength, and intelligence with the hope being the improvement of the American people. In practice, the Eugenics Movement resulted in scientific racism and forced sterilization. In his influential book, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), Madison Grant writes

Mistaken regard for what are believed to be divine laws and a sentimental belief in the sanctity of human life tend to prevent both the elimination of defective infants and the sterilization of such adults as are themselves of no value to the community. The laws of nature require the obliteration of the unfit and human life is valuable only when it is of use to the community or race. (qtd. in Kharem 103)

Today many Americans underestimate the popularity of Eugenics during the Interwar period, but this influence cannot be denied with some sterilization laws remaining in several states up until the 1970s. Nativism is a political philosophy that privileges those native to American culture as opposed to immigrants to America. Nativist rhetoric still is prevalent in American politics concerning immigration and the handling of refugees. In spite of the problematic nature of Lovecraft's works writers and artists are still inspired by his works, even creators of color, each adding their own voice to cosmic horror. Lovecraft tapped into the underlying violence of the American mythos. His fear of "primordial forces," his fears of being usurped, his fear that

society that America would crumble into dust, are all crucial to the American psyche. America boasts about its freedoms, and the courage of great men it took to gain those freedoms but America can also be scared and paranoid. Lovecraft was a prejudiced and paranoid man, and his prejudices and paranoia are a major part of his works. The fear that Lovecraft felt and wrote, is the same fear that continues to guide and shape America itself.

Chapter 2:

The Paranoid Style of American Literature

Democracy is a fascinating system in that it is facilitated by a debate and a discourse of ideas. Public debates serve the function of allowing our political candidates to vocalize their opinions and policies; as well as state how they believe those policies will improve the country as a whole or state how their rivals' policies will fail the nation. In this rhetoric, we see what American historian Richard Hofstadter referred to as the "paranoid style" of American politics. In his article, "The Paranoid Style of American Politics," written for Harper's Magazine, Hofstadter argues that many movements throughout American history involve a great deal of paranoia and prejudice.

In the history of the United States one find it [the paranoid style], for example, in the anti-Masonic movement, the nativist and anti-Catholic movement, in certain spokesmen of abolitionism who regard the United States as being in the grips of a slaveholder's conspiracy, in many alarmist about the Mormons, in some Greenback and Populist writers who constructed a great conspiracy of international bankers, in the exposure of a munitions makers' conspiracy of World War I, in popular left-wing press, in the contemporary American right wing, and on both sides of the race controversy today,

among White Citizens' Councils and Black Muslims. I do not propose to try to trace the variations of the paranoid style that can be found in all these movements, but will confine myself to a few leading episodes in our past history in which the style emerged in full and archetypal splendor. (Hofstadter)

As Hofstadter explains it the paranoid style is the result of the animosity and anger of the American people being leveraged for political gain. Fear and anger can be powerful tools in the hands of charismatic leaders. Leaders who sometimes seek to subvert the rights of others and make scapegoats of various oppressed groups. As Hofstadter is keen to point too, the paranoid style is found in various movements throughout American history; on both sides of the political spectrum.

Richard Hofstadter wrote “The Paranoid Style of American Politics” as a response to McCarthyism, a period of American history filled with paranoia and prejudice in which ruined the lives of many Americans. However, it is not difficult to see the paranoid style in today's American politics. In the 2016 election, Donald Trump constructed a populist argument that positioned the “average American” in opposition to coastal elites who ruled politically and economically. Trump’s rhetoric is not unlike a populist argument made by Andrew Jackson that positioned Tennessean pioneers against North Eastern politicians and industrialists who would rather protect their own interests as opposed to the interest of the pioneers expanding ever westward. This rhetoric often comes down to an “us versus them” scenario. This scenario manifests in two distinct but interconnected ways. The “Them” have formed a cabal of sorts to keep “us” down so that they may prosper; the elites, the Illuminati, the bourgeois, the Masons, the deep state, whatever they are referred to as they control our society and seek to undermine our freedoms and liberties. The other version of “Them” we see in America’s paranoid style is

what I will refer to as the “Invaders.” According to this variant of the “us versus them” rhetoric the invaders are groups of people who seek to invade the lands as well as pervert and delude the culture. They come seeking opportunity even going as far as to rip it out of the hands of the American people. They change the language, the culture, and the rights of the American people, and steal the culture away from the people. Repeatedly this “Invaders” rhetoric has been used against immigrants and refugees to America. Benjamin Franklin feared how German immigrants would change the Anglo-Saxon ways of America, the eugenics movement fear how immigrants would taint the white race with their “primitive genes,” and even today many right-wing politicians argue how Hispanic immigrants and Muslim refugees are changing and tainting American culture and American values.

The paranoid style is a part of many aspects of American politics and repeatedly has been employed in American rhetoric. The paranoid style however can also be found in American literature. Lovecraft's description of existential dread, alien monsters, and dastardly cults is the same language used in the paranoid style. There is something inherently xenophobic about many of the themes of Lovecraft's horror. Lovecraft's work deals with the fear of the unknown, the fear of the unusual, the fear of that which our mortal minds refuse to comprehend. Excluding the human antagonists of his stories, which will be discussed at length later, what makes the Cthulhus and the Yog-Sothoths in Lovecraftian horror fear-inducing is their alien nature. Everything about them is foreign to such an extent that they cannot be reasoned with or understood.

