

Fandom + Piracy — andré carrington, Racquel Gates, Alfred Martin, Rukmini Pande, “Fandom & Race Panel”

March 11, 2021

[MUSIC]

Abigail De Kosnik: Good evening everyone, and welcome to the third event in the Berkeley Center for New Media's Fandom and Piracy miniseries. My name is Abigail De Kosnik, and I'm the director of the Berkeley Center for New Media, which we call BCMN. BCNM is an interdisciplinary research center that studies and shapes media transition and emergence from diverse perspectives. BCNM is committed to promoting technological equity and justice. As such, our free events are inclusive, respectful, and harassment-free spaces. We do not tolerate hate speech or zoom bombing. We will have a safety team for each event to respond to any disruptive or hateful behavior. Attendees who violate any of the community guidelines stated on our Fandom and Piracy website will be removed from the event and maybe disallowed from future BCNM online events. Before joining our events, please read our community agreements and we'll share a link to those in the chat.

We encourage attendees, by the way, to explore native-land.ca to learn about the Native stewards of the land you're joining us from and our first value tonight is to honor the land. We recognize that BCNM is located in the territory of Huichin, the ancestral and unceded lands of Chochenyo speaking Ohlone peoples, specifically, the Confederated Villages of Lisjan. The history of prolific technological development in this region has always depended on this land, and all of our technological infrastructures and activities take place on and in relation to this land. We commit to supporting the sovereignty and ongoing stewardship of this place by Ohlone peoples through building long-term reciprocity and relationship with tribal leaders and organizations. I would also like to honor the Waray peoples of Leyte Island and the Lumad peoples of Mindanao Island in the Philippines, my homeland, and the Tonga peoples of [LOCATION], the place of the rushes, now called Lomita, California, where I grew up, and the Muwekma Ohlone tribe in whose aboriginal homeland I now reside in what is called the city and county of San Francisco. Now I'm going to turn to fandom and piracy.

The Fandom and Piracy miniseries consists of professor Rebecca Wanzo's keynote lecture on fandom two weeks ago, Professor Kavita Philips' keynote lecture on piracy last week, tonight's scholars' panel on fandom and race and next Thursday's scholars' panel on piracy and capitalism. Please register our website at fandomandpiracy.online for the complete schedule, abstracts and bios for all of our speakers, and to register for free for any and all of the Fandom and Piracy events. A trillion thanks to our amazing Fandom and Piracy staff for working so hard behind the scenes and behind the screens to make this series happen. Lara Wolfe, Sofia Hussain, Alicia Moreira, Jacqueline Jiao, our student moderators and our captioners. The Fandom and Piracy miniseries platforms the study of new media phenomena through a queer, feminist, and anti-racist lens. Fandom and piracy are two modes of countercultural computing alternative media distributed creativity and copying culture. I wanted to convene this evening's

speakers who have published some of the most exciting and generative work on fandom and race in recent years not only because race has finally begun to gain prominence in fan spaces, including fan study spaces, thanks to our speakers and other scholars of colors interventions and contributions, but also because I've lived my entire life at the intersection of fandom and race, having grown up in an extremely fan-ish family and culture and having actively participated from childhood in fan-ish friends groups, con-based fandom and internet fandom as a first generation immigrant and woman of color, so because of all of my own personal and scholarly interests, I'm thrilled to hear what tonight's scholars panel will share on the topic of fandom and race.

Our four amazing panelists are Professor Racquel Gates, Professor Alfred Martin, Professor Rukmini Pande and Professor andré carrington. I'm going to introduce our first speaker and then they'll speak for between five and 12 minutes and then I'll announce the second speaker and we'll hear them speak and so on. After we've heard from all four panelists, we'll invite a quick response from our fabulous keynote speaker from a couple of weeks ago, Professor Rebecca Wanzo, and then I'll facilitate a conversation among the panelists and pose some of your questions to them. And so while our panelists give their remarks, please type your questions into the Q&A box at the bottom of your screen. Please feel free to do that throughout the event.

All right, our first brilliant panelist is Professor Racquel Gates. Racquel Gates is Associate Professor of Cinema and Media Studies at the College of Staten Island, CUNY, and her research focuses on Blackness in popular culture. She's interested in the ways that Black fans and Black fandom complicate existing assumptions in film and media studies. She is the author of "Double Negative: The Black Image of Popular Culture," and her work appears in both academic and popular publications such as *The New York Times*, *the root*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Film Quarterly*, *Television and New Media*, as well as other journals and collections. Welcome, Racquel.

Racquel Gates: Hi, Gail, thank you so much for the invitation. It's such an honor to be here as part of this great series of talks and panels and especially with the great panelists that are here tonight. You know, I have known Gail since grad school. We were just chatting sort of right before we started about this road trip that we took to a conference in St. Louis back in 2005 and it was the first conference, like, outside of my grad school that I presented any research at. And there's something about this conference that has me feeling very nostalgic right now thinking about sort of back in the day when Gail and I were road-tripping to St. Louis and part of that is thinking about sort of my own intellectual trajectory and what happens when you go to grad school and you start studying film and media studies and when you start thinking about fandom. And I think that for a lot of scholars of color, at least this was the case with me, my experience with grad school is learning, you know, all of the sort of academic ways within film and media studies to study various texts, but then if you're like me, if you're a Black person, there's this constant check because it doesn't quite line up with your experience in your family, in your communities, of how you engage with film. And part of the idea of, like, you know, the discipline, which is something that Rebecca Wanzo said when she was a guest speaker in my class a

week ago, we are disciplined into ways of thinking. And one of the things that strikes me about fandom and fandom studies and sort of the role of scholars of color within that is to think about ways to sort of undiscipline ourselves or to reincorporate those aspects, those ways of seeing film and media and understanding it from the communities that we're a part of and bringing that into the academy.

And so with that being said, there's a couple of, you know, sort of things I think about in terms of thinking about race and fandom to that point. Most recently I've been thinking a lot about the relationship between fandom and film and media and quality. And what I mean by that is we tend to, in our discourse around film, we talk about quality as if it's this, you know, objective noble thing when really when we say quality, what we mean is well produced. What we mean is a film that had a crew that went to film school and they can afford good equipment and know how to do proper lighting, you know, and all of those things. And so what we tend to read as a "good film " is something that really is just sort of like an economically healthy film, right? That for me is an important point to highlight, because when I think about my own introduction to a film within the context of my family, I think about the logic of what my family saved and what they didn't save. And my dad, for instance, has this library of VHS tapes and now DVDs and Blu-Rays and the VHS tapes were the most interesting for me, because, I mean, I'm sure some people are too young to remember this, but back in the day when there were VCRs and you would record a film, you had these multiple settings you could use, SP, EP, SLP, I might be getting those right, but they recorded different speeds and therefore the quality of the recording is different. And my dad had this internal logic about which things you recorded at which speed. And it wasn't like the films that would have been regarded as "good films" within some kind of, like, academic, you know, basis. They were things that he felt had relevance to Black people and to the Black community.