A common metaphor for describing the “Old Ones” (the Pantheon of ancient gods in Lovecraft's connected mythology) is that we are but ants or a speck of dust compared to them. However, the Old Ones are also described as primordial and ancient; in many ways unevolved

compared to the more accepted portrayal of divinity. Those who worship the Old Ones are not lifted to a state of grace but rather corrupted and polluted. This connects well to some of the xenophobic ideas of eugenics. A tenet of American eugenics in the 1920s was that the non-white races are more primordial and less evolved than the white race and that interbreeding with them will result in a polluted offspring and the eventual downfall of the white race.

The decline of society is another theme that pops up in Lovecraft's work. The Whateleys of "The Dunwich Horror" were a once-proud family but have decayed and given in to inbreeding and unholy religious practices. "...the natives are now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters... sunk into the sordid populace so deeply that only their names remain as key to the origin they disgrace" (Lovecraft 104). The Whateley's have become a "them," something to be feared and ostracized due to their corruption; something to be kept away from "us." The Whateley's are othered due to their "retrogression;" in this, they have forsaken their family name and by extent their connection to society.

These are themes you see in both Lovecraft's horror stories as well as the fear-mongering common to the paranoid style. Fear of cultural and ethnic corruption, fear of societal decline, the fear of being usurped as the dominant power. For Lovecraft, the harbingers of the Old Ones, were those of polluted blood, the foreigners who sought to undermine the dominant, white, power structure. They were also the fallen of this power structure, the great families who betrayed their race and gave into primordial powers. For Lovecraft, the human race IS the white race and those who fall outside that narrow definition of humanity are aligned with dark powers that will eventually destroy all that the human race has built; this sentiment can be seen in the multiracial cult of Cthulhu, the degraded Whateley family, and the half-fish population of

Innsmouth. The works that will be primarily discussed are “Call of Cthulhu,” “The Dunwich Horror,” and “The Shadow Over Innsmouth.” These works were selected due to their popularity as well as their connection to the wider Lovecraftian mythology. These works were also selected due to their connection to various aspects of eugenics and nativism, both movements that were incredibly popular during the 1920s and 1930s when Lovecraft was writing and movements that have their own connections to the paranoid style. However, before these short stories and novellas were written Lovecraft wrote a poem that helps cement the ground on which Lovecraft developed his paranoid style.

Chapter 3:

A Monstrous Prodigy

“Providence 2000 A.D.” (1912) was a poem written by H.P. Lovecraft first published in 1912 in a Providence-based newspaper or magazine. The poem itself is a satire of sorts in reaction to a then-recent announcement in *The Providence Journal* that the Italian community of Providence wished to rename Providence, Rhode Island’s Atwell Avenue to Columbus Avenue. “Providence 2000 A.D.” describes a dystopian version of Lovecraft’s hometown that by the year 2000 had become a perversion of its former self. It had been changed and morphed by an influx of foreign influences. The poem itself tells the story of an Englishman returning to Providence, Rhode Island after his family was forced to leave due to the increase of immigrants:

For tho' by birth an Englishman am I,
 My forbears dwelt in undersiz'd R.I.
 Until, prest hard by foreign immigrations,
 Oblig'd they were to leave the old Plantations,

And seek a life of quiet and repose

On British soil, whence our fam'ly rose.

(Lovecraft Lines 2-7)

The poem starts with the idea of being usurped as the narrator's family was forced to abandon their home in New England and seek their ancestral home in Old England as they were "prest hard by foreign immigration." There is a persistent image of England being central to America as its mother country. In the view of certain populations in America, the white race's claim to America rests on the idea that they were somehow in America first, that the white man was the first to tame America and her savage beauty and create a true society. This, of course, ignores the reality that much of the land itself was already inhabited by the hundreds of tribes of Native Americans. This sentiment also ignores the countless contributions of African-Americans, both slave and free, to American culture and history. Uncorrupted Anglo-Saxon heritage "On British soil, whence our fam'ly rose" is the claim to purity and by extent to America itself. That is why the connection to Old England is so essential. The Anglo-Saxons came yesterday, and since members of every other race came later or were conquered by the Anglo-Saxons, they have no true claim to Providence and by extent America.

The phrase "the old Plantation" brings into focus just what version of America these immigrants, by the poem's implication have destroyed. An America where the white man has subjugated and lords over those, he deems impure. The plantations, were a symbol of the power of American agriculture to turn a crop that was nearly impossible to harvest, into a major trade good: cotton. The plantation, a symbol of the planter elites who amassed wealth to expand their land and purchase more slaves, and use that elite status to shape the world around them as they see fit. The plantation, a symbol of everything that white supremacists, then and now, believe

make the white race the supermen of humanity. According to white supremacists, the technology, the progress, the ability to tame the untamable, to rule the unrulable. That is what makes the white race the master race: the plantation. That is the narrator's connection to Old England as well as New England, his race, his blood, and although the poem does not quite admit it, the suffering of the “foreigners” that were once subjugated. However, in the America imagined by “Providence 2000 A.D.,” the plantations are gone and the white man no longer rules America. Now the impure do and as the poem states, in no uncertain terms what they have done to the once “proud” land of Providence, Rhode Island.

The poem cements the idea in its first lines that the pureblooded Anglo-Saxons are completely incompatible with the “immigrant hordes” that infest Lovecraft’s imagined futuristic Rhode Island. The outsiders have invaded the unnamed narrator’s home and as the rest of the poem demonstrates they have perverted it beyond recognition. As he explores Providence the narrator discovers how the foreigners have changed the names of the various landmarks and streets of Providence, Rhode Island:

Across a bridge, where fragrant waters run,
 I shap'd my journey toward the setting sun.
 A curving junction first engag'd my gaze;
 My guide-book calls it "Finklestein's Cross-ways"
 But in a note historical 'tis said,

That the old English nam'd the spot "Turk's Head" (Lovecraft Lines 31-36)

This is a common occurrence in the poem, for the speaker to come across a Providence landmark and reveal its new title of outside influence. This happens with various influences be they

Semitic, Italian, Spanish, Gaulish, Irish, and various other races and cultures. It all comes back to the idea of being replaced; of being usurped. Not only have the immigrants polluted the blood of America but also the land of America. As line 31 hints “where fragrant waters run”, the fragrant water could refer to the pollution of said water and perhaps symbolically the pollution of America’s culture and the white race. According to “Providence 2000 A.D.,” new Americans have brought a literal blight to the lands.

As stated, this poem is based on an event in which Italian-American wished to rename a street in honor of Christopher Columbus, a figure who ironically has become controversial in our modern times, but during the early 20th century was used as a claim to American history by Italian immigrants. Columbus was Italian therefore the Italians did belong in America. In “Providence 2000 A.D.” other races have laid claim to America and if the Italians take a street from Providence then the Jews must have theirs as well. “Finklestein’s Cross-Way” and every other renamed location mentioned in “Providence 2000 A.D.” The poem itself proposes a slippery slope argument that if one street gets renamed then every street gets renamed and then miscegenation happens, then the waters become polluted, then the white Americans, the “true” Americans have to leave their home, and then cats and dogs start living together. As absurd as it might sound, “Providence 2000 A.D.” is a doomsday prophecy about how the renaming of a street sign will lead to the downfall of American society. How the white race has been usurped and has been forced to retreat to the mother country of England.

“Providence 2000 A.D.” is a satire but it is also an expression of fear and paranoia, fear and paranoia that echoes throughout much of Lovecraft’s writing. In the final lines of the poem, the narrator filled with terror at what has become of his former homeland comes upon, what he describes as, a dreadful sight:

At what was once call'd "Olneyville" I saw
 A street sign painted: Wsjzypq\$?&%\$ ladislaw.
 With terror struck, I sought the warf once more,
 But as my steamboat's whistle 'gan to roar,
 A shrivell'd form, half crouching 'twixt the freight,
 Seiz'd on my arm, and halted short my gait.
 "Who art though, Sirrah?" I in wonder cry'd;
 "A monstrous prodigy," the fellow sigh'd:
 "Last of my kind, a lone unhappy man,
 My name is Smith! I'm an American! (Lovecraft Lines 60-70.

The first lines of this section set forth a terrifying scenario, being an alien in your own home. Our narrator sees the sign as a jumble of letters and symbols "Wsjzypq\$?&%\$ ladislaw," he recognizes the symbols but cannot form into a rational thought and unlike the other street signs, the narrator has encountered, lacks a clear origin culture. This is the horror of the intermingling of cultures, that it creates an alien and unrecognizable people, a race that is truly alien to the human race. That is the horror that Lovecraft is evoking here. Alienation from one's own nation and as the last few lines demonstrate an alienation from one's own people "a lone unhappy man." As the narrator looks upon Smith, he is described as almost alien himself "A shrivell'd form, half crouching 'twixt the freight,". Smith represents the decay that Lovecraft fears will take place in the future of America; that Americans will become unrecognizable and lower creatures compared to their European counterparts, a "monstrous prodigy." The narrator uses the term "Sirrah," a term specifically meant to invoke inferiority. In Lovecraft's dystopian future not only

have pure white Americans been forced to leave America but those who stayed behind fell to the same corruption that the foreigner brought to everything else. That is what makes the prodigy, the heritage of America a monstrous prodigy. It is a prodigy no longer worth claiming. That somehow Americans have become a dying race that Lovecraft implies might deserve extinction. Not only have the immigrants made Providence an alien land but it has turned “pure blooded” Americans into an alien race themselves burdened with their own legacy and their new corruption.

That is the madness and paranoia that Lovecraft evokes not only in “Providence 2000 A.D.” but also in his far more popular and influential works. Fear of being usurped, fear of the foreigners of society, fear of racial degradation, fear of isolation and alienation, these fears are all a part of the works that will be discussed. “The Call of Cthulhu”, “The Dunwich Horror”, and “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”, these fears all persist in these novellas and short stories. This fear is the paranoid style and Lovecraftian terror.

Chapter 4:

The Great (American) Dreamer

As stated in a previous chapter, H.P. Lovecraft’s “Call of Cthulhu” begins with one of the most concise definitions of cosmic horror ever put to page.

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of

our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (Lovecraft 36)

While many scholars and critics have noted the quote for its apt description of cosmic horror, it also has an anti-progress bent that still seems to echo many sentiments held by modern conservatives and even some progressives. The quote states that science will be the undoing of our peace and stability and eventually it will go too far and either destroy humanity or send humanity into another dark age.

“The Call of Cthulhu” was first published in 1928 and written in 1926. The story follows a man named Francis Wayland Thurston as he investigates the belongings of his grand-uncle George Gammell Angell, an esteemed professor at Brown University. Professor Angell’s death is initially chalked up to sickness and old age (the professor being 92 at the time of the passing) but the narrator notes an encounter the professor had with “a nautical-looking negro who had come from one of the queer dark courts on the precipitous hillside” (Lovecraft 37). As Thurston studies his uncle’s files he comes upon writings of a mysterious “Cthulhu Cult” he learns of several encounters Professor Angell had with said cult. Including a study of dreams in which artists and poets dreamed of a mysterious underwater city named R’lyeh. Angell learns that working-class people did not have dreams of such a city only vague nightmares, scientists were more affected by these strange dreams, and artists were paralyzed with fear and paranoia.