And it makes me think a lot about something that Al Martin talks about, this idea of Black film and Black cinephile practice as like a civic duty, and that was the logic that governed how he recorded things. It's the type of logic that I think would make sense to a lot of Black people, but that is not captured in any kind of way within academia, right? We don't necessarily have a language for thinking through Black film practice, Black viewing practices, which brings me to another sort of memory I have involving my friend and also fandom scholar, Kristin Warner when she posted on Facebook a number of years ago that she was about to teach a Black cult film class and she was sort of asking people, well, what do you think, when you think about Black cult film, what do you think of and everybody was weighing in and at some point, we realized we were listing, like, every Black film we knew. Part of what was sort of amusing for me about the takeaway from that is how do you understand what makes a film a cult film within a Black landscape when cult film assumes that there's some kind of mainstream accepted film to which cult is always sort of tangential to? But with Black film, all Black film is marginal. It's all marginal to any kind of mainstream Hollywood production. It's always marginal even to sort of, like, independent darlings, right? And so within academia, I find that we lack the language to get at this Black engagement with film and with media.

And sort of pivoting from that point, I'd be very remiss if I didn't bring up the "Coming to America"

sequel that just came out last week because I think it reveals all the ways that these logic, these conventional logics, just break down when we're thinking about Black engagement. And so you have this sequel, this incredibly expensive -- I think \$60 million was the budget? Al Martin sort of joked with me, there's something kind of nice about seeing Black people be able to make a really expensive mess, as "Coming to America", but what does that say? What does it say when you have all these markers of quality and yet if I had to guess, I don't think that that sequel will reverberate within sort of Black popular culture, within Black cultural memory in the same way that the original did. The original, which was not really made I would argue with Black people in mind. The fact that we sort of claimed it and turned it into something that we hold very dear is more about the audience's engagement than whatever the director was trying to do with that film.

So these are some of the thoughts that I've sort of had around in my mind right now, this relationship between Black people, Black audiences, films, discourses of quality, and the ways that academia I think is really trying to catch up, partly through the work of the scholars who are part of this series of talks. Academia is really trying to cap up to capture that because the logics of Black audiences have never been the same ones as white audiences.

The affective response to film, to media, is operating in sort of different turf I would argue partly because Black audiences have also been marginalized from mainstream Hollywood film. We don't view films on the level, I would argue, because films have never been made for us. We're always reading between the lines, always sort of essentially doing these alternative readings of things and turning texts into our own when they weren't created for us. And that's something that I'd like to think through a little bit more hopefully in conversation with the other panelists.

Abigail De Kosnik: Awesome. Thank you so much, Racquel. I find myself, you know, typing notes really quickly and then having to actually do and then I forget. Oh, yeah, I'm actually moderating this thing! Okay, thank you so much. I'm going to introduce our next phenomenal speaker, Professor Alfred L. Martin Jr. Alfred L. Martin Jr. is a Media and Cultural Studies scholar whose work is concerned with the complex interplay between media industry studies and audience/fandom studies as related to media studies, critical Black studies, sexuality and gender studies. He is Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the University of Iowa, the author of the book "The Generic Closet: Black Gayness and the Black-Cast Sitcom," and has published articles in scholarly journals including *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, *Communication*, *Culture and Critique*, *Feminist Media studies*, *Popular Communication*, and *Television and New Media*. He is currently working on a book about Blackness and fandom studies and a co-authored monograph on the documentary "Tongues Untied" under contract with McGill-Queen's University Press. Alfred, take it away.

Alfred Martin: All right, thank you so much for having me and thank you, everyone, for attending. So tonight, I kind of want to sort of talk to sort of in some ways I come at this tonight from, like, the Blackest of Black spaces and that is through Frankie Beverly and Maze and their song "Joy and Pain," and I kind of want to think through my thoughts tonight on fandom around

this idea of joy and pain. And I want to sort of also suggest that I'm talking about pain as not as something that's painful or that is hurtful, but something sort of like taking great pains, sort of an effort to accomplish something.

So in my sort of brief comments tonight, I want to sort of use and talk about Black fandom around this rubric of joy and pain and the sort of pain or the effort to accomplish something is largely captured through what I've elsewhere called a mussy Blackness and I'll talk a little bit about that and then Black joy, I'm actually looking at that. I want to sort of talk about that as a particular kind of analytic that in some ways might get us out of necessarily this sort of mussy Blackness pose, if you will.

So for me, at least, mussy Blackness is really as Racquel kind of talked about, is this idea of the imperative that Black folks see in consuming particularly Black cast content. And so within that, I would argue that two sort of broad things that I want to talk about emerge. And the first is sort of this sort of classed nature that really talks about in some ways the difference between, as Racquel was talking about, quality films or good films or positive representations, so on one hand, we might have something like -- and no disrespect necessarily to Tyler Perry, but we might have Tyler Perry's cinematic output which Touré at one point called "cinematic malt liquor" and then we might have something like *Black Panther* on the other hand which, like, I would argue could be called cinematic malt liquor, but other folks disagree with me and that's okay.

So I'm interested in thinking through then not only this sort of class nature but also this cache and the way that I want to think about cache is that when I've looked at mini Black fandoms, it's really sort of about showing Hollywood or showing some industry that Black audiences are viable. And so this was part of the thrust behind folks wanting to see something like *Black Panther* on its opening weekend. It is also about Black folks wanting to see things like the ballerina Misty Copeland because sort of showing folks like American Ballet Theater or perhaps New York City Ballet or some other ballet company that if they have Black folks, you know, present on the stage, then Black folks will simultaneously spend their money to come and see them. I mean, we'll set aside the fact that there's been Black people in ballet companies before Misty Copeland, but we'll set that aside because apparently she's the first and it's new, so we'll table that for now. And then sort of the converse, the sort of opposite side of that coin that I want to look at and talk about is sort of Black joy and sort of thinking about the things that bring Black folks joy. And in particular, like sometimes it's things that don't even necessarily include us, but there is something about them that sort of makes us glom on to it as a culture.

So I'm interested in sort of the idea of community in the way that social ties through sort of Granovetter's social network theory, how sort of community forms around particular kinds of texts and in this case, I'm specifically talking about what we could call a cult film if we believe that all Black films are not cult films but the whiz. And sort of the way that communities of Black folks of which I am one, my best friends from freshman year of high school, we all sort of come together around our fandom of the whiz and thinking about the way that in these kinds of traditional ways that we talk about fan communities and when we talk about fan communities,

we often are ex-nominating ideas and ideals around race, but thinking about the ways that community might -- or Black community -- might come together around particular kinds of fan objects and are not necessarily interested in the politics of representation and whether or not it is a positive or a negative representation.

And then at the other end of this sort of Black joy is the idea of comfort. And in particular, I'm interested in sort of thinking through, like, what are the things that actually just bring Black folks a sense of comfort and particularly in a hostile world, in an anti-Black world, what are the things that bring us joy? And so I'm interested in sort of looking through comfort as a way to talk about the *Golden Girls* and something that doesn't include Black folks but Black folks sort of glom onto as a thing that at least in my interviews, folks talk about the way that it brings them comfort.