Average people in society and business-New England’s traditional ‘salt of the earth’-gave an almost completely negative result, through scattered cases of uneasy but formless nocturnal impressions appear here and there...Scientific men were little more affected...It was from the artists and poets the pertinent answers came, (Lovecraft 41)

There was also an overall increase in madness around the world.

Voodoo orgies multiply in Haiti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings.

American officers in the Philippines find certain tribes bothersome about this time, and New York policemen are mobbed by hysterical Levantines...The west of Ireland, too, is full of wild rumors and legendry, (Lovecraft 42).

It seems as though while the white New Englanders had experienced the effects of “R’lyeh” as nightmares, those of other hues had more violent reactions. Suggesting early on a connection between Cthulhu and those Lovecraft considered to be impure.

The first chapter serves to introduce Professor Angell and more importantly hint at his experience with the Cthulhu Cult. Angell’s death is put under suspicion because of an encounter with a Black man on the waterfront. The “nautical-looking negro” is the first cultist the reader is clued into immediately drawing the line between Angell, an upstanding scholarly white man, and the cultist, a lower-class black man who works on the docks. What divides Angell and the cultist is not only their race but also the air of suspicion in “The Call of Cthulhu” that surrounds the “nautical-looking negro.” The dreamers as well are also divided amongst class lines between the working class, who experience no strange dreams, and the artists and scientists who do experience the strange dreams. Another line that is drawn is between the “salt of the earth” working-class who According to “The Call of Cthulhu”, may simply be too simple to understand the greater cosmology of the universe. Meanwhile, the scholars and artists, both of which were respected career paths in the white community of the east coast in the early 20th century, having inherent intelligence can understand the cosmic terror that Lovecraft has created. The first chapter even divides the madness by race; while it connects the “Haitian Voodoo orgies” and

“hysterical Levanites” with the overall rise in madness and delirium is still presented as wilder and more dangerous than the madness experienced in the refined land of New England. The first chapter introduces these divides, the “Us vs Them” of the paranoid style. “Us” being morally upstanding and presumably white scholars and “Them” being the primordial cults as well as the wildness of foreign places and the foreign faces that have invaded the sanctity of white spaces. The scholar vs the seaman, the artist vs the Voodoo practitioner, white vs black, us vs them.

An earlier encounter documented in Angell’s notes involves an event in the bayous of New Orleans. While at a conference Professor Angelo is approached by a policeman who presents the conference with a clay statue of Cthulhu found during a raid of a “voodoo meeting” though Francis notes that the cult that the statue actually came from is “infinity more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles” (Lovecraft 43). The police continue to investigate the Cthulhu Cult and investigate a meeting of the cult. At the meeting the police find...

“a hundred mongrel celebrants... men of very low, mixed blood, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes, and mulattoes, largely West Indians of Brava Portuguese from Cape Verde Islands, gave a coloring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult... Degraded and ignorant,” (Lovecraft 47).

The cultists are taken prisoner and interrogated. The cultists speak sparingly about the specific details of the cult only that

it had always existed and always would exist, hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world...Some day he (Cthulhu) would call, when the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him. (Lovecraft 47-48).

The prisoners had also revealed the meaning of their chant and the inscription on the statue: *In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.*

While the first chapter defines the lines between us and them, the second chapter of “The Call of Cthulhu” shows the nefarious nature of the enemy: the Cthulhu Cult. While a distinction is made between the Cthulhu Cult and Satanic as well as Voodoo practitioners, Lovecraft invokes ideas and imagery associated with the stereotypical evil cult. Esoteric rituals performed in the wild, human sacrifice, the worship of an ungodly idol. Oftentimes though cults are associated with the outsiders of society. The Cthulhu Cult is full of the racial outsiders of polite American society “men of very low, mixed blood, and mentally aberrant type.” It is those of so-called low blood who are drawn to the worship of Cthulhu. In Lovecraft’s mind, in Lovecraft’s America, it is those of impure body and mind who seek to subvert and distort the purity and sanctity of humanity.

To make matters worse for the world Lovecraft has created in “The Call of Cthulhu,” the Cthulhu Cult is older and more ancient than modern society “it had always existed and always would exist.” They have always existed and will continue to exist after the fall of modern America. In the world of “The Call of Cthulhu,” the white man has been able to etch out his place in the societies of Europe and America but that is a place not guaranteed. The other races may be impure and unworthy of the white man’s land and blood but they are older and the white man’s place at the top of society is not a certainty, the white man’s claim to a land gifted to them by the Christian God is put into jeopardy by the cultist of the Cthulhu, the Great Dreamer. While

Lovecraft's claim that the outsiders of society are a part of some dastardly cult may seem extreme it is part of a long legacy of fear of cults and other outside forces that seek to subvert the will of the people. America has a long history of fear of cults; the freemasons, the Illuminati, anti-Semitic and anti-papist claims of some grandiose conspiracy to invade and subvert the American Way. The fear of communism in the 1950s and 60s that lead to dozens of people being blacklisted from their careers. These fears are discussed in the rhetoric of the paranoid style, these fears "had always existed and always would exist."

The final chapter of "The Call of Cthulhu" follows Francis as he investigates a Norwegian man named Gustaf Johansen. Johansen told a Sydney Newspaper "an exceedingly strange story of piracy and violence." Johansen explains how his original ship the "Emma" was attacked by an "evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes" manning a ship called "Alert." Johansen and his fellow sailors are able to kill the original crew of the "Alert" and decide to sail on the ship's original course. They come upon a strange island. The island seemed to have some sort of alien geometry to it that made it difficult for Johansen and his men to explore the island; they eventually come across a gateway that the sailing crew open; inadvertently releasing Cthulhu. As Cthulhu rampages across the island and begins his journey into the sea, he squashed most of the crew while some of the crew fell victim to the alien terrain of the island. Johansen and his companion make it back to the ship. Johansen then decides to ram Cthulhu, which he successfully does causing the Old One to break apart like awful-smelling jelly but as Johansen sails, he notices the remains of Cthulhu drifting back to the island. His companion goes insane on the sea and dies from his madness, leaving Johansen the sole survivor. The book ends with Francis in a paranoid state realizing that the cult will not let him live with the knowledge he possesses.

I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me. But I do not think my life will be long. As my uncle went, as poor Johansen went, so I go. I know too much, and the cult still lives. (Lovecraft 60)

The book ends as it begins; with descriptions of paranoia and madness.

While the first two chapters dealt with Cthulhu in a theoretical sense, the nightmares he causes, the cultists he inspires to fanaticism, the third chapter shows Cthulhu in his slimy, gelatinous glory. It is here that Johansen has a physical encounter with the Great Dreamer. It is here we see the true power of Cthulhu and by extent the true threat of his cult. Francis puts to rest any doubt about the power the Cthulhu Cult hold by learning of a physical manifestation of their deity. Cthulhu is real and one day he will awaken and reclaim the Earth from mankind and send society into madness.

Cthulhu represents many existential fears regarding mankind's place in the universe, whether it is better to exist alone on our island or be surrounded by a sea of monsters that could squash us like a gnat. Mankind's long-standing fear of mortality as well as the fragility of life and society. These themes however carry different contexts in terms of the American mythos, however. The Cthulhu Cult can be read as an intense paranoia over the increasing influence of non-whites on American culture. As Cthulhu will usurp humanity, the non-whites will usurp the white man. This has long been a fear for a certain sect of white Americans. A major argument against freeing the slaves was the fear and paranoia over "servile insurrections." They feared that the slaves would overthrow their masters and claim America for their own. The fear and paranoia over cults and secret organizations speak directly to the fear Americans have over their freedoms

being breached. The traditional values of America being subverted and disregarded. America has had many wars and conflicts but one it seems to fear especially is an unseen enemy; an enemy that has already invaded. In the minds of some Americans, the barbarians are at the gate and the cultists are among the populist. They threaten traditional values, and the racial purity of the white man, they even threaten the freedom that America was built for.

“Call of Cthulhu” begins with an anti-progress sentiment; for Francis Wayland Thurston he attempted to progress his knowledge of the world but consumed a tainted reality that had blighted his perception of the world. Ignorance truly is bliss in the world of Lovecraft’s mythology. In modern times racial and social diversity are seen as progress, a way towards a better future but many like Lovecraft still state that it is still “Us vs Them”. That the divides between our societies must be maintained. That there are still cultists among us, the same paranoia-style prevails.

Chapter 5:

The Real Horror of Dunwich

“The Dunwich Horror” was written in 1928 and was published in 1929. The novella concerns itself with the Whateley family. A white family living in the rural Massachusetts town of Dunwich. Dunwich is described as having various tales of occult activity in its past. The town has many prominent families with the Whateleys being one of them. However, as the novella repeatedly points out many of the branches of these families have fallen into decay.

The natives are now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression common in many New England backwaters. They have come to form a race by themselves, with the well-defined mental and physical stigma of degeneracy and

inbreeding. The average of their intelligence is woefully low, whilst their annals reek of overt viciousness and of half-hidden murders, incests, and deeds of almost unnamable violence and perversity... many branches are sunk into the sordid populace so deeply that only their names remain as a key to the origin they disgrace. (Lovecraft 104-105)

The novella concerns itself with one of the “decadent” branches of the Whateley family. Lavinia Whateley who is a “somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of thirty-five” she is also uneducated and heavily implied to be inbred. She lives with her father, Old Whateley “an aged and half-insane father whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth”. One day Lavinia gives birth to a child named Wilbur Whateley who is described as a “dark, goatish-looking infant.” Lavinia is unmarried and whenever asked about Wilbur’s father Old Whateley only responds cryptically.

I dun’t keer what folks think—ef Lavinny’s boy looked like his pa, he wouldn’t look nothin’ye expeck. Ye needn’t think the only folks is the folks hereabaouts... Let me tell ye sunthin’--- *some day yew folk’ll hear a child o’Lavinny’s a-callin’ its father’s name on the top o’ Sentinel Hill !* (Lovecraft 107)

Wilbur begins to grow supernaturally fast resembling a boy of ten at four months old, and the decayed Whateleys perform some sort of ritual twice a year atop a hill with an old stone circle.

Immediately in “The Dunwich Horror,” Lovecraft paints an unflattering image of Dunwich and the Whateleys. Dunwich, much like the Whateleys, has a dark and troubled past and is repeatedly described as a “backwater” town and the “retrogression” or decay of the Whateleys is described as a common occurrence in such backwater towns. The Whateleys themselves are not the only decayed family of Dunwich. The word decayed repeatedly comes to mind for the Whateleys; they are a decay of the white races, having given themselves to occult

and esoteric rituals, inbreeding, mental, and physical decay. They have “disgraced their origins.” In this way, they have forsaken their whiteness and “have come to form a race by themselves.” The Whateleys are the exact kind of family that eugenicists sought to prevent in the early 1900s; they are the ‘monstrous prodigy’ that Lovecraft feared white Americans would become in “Providence 2000 A.D..” Old Whateley’s speech is heavily accented making it difficult at times to understand him; further cementing his alienation from whiteness. Lavinia’s disfigured appearance and lack of mental faculties also serve to illustrate the decay of the Whateley family as does Wilbur’s strange appearance. While Wilbur Whateley’s appearance is the result of supernatural influences, with Wilbur taking after his “pa”, it also hints at the Whateley’s forsaking of whiteness. The distinction between poor, rural whites between middle- and upper-class white has deep roots in American history. “The Dunwich Horror” cements this divide between the Whateleys and proper white society.