So I'm really sort of interested in our sort of discussions and sort of talking about not only the ways that Black fandoms are or can be rooted in these ideas or ideals around sort of showing Hollywood and making sure that there is Black representation, but also marrying that with an idea of, like, what's the stuff that we just enjoy? And it doesn't have to -- like "coming to America," it doesn't necessarily have to be good. It just has to be something that brings us joy, so I'm going to leave it there for tonight, at least for my remarks.

Abigail De Kosnik: Awesome. Thank you so much, Al. Okay, our next amazing panelist is Professor Rukmini Pande. Rukmini is an Assistant Professor in Literary Studies at O.P. Jindal Global University, India. She is currently part of the editorial board of the *Journal of Fandom Studies* as well as *Mallorn: The Journal of Tolkien Studies*, and has been published in multiple edited collections including the *Wiley Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies* and *The Routledge Handbook of Popular Culture Tourism*. She has also been published in peer review journals such as *Transformative Works and Cultures* and *The Journal for Feminist Studies*. Her monograph, *Squee from The Margins: Race in Fandom*, was published in 2018 by the University of Iowa Press. Her edited collection, *Fandom, Now in Color: A Collection of Voices*, brings together cutting-edge scholarship on race/racism in fandom was published December 2020. Rukmini, please take the stage.

Rukmini Pande: Thank you so much, Gail, and I'd also like to thank the entire team at the Berkeley Center for New Media, especially Sofia Hussain and Lara Wolfe for organizing this great event across time zones. Hello from New Delhi! So it's wonderful, of course, to also share this space with so many excellent scholars and I look forward to hearing and hopefully contributing to a great conversation. To begin with, I'd like to clarify that my comments today will be addressing online media fandom spaces that have grown around primarily Anglophone media texts. These have traditionally been seen as associated with fans from marginalized gender and/or sexual identities and these spaces have also been seen as resistant and subversive primarily because of their production of fan work such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan videos that amongst other things experiment with queer sexualities and other kind of revisions of the text. My research has focused on exploring how operations of race and racism within these communities put pressure on such utopian framings. Pointing to a long history of

marginalization of both characters of color in fandom's beloved media text as well as the marginalization of critical fans who have pointed out these exclusions. I have built, of course, on the work of many other scholars to do so, many of them right here in this room today, including Rebecca Wanzo and andré carrington, to just name a few, so this is quite a fangirl moment for me as well.

And as I think it is perhaps this would be known to most people here that there has been an increased attention to the operations of race and particularly anti-Blackness in fandom spaces in the last year, especially in the wake of the "Black Lives Matter" protests that took place in the U.S. and indeed around the world. There have been varying responses to this increased attention. One strand of which, one strand of this attention has seen cause for hope in the ways in which some fans have come together for socially progressive causes in various ways from raising funds to keep up fans, allegedly, at least, disrupting Trump rallies. Indeed, there is great value in recognizing the different ways in which political participation, education, and consciousness raising can operate in these spaces and especially amongst communities that have a lot of diverse participants. However, in my opinion, it is also important to understand that narratives claiming that the fans will "save us " also ignore the complexity of these spaces where in critical fans of color, especially Black fans, continue to face severe backlash for pointing out the racialization of fandom space and attachments.

While media fandom spaces are quick to acknowledge and indeed condemn racism outside their fandom spaces, there is still a deep resistance to acknowledging its effects on inter-fandom dynamics. I'm thinking of Star Wars here, for instance, and there have now been multiple -- too many -- but multiple flashpoints around race and racism and fan reaction to the newest trilogy of films. The targeting of Kelly Marie Tran was perceived to be a backlash by primarily white male fans and so roundly condemned in media fandom spaces when she spoke about her experiences. However, I will point out that the sustained targeting of John Boyega and he has also talked about this in multiple, you know, interviews and on his Twitter, et cetera, that targeting has either not been engaged with or deflected, because it addresses the activities of fans perceived to occupy more marginalized identities. When the discrepancy in these reactions are pointed out such as by fan commentators and journalists such as [NAME] and Ashley Reese, just to name two off the top of my head, the pushback has been quite severe and sustained. Media fandom spaces indeed explicitly draw on the historical framing as subversive and resistant and diverse to deny any possibility that structural racism might have a part to play in their fandom activities at all.

This backlash is also bringing up realities of the messiness of transnational and transcultural understandings of race and racism, the global operations of anti-Blackness and the rise of militant internationalism in many countries. It is tempting to see media fandom spaces by the fact of their diverse participants as somehow fundamentally oppositional in their politics to such reactionary forces. But I think that is where we come up against the limitations of such theorizations. Indeed, I think it is notable that other fandom spaces that have not been kind of framed as subversive by default such as sports or videogame fandoms, which also I will point

out do have diverse participants, have had a much more open and perhaps reckoning with racism within their communities than has been possible in media fandom.

In my work, *Squee from The Margins*, I talked about the term “fan of color” as an identity label that was deployed by my respondents in interviews. And I pointed out that this term was always unstable and contingent. It was always a hope towards solidarity, not a claiming of it by, you know, any one point of identity. And more and more, I think that it is valuable to underline that instability and push past kind of surface narratives of solidarity. To give an example of outside fandom in my own location, the terrifying rise of [Indian term] in India has deep links to diaspora networks which routinely think-wash propaganda to make it palatable to progressive circles in places like the U.S.A. It is therefore vital to understand that stated solidarities and commitments to anti-racist decolonizing efforts in any community should be open to scrutiny. So to conclude, no, I don't think the fans will “save us,” but building more nuanced and comprehensive understandings of the circulations of power and identities in all fandom communities might help us be better prepared for our contemporary and fraught realities. Thank you.

Abigail De Kosnik: Thank you, Rukmini. Okay, now it's time for our fourth wonderful, brilliant speaker, professor *andré carrington*. *andré* is a scholar of race, gender, and genre in Black and American Cultural Production. He is currently Associate Professor of African American Literature at the University of California Riverside. His first book, “Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction,” interrogates the cultural politics of race and the fantastic genres through studies of science fiction, fan 'zines, comics, film and television and other speculative fiction texts. *andré*, take it away.

***andré carrington*:** Thanks so much. I feel really privileged to be in all of your company today and always, really. So I will read some of what I have prepared to read and recall the rest of it as best as possible. And I'm looking forward to our discussion. I also wanted to say that I am wearing my Oso Oro t-shirt that I got for supporting my friend and comrade, [NAME] on Patreon because he makes comics with queer people of color and that is the thing that is great!

So I really like *The Expanse*. A couple years ago, I was one of thousands of participants in the escape velocity science fiction and steam education conference who got involved in mostly virtual campaigns to #savetheexpanse which played some part in getting the show moved from sci-fi network and renewed for the Amazon streaming platform. I like the show in part because it features incredibly talented compelling characters portrayed by people of color including Dominique Tipper, Shohreh Aghdashloo, Chad Coleman, and Frankie Adams. If you watch the show or look those people up on IMDB right now, you will see why they are so great to look at and just so wonderful in what they bring to a science fiction story in space with really cool science in it.