As “The Dunwich Horror” proceeds Wilbur continues to grow at a rapid rate. Wilbur develops an obsession with stay bundles and is paranoid about being seen nude. Old Whateley becomes sick and on his deathbed tells Wilbur to continue renovations of the house and make room for “that” thing that lives on the second floor. Wilbur studies all manner of occult books and rituals, even getting in contact with various libraries in search of various esoteric tomes. Lavinia mysteriously vanishes and Wilbur relocates to the shed after demolishing the remaining interior walls of the house. Wilbur eventually finds a copy of the Necronomicon at the Miskatonic University in the city of Arkham, the English version left to him by his father being incomplete. As Wilbur studies the ancient tome the librarian, one Dr. Henry Armitage can quickly read a passage of the book

The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but *between* them, they walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. *Yog-Sothoth* knows the gate. *Yog-Sothoth* is the gate... Great Cthulhu is Their cousin, yet can he spy Them only dimly. *Ia! Shub-Niggurath!* (Lovecraft 115, *The Dunwich Horror*).

Wilbur asks Dr. Armitage if he can borrow the book to which Armitage refuses.

Wilbur by this point of the novella becomes a more malevolent force. His appearance continues to be a point of disgust for many people however most simply write it off as inbreeding. Wilbur is described as something of a scholar in the novella, tirelessly researching ancient text however his speech and appearance still others him. The novella also introduces Henry Armitage, Armitage like Professor Angell is a scholarly white man who stands in contrast to Wilbur. While Wilbur and his branch of the Whateleys have forsaken whiteness and brought Dunwich into a state of decay, Armitage is a heroic figure of white society from the undecayed city of Arkham. It is Armitage who with his wit and knowledge prevents Wilbur from procuring a copy of the Necronomicon. The library of the Miskatonic University serves as a bastion of knowledge and a prison of arcane lore with Armitage serving as a guardian and warden of knowledge. The information found in the Miskatonic Library also reveals the nature of Yog-Sothoth and his connection to the wider Lovecraftian pantheon of Great Old Ones. Like Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth also represents a primal force that has existed before humanity and will exist long afterward. This creates a connection between the Whateley family and the Cthulhu Cult from “The Call of Cthulhu.”

Wilbur continues, in vain, to find a complete copy of the Necronomicon, eventually, he attempts to break into Miskatonic University where is attacked and mauled to death by a

watchdog. Dr. Armitage arrives at the scene with two other professors, Professor Rice, and Professor Morgan. There they find the dying Wilbur Whateley who has been stripped by the dog. It is here that the full monstrous appearance of Wilbur Whateley is revealed. His head and hands appear human but his torso is green and scaly, his legs are covered in coarse black fur, with an aberrant eye on his hip and tentacle-like appendages spring from his waist, and a tail with a mouth at the end coming from his spine. As the professors seek others Wilbur begins to dissolve into a viscous, black ionic. The professors concluded that Wilbur Whateley took more after his other-worldly father. A few days after the incident at the Miskatonic University the Whateley house is destroyed by the monster the Whateleys kept in their household. The monster is invisible and runs amok, destroying property and eating people in Dunwich leaving the locals scared and confused. Armitage, Rice, and Morgan hear about the incident and travel to Dunwich to attempt to fight the monster. The three professors and the villagers of Dunwich find the monster, the villagers find themselves too afraid to confront the monster so the three professors confront the horror atop Sentinel Hill with the stone circle. Armitage performs an incantation he has prepared and the horror is banished. After the horror is banished, Armitage explains to the townsfolk of Dunwich that the monster was both “real” and “unreal” so it technically couldn’t exist in three-dimensional space, the spell corrected reality. A Dunwich man who briefly saw the horror begins to describe the monster as an amorphous blob with tentacles sprouting from it. According to the Dunwich man, the horror also had a face that resembled Old Whateley’s.

that face with the red eyes and crinkly albino hair, and no chin, like the Whateley’s...they was a half-shaped man’s face on top of it, and it looked like Wizard Whateley’s, only it was yards and yards across (Lovecraft 138)

It is here that Armitage concludes that Wilbur did not summon the horror but it was his twin brother, but the horror took more after Yog-Sothoth.

Due to Wilbur's death, the decay of the Whateleys is released on Dunwich like a blight upon the land. The Whateley's decadence and evil is released on the poor, rural community, a blight the community arguably brought onto itself according to Lovecraft, for it was the communities' involvement with pagan activities centuries before that started the plague. It is telling then that the community is unable to defend itself and must rely instead on the scholarly men of the Miskatonic University. Earlier the Miskatonic University was compared to a prison but it is also a sanctuary protected by knowledge and privilege. It is at Miskatonic University that Wilbur is killed for invading a space he did not belong, now the professors of Miskatonic must save Dunwich from the horror the Whateleys have brought upon it. Miskatonic protects whiteness and the sanctity of white spaces. It also invaded other spaces that it believes it holds claim to. The people of Dunwich cannot protect themselves because although they are white, they are not the "superior" whites; this is the divide between the "backwaters" of Dunwich and the pristine of Arkham and the Miskatonic University. The horror itself is a product of the decadence of Whateleys; his human feature shares the inbred qualities of his human kin. The decadence of Dunwich and the Whateleys threatens the society of Arkham and all of humanity. It is a decay that threatens to spread if Yog-Sothoth is released; if that gate is open. The Whateleys are the "monstrous prodigy" that Lovecraft fears. That in the face of outside invaders, whether from the far reaches of another existence or from across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the white race will wither, decay, go "far along that path of retrogression," and betray their origins. That is the real horror of Dunwich.

Chapter 6:

One Drop of Fishman is a Fishman

“The Shadow over Innsmouth” was written in 1931 but was published in 1936. The novella is something of a formula break for Lovecraft since the protagonist and narrator of the story, Robert Olmstead, is involved directly with the events of the novella unlike Francis in “The Call of Cthulhu” or “The Dunwich Horror” which was told with a third-person omniscient narrator. Robert Olmstead reveals to an unseen person that in the year 1927 he was taking a tour of New England as a rite of passage but trying to do so as frugally as possible. On his way to Arkham, Massachusetts he learns about a cheap bus that will take him to Arkham but unfortunately, the bus stops over in the seaside town of Innsmouth. An attendant at the bus station reveals that Innsmouth used to be a great place but after a plague swept through the town in the late 1800s Innsmouth has fallen to ruins. He says that the people of Innsmouth are much reviled around, he chalks it up to race prejudice but states he gets it because he’s prejudiced against the Innsmouth citizens as well.

But the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice—and I don’t say I’m blaming those that hold it. I hate those Innsmouth folks myself...what a lot our New England ships used to have to do with queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else, and what queer kinds of people they sometimes brought back with’ em. You’ve probably heard about the Salem man that came home with a Chinese wife, and maybe you know there’s still a bunch of Fiji Islanders somewhere around Cape Cod.
(Lovecraft 348)

The bus station attendant also reveals that a sailor named Obed Marsh was responsible for what little wealth the city has and his grandson nicknamed “Old Man Marsh” runs the town’s mill. He also implies Obed had a foreign wife. A local museum attendant also reveals the claims of devil-worship in Innsmouth are not completely unfounded since the town has renounced the Christian God and now worships a pagan deity known as Dagon. Olmstead takes the bus and arrives at Innsmouth where he finds it to be just as decayed and miserable as was described to him. He also notes how most of the citizens have a strange look about them, hunched over, with bulging eyes, with balding heads.

Much like Dunwich, Innsmouth is a small town in rural Massachusetts that has decayed and given itself to esoteric rituals, unlike Dunwich however Innsmouth’s decay comes not from inbreeding but instead from miscegenation. The bus station attendant’s comments about “queer influences” brings to mind the controversies of race-mixing. Miscegenation is a complicated topic in American history having been made soundly illegal in almost every state. The official policy of the US government was that one-drop of non-white blood made someone non-white. As defined by the African American Registry, a comprehensive online database on African-American history.

The one-drop rule once an American spoken phrase morphed into a legal term used to separate white citizens from all others. It holds that a person with any trace of Black African ancestry (however small or invisible) cannot be considered white. Beginning with the Middle Passage and during the centuries of American slavery, people had interracial relationships, both forced and voluntary. In the Colonial years, free people of mixed race (free people of color) were considered legally white if individuals had less

than one-eighth or one-quarter African ancestry (depending on the state). Many mixed-race people were absorbed into the majority culture based simply on appearance, associations and carrying out community responsibilities. (African American Registry)

The child of an African American and a white American is an African American child; its mixed heritage used to be disregarded in American law. It is this “queer influence” that has damned Innsmouth and made its citizens into inhuman monsters. The citizens' disfigurement is a result of their mixed-race heritage, they are abominations in the same way that America used to view mixed-race couples and children. The paranoia and hatred surrounding Innsmouth is the paranoia and hatred of miscegenation and the invasion upon whiteness. In the minds of many Americans, the end of the white race came through race-mixing.

Robert Olmsted eventually learns the truth about Innsmouth from Zardok Allen; an elderly man who has lived in Innsmouth his whole life. Many years ago, Obed Marsh came upon an island in the Pacific where the islanders were given gold and jewelry by fish people from the sea, in exchange the islanders would provide the fish people with human sacrifices and would mate with the fish people. The offspring of human and fish people's relations start out looking human but as they grow older would begin to take on fish-like qualities until eventually, they become full-fish people. Obed established trade with the Islanders however one day he finds that the island has been destroyed by other tribes of islanders who wanted to put a stop to the fish people mating. Obed uses an artifact given to him by the islanders and summons a group of fishmen to Innsmouth and renounces the Christian God in favor of Dagon. Obed tries to get the citizens of Innsmouth to go along with a similar deal to the ones the islanders had with the fish people but they reject it and arrest Obed. Later on, the fish people rise from the ocean and massacre the town forcing the townspeople to make a pact with Dagon, to continue the

sacrifices, and mate with the fish people. Obed's wife was a fish person and thus all his descendants are becoming fish people as well, he had a normal-looking daughter who was educated in Europe but never returned to Innsmouth instead marrying a man from Arkham. Zardok also reveals the fish people are immortal and someday they will rise from the sea, take the land from humanity, and worship the Great Old Ones. Robert Olmstead escapes Innsmouth but learns that he is a descendant of Obed Marsh and is transforming into a fishman himself.

It was then that I began to study the mirror with mounting alarm. The slow ravages of disease are not pleasant to watch, but in my case there was something subtler and more puzzling in the background...Could it be that I was coming to resemble my grandmother and uncle Douglas? (Lovecraft 397).

The novella ends with Olmstead resolving himself to join his family in the sea.