Recently, I read a thread about *The Expanse* on one of the political blogs that I follow. And in the comments, there was excellent discussion about what the readers loved and unloved about the series, about the performances, about relationships between the novels that form the source

material for the series and about, you know, how well and how poorly the materials adapted for the screen. This is very much, you know, typical science fiction online discourse about media. But in a blog that is otherwise about, like, you know, risk corridors in the American ACA, (Affordable Care Act) subsidies, and what it will mean if Deb Hallen's vote to be confirmed as Interior Secretary is a symbolic gesture or a truly structural intervention that's demanded. So in that same space, the same people have a variety of interests. There's a great deal of back and forth about the politics of the science fiction in the story, about whether a TV show can imagine human futures in space on an appropriate time scale, because you've got to have people who live human life spans playing characters in a live-action series, but you can tell any kind of story you want in fiction that has time scales greater than many human generations. Whether it's outlook on future configurations of political geography are viable and how well or how badly it did portraying an extraterrestrial threat to the human species as the real problem or just a sort of distraction from a shiny object to refocus our attention on the infra-species conflicts that are the proper frame for a story in any genre.

There's also some discussion of the casting including the departure of a cast member who was credibly accused of harmful conduct and rightfully dismissed from the show and a really fascinating topic of how dialogue delivered in the series, including a fictionalized patois, which is a common device in science fiction to signify a future combination and transformation of language that reflects on what we think of racial and linguistic difference in real life, how that came across as, like, reductive or exploitative or realistic and that was one of the things that really stokes my interest and tells you how I look at TV, which is to say I watch TV like a Black person and I'm interested in whether people in the future talk the way that people talk and are imagined to talk in the future the way that we have come to talk through our histories and the meanings of our backgrounds in relation to each other.

All that brings me to this observation about how much fandom is like politics discourse online and really how our vernacular discourse for politics and our imagination of the society we live in and the institutions that govern us in which we participate, how much those things as language communities are like fandom and how much race is an integral factor in determining how those things work. I mean, there are fan-ish tendencies in how we learn about the uptake of political messaging and resistance to it and the fault lines along which, you know, political media organizes itself. There are sociolinguistic and geographic questions that are common to fan conversations and to politics jargon and imagery that circulates in different markets supported by different advertising or translated or subtitled in different languages.

There are also questions about the sociological imagination and the humanistic value of narrative played out in the way that people talk about and the way we see and hear people talking in real and imagined possible futures, right? The way that we imagine people will relate to each other tells us about how we imagine ourselves relating historically and in the futures we desire or want to avert. And even occasionally, you might be like me and feel some kind of way when the term "fan fiction" shows up in political media. In all of these places, I'm really interested in, which is to say I'm curious about and I want to know about the role that Black

power and Black desire play in mobilizing our resources and our judgment. I'm not so much interested in using fandom as an allegory for understanding politics, but as I am wont to do, resisting the tendency to use allegory especially in genre delineated forms to understand social relationships that are actually taking place in the production of cultural narratives in media. And instead pursuing a more complex, a more systematic analysis of how we make culture and how the work of doing culture and making and consuming media are embedded in social structures that really exist.

It may not seem like it, but this comes back, to me, the politics of representation, or at least what I think is commonly spoken about as the politics of representation. You and I probably bristle when you hear that term because it's usually phrased in the negative as a way to discount the extent to which representation matters and visibility matters. I think that those notions are taken as hallmarks of a kind of liberal imagination that has now outlived its usefulness. And I don't want to dispute that. I think that's true. It's not that I don't want or that I don't think fans and audiences, including large numbers of Black people, don't want something other than representation or think that visibility is ultimately inherently good or bad for us. We do want more than those things and we do want those things or alternatives to them that are good for us rather than bad for us. But I also think our desires are not the ultimate determination of what's politically possible and meaningful, so we can communicate about our desires without making that the be all and end all of the power relationships we have to each other.

I think that what I see in political blogs online, in social media, and in fan cultures is a negative emphasis on representation that misunderstands what it means to do representation. I think when people talk about representation in a reductive way, we often misunderstand what's at stake as matters of fact, as whether representation takes place or it doesn't. And I think instead, that because of the way we're situated in society and in media institutions and in different fields of discourse, including our political systems, Black people come to fandom and come to participation in political communication with a vernacular theory of performance. I'm not talking about a mis-application of the notion that people say and do things that are purely performative but rather I think when it comes to the politics of representation, often it sounds like Black people are only talking about representation or saying affirmatively that visibility matters when in fact we are also talking about performance. We are talking about what culture makes happen and what someone's presence and action does in addition to what it means that someone can be in a place and that what they do means something symbolically. The best synopsis for this to me comes from the way that I look at *The Expanse* and the way that I see predominantly white political blog readers looking at *The Expanse*.

Many of us as people of color are more concerned with the representation of people from our backgrounds in popular media. It can be the thing that motivates us to tune in or tune out and likewise also seemingly more concerned with our representation among governing officials in our political system and I think we can be discounted for relying too much on Black faces in high places, which is adorable, because it rhymes, but is I think too reductive a way to comprehend what's going on when people interpret the significance of our participation in majoritational

institutions from minority standpoints. I think instead, what we're looking for and taking exception to, which is something white people don't have to do, is how much representative and representational practices are things we can do and how much people who are members of our communities are also members of the communities that make things happen through means that we understand, sometimes incorrectly, as representation, as speaking on our behalf? I think instead, we should be attuned to something we know from studying fandom, which is that audiences make meaning that viewers are not passive or actively engaged, that consumption isn't just a passive process, but actually that the communities we come from are co-present in the community representatives we send into and that claim to speak on our behalf in places supposedly outside of our communities. I think that Black people as groups and as people concerned with how we are represented or how people who represent us are like us are actually smarter than we're given credit for because we are aware of what it means to do representational work and to have that as an avenue of activity, as a social role that is available to us so that representation is one of the things we do instead of something done for us, without us present.

I hope that that encourages people to rethink how they see us talking about representation sometimes and makes you interested if not provoked, if not compelled, if not turned off to when you see those debates taking place.

Abigail De Kosnik: Excellent. Okay, let's see if Professor Rebecca Wanzo is around. If you are, Rebecca, and you're willing to unmute yourself -- yes! I'll just give you a super quick introduction because I gave you a long introduction a couple weeks ago. Just really quickly, the marvelous Professor Rebecca Wanzo is Professor and Chair of the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. Rebecca, your thoughts on our great panel?

Rebecca Wanzo: Yeah, I mean, I get you want to give comments and it's like, 12 hours in zoom and already, but look, let me just say these few things. Those were brilliant comments and people whose work I know pretty well. There were a couple of questions that I've had in my head as I've been thinking about all of your work for a number of months now as I'm trying to work on my own book of fan studies and I'm trying to move from what you're thinking about now.