The idea of racial purity is a myth because virtually every American has some mixed blood somewhere in their heritage. In this regard Robert Olmstead realizing he's part Fishman and therefore a Fishman illuminates perhaps unintentionally the fallacy of racial purity. White supremacy is a fantasy by every definition of the word. It is based on a history that did not happen, and scientific facts that have been roundly rejected. Yet some people still cling to that fantasy even today. "The Shadows Over Innsmouth" showcases the paranoia that white supremacy is a fantasy, that the white man is no purer than the very people he seeks to oppress. To believe in purity one must define what is pure, and the purity as established by American white supremacy is impossible and it is often merely an excuse to project power over insecurity and weakness. It is a way to hold onto the belief that one race is inherently better than another. The paranoia is the realization that maybe that is not true.

Chapter 7:

The Seed of Fear Still Grows

The political paranoia that Lovecraft's work embodies did not begin in the 1920s and 1930s. The seeds of his paranoia and prejudices were planted in colonial times and have been growing ever since. What Lovecraft's works: his poems, his novellas, and his short stories, show is the branch of paranoia that was growing in his time. His works give us a chance to view the fears and anxieties that America was experiencing in Lovecraft's time. However, that seed of fear still grows in modern America. At the beginning of his article, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," Hofstadter writes that "American politics has often been an arena for angry minds." (Hofstadter) The arena invokes imagery of conflict and battle. Anger is oftentimes an expression of fear and paranoia. It is not hard to see the paranoid style in modern American rhetoric. As stated previously Trump's campaign was based on an "Us vs Them" political rhetoric in which he positioned the average American citizens against the elites of society. In this speech from 2016 about illegal immigration, he said as much.

The truth is our immigration system is worse than anybody ever realized. But the facts aren't known because the media won't report on them. The politicians won't talk about them and the special interests spend a lot of money trying to cover them up because they are making an absolute fortune... The fundamental problem with the immigration system in our country is that it serves the needs of wealthy donors, political activists and powerful, powerful politicians... Let me tell you who it does not serve. It does not serve you the American people. Doesn't serve you. When politicians talk about immigration reform, they usually mean the following, amnesty, open borders, lower wages.

Immigration reform should mean something else entirely. It should mean improvements to our laws and policies to make life better for American citizens. (Trump)

Trump, when discussing the flaws of the American immigration system, places the blame on the “of wealthy donors, political activists and powerful, powerful politicians.” Trump frames illegal immigration as something that benefits these powerful elites and inconveniences the American citizen. In this speech, Trump uses immigration as a platform to discuss the nation’s internal enemy; the elites who allow Mexican immigrants to cross the border illegally. This is the paranoid style in action in 21st century America; the cults that Lovecraft writes about are not dissimilar to the elites that Trump discusses.

The themes of being usurped are still deeply embedded in far-right extremists. A chant during the Charlottesville Rally, a rally held by white supremacists, was the repeated cry “Jews will not replace us!”. This brings to mind the paranoia Lovecraft presented in “Providence 2000 A.D.” and “Finklestein’s Cross-Way”. The doomsday prophecy of “Providence 2000 A.D.” is still used today; how the paranoid style of the potential renaming of Atwell Avenue in 1912 is still evoked in modern America. It is difficult to read the paranoia presented in this poem and not think about recent controversy revolving around Civil War memorials as well as other landmarks and titles that have been deemed problematic. The cries to tear down these potentially offensive monuments, monuments with troubled histories and dubious intents, are being met with similar rhetoric. How often has the phrase “heritage, not hate” been spoken in the last few years? How often has the slippery slope argument been used? Former President Donald Trump used the argument that since statues of former slave owners were being taken down then other slave owner statues might be taken down. If the left wants to take down statues of Robert E. Lee and remove Andrew Jackson from the twenty-dollar bill then how long before they target George

Washington or Thomas Jefferson. The paranoia of being replaced still rings today in modern political discourse; the fears that are represented in “Providence 2000 A.D.” are still a part of modern American discourse.

While some of Lovecraft’s themes and paranoias are distinctly American and distinctly of his time there is a certain universal appeal to Lovecraftian horror. Imagine a scenario, not unlike Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. You are isolated in a cave, you were born in the cave, raised in the cave, knowing nothing of the world outside the cave. The only reality you know is the shadows projected on the wall. Then, one day, you are shown the true world in all its horrifying glory. You see how vast the world truly is, the totality of reality, you gaze into reality and you come to a startling realization. Your existence is a lie, your experiences are false, and you are insignificant in the scale of everything.

After your eyes are opened to the truth you are shoved back into the cave. You go back to staring at the shadows dancing on the walls, but you know the truth now. You know the shadows are fake and you know that you are an insignificant speck. This realization crushes your mind and drives you insane. The truth did not liberate you, it destroyed you. What is worse is that you discovered in your gazing of the vast reality that there are beings far beyond your comprehension. They are the true rulers of the world, the gods who have existed for eons before you and will exist eons after you. You are an ant to them, a being made of nothing but space dust who will someday be dust again. These old gods do not care and they are beyond what our language could possibly describe. They cannot be killed and even if they die, they are still dreaming, waiting for the time to awaken and destroy all that humanity has built. So, you stare at your shadows, knowing the truth, you can suffer quietly and keep the truth to yourself. You might try to tell the others in the cave about what you have learned but they will not accept it.

Regardless of what you do, the truth is you are nothing but dust. That is the existential dread and fear that Lovecraft's work can inspire. Was Lovecraft a bigot? Yes. However, his work gives us such a unique snapshot of America; with all its fears, paranoia, and anxieties. His work allows scholars and critics to continue to examine these fears, paranoia, and anxieties through the lens of Lovecraft's fiction. His work also established a sub-genre of horror that continues to be made by creators from all walks of life; even those Lovecraft himself would have despised and feared.

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