So most of us I think are really sort of uninterested or have talked about the problem of positive and negative representation. It's just analytically inadequate, but I am interested in whether or not utopia, like the idea of the utopian or to coin a really ugly idea, like the BIPOC-topian, is something that we still have a deep investment in because one of the consistent threads throughout these conversations is space or place. I was noting in the conversations and what are these spaces and places and the virtual very early in fan studies was an essential aspect of that. Obviously there were lots of in-person fan conventions, but there are things the virtual enabled, right? And so that's one space. It's also viewership as space.

There's the idea that sort of film and television and various other kinds of media produce space

for us, right? And I think that there is still an investment in the building of spaces that we can inhabit, right? As fans, as something that maybe is not fans. andré, those were interesting comments I want to go back and look at more, but the idea -- when you said you do what it means to watch TV as a Black person, but I think one of the things that's really interesting is that we know there's real diversity in what it means to watch as a Black person, even as we do find certain kinds of consistency for some communities, which Al's work has talked about, right? Or also with Racquel's work, there are things not designed for us but that they could still produce the conditions of building community, which was another thread. Community is building a space but utopian space that's no space so it's a space we always know is for us but not for us, so what do we think about media spaces that are for us and not for us?

One thing I was really struck by with the cult film idea that Racquel brought up is the idea that we're always outside of what film is, that we're necessarily cult. But what's so interesting about that is that Black performance is thoroughly not outside, so Black performance is both essential to the history of media, but then we might say the whole Black film, something that's totally identified as Black, may be outside. So what does it mean to think about both of those things existing simultaneously?

Another thought I had is if we are constantly trying to move towards a space that is inevitably impossible to inhabit and can't exist given the thrust of the desire for diversity but homogeneity, right? Is there something in the construction and Rukmini pointed to "fan of color" as something that people might have some kind of ambivalence around or be hailed into. Is there something about fandom that is always evoking Jackie Stewart and just fandom of color reconstructive spectatorship? Is that just so inherent that it's hard to get away from that idea? Right? And that the legacy, the history always informs our consumption and maybe 100 years from now, that won't be the case. But we constantly have resistance to what we understand is progress in terms of various things will come up and remind us of history always being in the present. Like, today, I was just, like, so what? They darkened the face of this actress on *Lovecraft Country*. She's wearing Blackface, did that just happen? And I also think -- but in terms of the question of communities and what people look for, I thought there were some interesting tension. I wonder if Al and Racquel, if you can negotiate this, how we think about pleasure and fandom and why we might embrace things.

So as Racquel knows and everybody who is on my Facebook page, maybe all of these people know, I, like Racquel, is not a fan of *Coming to America*, the second one. But I'm not as clear as Racquel is on the idea that it won't become a Black film like the first one. That is not clear to me. And certainly even though I said that people need to block me if they really liked it because I won't trust their taste anymore, I do believe -- I did see there were a lot of people who had a lot of love and attachment to it. There are certain kinds of things that people look and gesture to. It's, like, lots of beautiful Blackness and people will always be attached to that, right? So, I mean, there is a way in which quality is always outside of a conversation of some kind of Black consumption as something that is beside the point of having esthetic touch stones that there's still a kind of quality which is about aesthetics and Black beauty and the pleasure people might

take in that.

I also want to go back to the thing that Racquel said in the very beginning about disciplines and the sort of -- which is ripping off of something said in her class -- I wonder if what we're saying is there is an undisciplining that we need to do in relation to fan studies. Certainly a want to push away from fan studies but sometimes I also think, and I've heard AI talk about this in terms of the kind of things that people feel that they don't need to address if they're doing race and media studies and actually maybe some of us who do race and fan studies are actually trying to discipline fan studies more and sort of making different demands on them in terms of what kinds of things they have to be knowledgeable about. So that maybe disciplining is also to create, again, a space, a utopian space for us is about disciplining people in a deeply pleasurable, "Yes Mother, may I have some more" kind of disciplining as something we might understand as scholars.

And finally, I'm just going to end with a provocative case study that I'm sure will make many people angry with me, but again in the no place of what we desire. So obviously one of the major fan objects this week has been Meghan Markle and Meghan and Harry. And it is really interesting to think about the attachments to the Black princess narrative and I was thinking about this in relation to *Bridgerton*, which I brought up in my keynote, you know, what does it mean to invest in Black folks in having a space that's inherently just inhospitable and carries the blood of colonialism, right? Like, what does it mean to say we will transform it. Maybe this is reconstitutive spectatorship, maybe that's what it is, but it makes me wonder if there's some version that's not love and theft. Like is there a love and forgiveness in terms of BIPOC-topia? Is there some kind of love and sort of war of position in relation to trying to inhabit spaces that under no circumstances can actually be our own, but the utopian project of fandom is often the fantastic, right? And going to sort of all the sort of reckonings and ways in which andré has thought about how the Black fantastic, which is not necessarily representative always, is not always what people are looking for as fans, right, but also sometimes they do look for it. There's a way in which there's an impossibility of what people were asking for in terms of her being in that space and what kind of progressive sensibility it could offer given that it's the British monarchy and how do we negotiate the inevitable failure but also the complexity of the desire to inhabit, like, that kind of violent normative space? And what does that mean in terms of what it means to be attached to Blackness? So I'll end that there.

Abigail De Kosnik: Great, great, great! Okay, all our panelists, please come in and all our audience, please post your questions in the Q&A box because we are turning towards the conversational part of this event. So we already have some great questions from the audience, and I also feel like Rebecca posed questions in your awesome response too. So I'd like to start with that I love BIPOC-topia and the question of space you brought up which you noticed as a theme through the panelists' speeches. You know, in your keynote lecture, Rebecca, you said some people need the MCU as a space. Some people need *Black Panther* as one space. And then they need *Moonlight* as another space and then they need *Lovecraft Country* as another space, you know. Or the original *Coming to America* as another space, and Malika, one of our

graduate students, said you know, I need all the spaces. I don't want to let go of any of the spaces because I'm a different fan in all the different spaces. So I just want to sort of up-vote this idea of space and place as a theme in all of your thinking about fandom. How do you interpret just thinking through the conversations from the keynote and also what Rebecca just said and what you just shared with us, how do each of you sort of map the idea of space and place onto your work and how you're seeing fandom and race right now? Who would like -- who feels it? Who would like to jump in first? Maybe Racquel because you went first, right? I keep calling on you!

Racquel Gates: God, it's such a big question. I'm sitting here trying to think about it, how do we map space and place onto our work? In terms of being about fandom... I guess I don't know if this is actually going to answer your question, Gail, but I'll try.

Abigail De Kosnik: I would say for sure, the academy is a space that you really flagged strongly in your remarks, you know.

Racquel Gates: I mean, I think yeah, I'm definitely sort of identifying the academy as this place that as I said, like, riffing off of Rebecca, disciplines us, but I think one of the things I've been thinking about a lot in some of my more recent work and stuff that I'm thinking about is also for us as scholars sort of thinking about, like, sentiment and thinking about sort of the role of sentimentality and what I mean is I was struck by what Al said about his work on Black fan of the *Golden Girls* and for me, the *Golden Girls*, that's a show I watched with my parents. Do you know what I mean? That's the show that when I went off to college, because it was my favorite show, my dad recorded a million episodes on VHS tapes and sent them in a care package. So I can't ever actually untether the show from that experience. And I think that one of the things that seems to happen quite often -- it's not an academy bashing session, I don't mean that, but in the academy, we learn that other texts matter for reasons completely disconnected from the things I'm talking about, right? Which is what I think is so great about something like the Black fandom around the *Golden Girls* because it's all completely thinking about the affective relationship, right? Not necessarily talking about, like, well, here were the demographics they were going for and here were the advertisers, although that stuff matters, but normally we within the academy understand audiences and reception, and so I've been trying to think a lot about these other sort of formative structures that lead us into the work that we do but also sort of shape, I think, our engagement with it. I mean, Rebecca, in your response just now, you mentioned the Disney princess, sort of imagining Meghan Markle within this kind of princess landscape. There was just a McSweeney's thing that came out today which was riffing on that. Oprah's tell-all interviews with other princesses, and it's her interviewing Disney princesses with the same dialogue she used in the Meghan Markle interview. But thinking about these spaces that sort of live in our hearts and minds that are actually shaping our approach to things, right? That feels really important to kind of bring to the fore. In the same ways that we talk about methodology, in the same ways that we talk about what sort of theorists are influencing our work.

Alfred Martin: I mean if I could jump in because Racquel was talking about the *Golden Girls*

and that's something that I -- and actually, I'm interested in it because it's actually part of the book I'm currently working on and Black fandom around it, but also what I think is really fascinating about the *Golden Girls* and Black folks' attachment to it is that like Racquel was sort of talking about, I went sort of looking for why industrially the *Golden Girls* might make sense if we're talking about 1985 as a text. And when I looked at it, it's like, for the first four years that it's on the air, it's paired with all these Black-ass TV shows, so it's with, like, 227 is legit like our show. I feel like white folks are, 227, what are you talking about? 227, amen. It's paired around there. And then it also has these sort of perhaps crossover shows like *Facts of Life* or *Give Me A Break* that are with it, but I would actually argue that even in sort of its disengagement or its broad disengagement with an ongoing sort of Blackness, it sort of -- if we're talking about place, its place in the network lineup was positioned in a Black space. And as an aside, for the first four years of the show, one of the writers was actually a Black woman who -- in my interviews, a lot of Black folks were, like, oh, my god, I really sort of relate to Dorothy and she was the one primarily writing for Dorothy in the show. So there's sort of a way in which this sort of Blackness, this Blackness sort of comes through and in some ways sort of provides us with a space and a place and a way into the show.

And so similarly, I would argue that part of what at least I've observed around things like *Black Panther*, things like Misty Copeland and I'm going to sort of zero in on Misty Copeland in particular because what so many people who talk about being fans of hers say is that what's important about her is that she has carved out a space in American Ballet Theater -- a space that they understand as being inhospitable to Black bodies although they have had a number of Latinx bodies in it, in that company. But because she's sort of pushing her way into this space, that's part of what becomes important to her and it is specifically important that she has taken her talents there versus to Dance Theater of Harlem, an all-Black org or at least it used to be an all-Black ballet company or mostly Black ballet company or to the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater which is known for having a majority of Black dancers if not just simply dancers of color. So there's these sort of two in some ways these two registers that I would sort of suggest is partly about sort of -- like, there's still sort of a kind of proving-ness that underscores at least the fandoms that I'm looking at, sort of proving that we are good enough or we are here enough that we should have more of these things because, of course, the media industries have a history of forgetting. So the next time, like, you know, oh, and I guess I ran out of juice on my lights, so we'll have to deal, but, you know, when the next sort of *Black Panther* movie comes around, the industry will all over again act like there's never been a Black blockbuster and all of our hopes and dreams will then once again be pinned on this next sort of blockbuster film. And it's actually fruitful, quite frankly, for the media industries, because they can activate Black consumerism by being, like, listen, if you all don't show up for this, you all ain't going to get no more and a Pavlovian response, like, Black folks, show up, because they're like "Lord Jesus we cannot have another *Black Panther* so come on, y'all." So that is how I would sort of theorize the idea around space.

Rukmini Pande: If I can perhaps talk a little bit? Since AI was talking about inhospitable spaces, I think that kind of thing for me, because I think in my negotiations, and what I look at,

the kind of media fandom spaces I look at, I think the conception of space and who belongs in those spaces and who doesn't belong in those spaces is currently quite fraught. It's always been fraught, but currently there is a real I think anxiety around the ways in which belonging is being framed and is being deployed against certain types of fans. And so the way that you -- on the surface, of course, you always have super inclusive, super queer, super diverse, transcultural, transnational, we love Sam Wilson, you know, we love Finn, all of those things. And that, of course, also I think is the way that a lot of narratives around fandom also -- of that kind of fandom also frame it.

And I think that more and more, the precarity of that and the instability of that is getting to at least to me, more and more obvious and I think that is, for me, the most productive space to think about because you can be seen as not a fan or not a real fan very, very, very quickly. And that I think people who are, you know, more critical of certain types of let's say institutional or structural issues within those spaces can find themselves disqualified very, very quickly from the very spaces that they have histories in. And that is something that again I think ties back to a lot of you know what is our space then? And what is -- if I have been in fandom from when I was 18, you know, and I can show you the receipts, all the kind of proofs that I was in a fandom, but I'm now no longer seen to be a real fan, right, because of the way that certain critical narratives work, you know, that is something that is happening more and more obviously. So I think that ties in again to how these spaces are constructed and made exclusionary and how that cycle keeps going and is in these virtual spaces as they kind of converge and diverge I think at the same time. Those things -- that terrain keeps shifting.

Abigail De Kosnik: andré, do you have thoughts about space and place? The expanse is a spatial name. A lot of science and speculative fiction takes place in radically imagined spaces. So--

andré carrington: Yeah, I actually find the idea of like, say a BIPOC-topia, it's sort of like transgressively very seductive because I think that utopia has to be that, right? It has to be no place, right? And it has to, you know, even when we project our desires on to what we would like a fan-ish space to encourage and celebrate, we can project that on to the properties that we take an interest in and into the relationships we form and the relationships we avoid. And I think that it is kind of -- it's fruitful to want a space that is welcoming to us because of our racial backgrounds and investments as like a motivation for having it. Like, that's valuable.

And I also think that spaces, virtual and actual, are just important because they in some ways they can help us get away from the abstraction that can be the source of alienation both from popular culture, from wanting to make it or wanting to be invested in it, and from relationships that might flourish with people but for the alienating stuff that comes from an abstracted outlook. By that, I mean, you know, if you look into the future and say, oh, well, race doesn't matter in the expanse or race doesn't matter in post-scarcity *Star Trek*, so I don't have to speak to you like a human being or comprehend where your national background or your citizenship status situates you in relation to this property or how you're dressed in your cosplay or whether you wear a

headscarf or not. There are all kinds of things that are actually real, but if you view what is valuable and utopian from such a place of abstraction that it just reinforces all the other things you never have to think about in a white supremacist society, that's terribly alienating. So if we encourage and dream of, like, you know, this is a ship that is piloted entirely by people from the African part of the federation on earth or this is a colony of federation people who don't call themselves a colony because they're descendants of Indigenous peoples from the Americas, like, any of those imagined horizons on which we can see ourselves can be really fruitful and is worth seeking out. In part because we know that if we don't consciously put a little desire for a dreaded racially specific sort of utopian space out there that it's not just going to happen. And I'm down for that. I'm pretty inveterately committed to utopianism in a non-pejorative sense.

Abigail De Kosnik: That's so great. I mean, I have to say, not to give Roddenberry too much credit, but I saw the last NASA panel around the moon base, which is imminent, and I thought this is *Star Trek* made real in all of Roddenberry's imagining, the neoliberal idea of Black excellence and women STEM experts taking front and center in that announcement and throughout that whole panel which William Shatner moderated. This was paneled at the last ComiCon because it had to be all online last year and free. So in a way, *Star Trek* unlocked the key of what can be or should be a kind of post-racial tech space exploration program. And NASA is faithful to that map. And so you're saying, you know, we should create more maps and more ideas and spaces that the future will feel compelled to be faithful to. Which I think is really -- yeah, I mean, that is the dream of speculative fiction for sure.

Okay, we have some great questions. Let's take a look at these questions around COVID-19 and this year, which Rukmini helpfully framed as the brain broken year or month or day, whatever however you want to take the register of time, all our brains are soft and weak in this time. But thank you all for being geniuses and being here and sharing what you still have with your intellectual power with us. So we have a couple questions I'm going to combine about this. How have you seen your fandom communities, those you are a part of, change or evolve over the past year? One person asks, and another person asks, with COVID-19 having affected all of us and further substantiated fandom into online or ephemeral spaces, is there a way to think about how media today might require more undisciplining to take up Racquel's term, especially with the growth in streaming services? So this has been a very media-heavy year, a year when all fandom took place just about in the virtual spaces. How has this year affected either your fan-ish participation or the way you think about it?

andré carrington: This is an indicator of how, speaking of disciplines, like my ability to periodize is a casualty of pandemic time. But when *Avatar: The Last Airbender* came on Netflix, I think it just provided this way to kind of revisit the different levels of engagement we have with certain narratives and what they mean in relation to, like, how they're made available and how widely available they are, right? Because they become things that more and more people can know about but not look at, you know. You can know about something and have its profile raised and know that it's out there but not really care to invest in it or you can have lots of people take the opportunity to get newly invested in stuff. I kind of love and treasure how the critical discourse of

race bending came from *Avatar* and the horror of the live-action adaptation before *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Legend of Korra* were quite as widely available as they are now, and to me, that's really great because it provides this opportunity to think about how a lot of fans laid the groundwork for the reception of this in a way that they let us know there was something to be learned from it before many, many people would see it and look to it for what they might learn. So it's a cool thing that happened that I was really excited to be able to re-watch stuff that I liked.

Rebecca Wanzo: I'm always interested in when we move away from the exceptionallization of fans and think about how broader parts of the culture sort of learn fan practices, and one of the things that obviously lots of people talked about this year was rewatching and to Al's point about comfort, right? So many people said we can't watch anything new, so I don't know how many more times I could watch Joe Morton, like, saying she blinded me with science and *Eureka*, but I rewatched *Eureka* multiple times because it was my big comfort watch this year. So there is something about pleasure and the rewatching and the comfort in a time of crisis that lots of people were adapting. And to think about rewatching as something that's often pathologized in fans, but also we know can be very normative. And so how we can think in this broader discourse of sort of trying to understand what rewatching is about and how this year could help us think in different and bigger ways about that practice.

Alfred Martin: Yes, and, I mean, these sort of questions that Rebecca brings up are part of the reason that I was even interested in looking at the *Golden Girls*. So on one hand, we were in an alleged, like, cancel moment in which mini texts were coming under fire for their alleged, you know, racial issues. And I was partly sort of struck by the sort of sheer humanity of the charge for the *Golden Girls* and then simultaneously I was interested in -- because in some ways, the way that the *Golden Girls* is discussed in popular sort of discourse or at least the way that I feel it's discussed in popular discourse is that it is -- it was at once in some ways a text for, like, white ladies and ended up being the thing that puts lifetime television for women on the map and then simultaneously that gay men sort of glommed on to the text and glommed on to the text to be sure in its initial iteration. I've heard tales of gay men going to, like, bars in the 1980s on Saturday night and sh*t shuts down when the *Golden Girls* come on and we watch and then there's commercials and then there's music and then it comes back, the music stops, everybody watches. But there was -- I mean, as with most things, people don't ever talk about Black folks and the things that we find joy in.

And so I was partially sort of struck by sort of watching the twitterverse and Black folks talking about the *Golden Girls* and on a lark, I was, like, do Black people love *Golden Girls*? I'd like to talk to people. Then I got a flood of Black folks who wanted to talk about, in some ways come out of the closet, as *Golden Girls* fans, and when I sort of engaged with these fans, I found that people's spouses had gotten them -- had had artists draw them into the *Golden Girls* image. Another woman sent me a picture of a Sophia purse that she had. And so there's a way that these sort of fan-ish practices and what we sort of associate with fan-ish practices were here all along if we just f*cking looked for it.

And I was simultaneously also like, we often try to sort of claim a kind of objectivity, but in some ways, I was partly trying to figure out am I -- do I just love *Golden Girls* because I'm gay? Or where are the Black people? And then particularly Black women, because Black women are just f*cking amazing and they're always saving our asses from everything, but Black women showed up and they were, like, yes, we love the *Golden Girls* and many of them were like, I grew up watching it with my nana and so after I was watching it with my nana, I didn't know why it was funny, but I kept watching until I understand why it was funny.

And so I was really interested in things that in some ways Black folks weren't sort of doing work in their fan-ish practices in the ways that they were sort of, like, you know, like the people who I've interviewed who are fans of Misty Copeland, they don't know sh*t about ballet, because they're just going because it's a Black lady onstage who quite frankly is often times falling down, but we can save that for later. But they're just going for these ideas and ideals around this ability. So I was interested in what happens when you're just watching something because you like it?

And so the pandemic in some ways has had me turn to joy, because there's so much -- there's just so much sh*t in the world and so much anti-Blackness in the world that I'm just like what's something that isn't going to make me feel like garbage because I've got to excavate through it? And what can I actually sort of think of that is joyful? That I can also turn into research.

Racquel Gates: I wanted to also respond to that question and to maybe complicate it a little bit, because I'm really struck by this question of, like, you know, how has the pandemic changed your relationship with fan communities? Well, I haven't watched anything because my kids were home for, like, ten months. They just went back to school a month ago. And I say that because I think that whether we're talking about media studies as a discipline, if we're talking about fan communities, there's this idea that the text is the thing, the text trumps all; your primary identity is your relationship to the text and to other people who watch the text as opposed to also thinking about, like, what happens -- and I think about this with streaming, as I just said I don't even know what for Paramount+, because *The Real World* reunion is on there, so they can charge me whatever, I'm going to buy it, right? What happens when the price of admission keeps going up when the ability for people -- and so I'm thinking about resources of time which I didn't have for the past year to watch anything except *Cinderella* and *Dumbo* on a loop all the time. But resources of money, resources of access, like, who is able to now access these sites? And so I think we tend to talk about, for instance, streaming and all these multiple platforms only in terms of it's a boom of accessibility and not necessarily thinking about who gets excluded from those things as well. Like what do you do with -- I'm thinking about what AI just said about the *Golden Girls*, but what happens to older viewers, for instance, who don't have smart TVs or are still working with whatever TV they've had since 1998 or something like that? What happens when you have folks who don't have wi-fi at home? What happens there, right? And so I'm also thinking about not just this sort of proliferation of choices and this proliferation of options, but who keeps getting left out and dropped every single turn such that fandoms and fan

communities might very well, you know, start looking much more narrow. And to the extent that you might not be able to have the lovely discovery that AI has made with, like, the Black fans of the *Golden Girls*, because what happens when certain demographics get Xed out of it, which is a thing I'm rather concerned about.

Rukmini Pande: Yeah, I think my comments would follow Racquel's. I think one of the things that I've been thinking about for a while from my book on worlds has been the possibility of escapism and this constant thread in fandom spaces about escapism and about that's why people don't want to think about race or quote unquote, problematic ideas. And also the people that I see and the people that I talk to, I also see the impossibility of that in that again how far do you -- how much can you have in that space of escapism? Is it within -- and I'm not saying that, of course, people do find various ways of accessing that space of joy, but I think that is also something that is still quite precarious and questions of access are huge. Not just in terms of the streaming services. I know that I am completely cut off from large parts of the people that are watching on Disney+, for instance, you know, or there's a whole bunch of shows that I would have to kind of get access to now three, four, five more different streaming platforms, which again has different connotations of access across different geographical regions, currencies, and all of those things. So I think that is in my fandom spaces, I've seen people look for escapism as obviously it's a thread, but again, it's so conditional. And once again, the ways in which you interact with those texts, even if you are watching to love them, is I think also constantly -- I keep coming back to precarious, but that's I think what has defined a lot of my fandom experiences and my thoughts on how fandoms are working through these issues, through this past year.

Abigail De Kosnik: Mm-hmm. Okay, great. Let's go to Samira's question which is a bit of a long question. You all can also read it; the panelists can read it in the Q&A box. There is also the larger question of conditional representation where if you don't show up for a show or film, it might be taken away. There's less willingness to look at violence even in these media franchises and artifacts, for example *Sense8* and *Hindus Under Attack*, which plays into contemporary and historical Hindutva, which I might need someone to explain that to me. Holding this as good representation because it represents underrepresented populations on the one hand also leads the way these things are normalized and mobilized in the world towards what is, well, basically, facism in spaces it is claiming to represent or draw to people's attention. How do we reckon with these conceptions of representation that are not merely about the provision of joy but about the mobilizing of that joy towards a deliberate violence? And Sofia, one of our staff members, actually private messaged me saying that she really was interested in this question, so Sofia, if you want to jump in and talk a little bit about what's so interesting about this question, that would be great or if any of the panelists want to have a thought and would like to respond? That would be great too. Sofia, do you want to jump in?

Sofia Hussain: Sure, yeah. I don't know a ton about the media in India, but I do know that Hindutva is a powerful cultural force in the United States, and so I related a lot to what you're saying about how the diaspora here is also very involved in that. And yeah, it's just had me

rethinking a lot of sort of popular entertainment that I consume as being basically fascist or too close to being fascist, and in some ways I have to rethink some of my fandoms. It's not enough to just be a fan of Bollywood. Yeah, so these things are complicated, so I was interested in just asking more about, like, Hindu folk in India.

Abigail De Kosnik: Kavita Philip is also here and interested in this question, so Kavita, if you have anything to say about it, that's great. I also see that Rukmini is unmuted yourself, so feel free to jump in too.

Rukmini Pande: Well, I guess I'm a resident, not an expert, but a witness to the operations of Hindutva and its currently quite terrifying forms. I think that Samira, of course, I know Samira as well, I think this is a very complex question, right? Because obviously we've been talking about how different texts -- I mean, texts will always function differently for different viewers and different sets of fans, but I think beyond that, there is the question of, you know, when these texts mobilize certain narratives that basically pink-wash or if we can call it pink-washing, we can call it homonationalism, we can call it multiple things, but for the reference to *Sense8* is basically that, that *Sense8* within its larger kind of queer imagining also had this incredibly dangerous narrative of the majoritarian culture of India, which is in Hindutva; The whole narrative was about how it was under threat, which is a part of a fascist project that is currently putting, you know, people like academics in jail. And if you did talk about that, because it was framed in a more kind of liberating text, and if you didn't have that experience, you could talk about it in kind of like this is great, which is what most of that text was received as in fan communities.

And so I think the stakes of those conversations vary greatly, and I think that is -- I think Rebecca said the impossibility of that reconciliation is true, but it's also I think beyond kind of yes, this is a text that speaks to me and so this is a valuable text. The questions of larger like how power intersects with actual political, you know, repercussions across and now in our very globalized world where these media flows are constantly in conversation with so many different things. I think that's something that is going to continue to pose real questions and problems. So that's my response. Not an answer, I suppose, but a response.

Abigail De Kosnik: Yeah, this is a larger question of fascist propaganda embedded within beloved text that I think reaches way, way back in Hollywood and many other countries' national film traditions. I think about so many -- I mean, *Top Gun* or any Michael Bay film or any of the ways the American military is just de facto valorized as a site of awesome masculine accomplishment and agency you know, and many people love those movies. Often in a -- I mean, yeah, popular culture is there to be resistantly read also, so we can't assume everyone who loves those movies is automatically buying into the fascist undertones, but nevertheless, yeah, this is a problem. Does anybody else want to jump in on this?

Rebecca Wanzo: Go ahead.

andré carrington: Yeah, I was just going to think about if there is historical perspective for us to

bring to bear from Blaxploitation because it's so much of a moment in discourse that depends on, is produced by fandom that we don't necessarily think of it as generative or part of genealogies of fandom. But because it really is about seizing on demand and mobilizing obviously actors and musicians and audiences in such exploitative ways, it does a lot of the things in more spectacular ways that I think we can today get upset about and know how to recognize on a much smaller scale, right? So that if the representation we're attentive to only pays lip service to the concerns it's trying to place before the audience, that can be cheap or it can be exploitative or it can be baiting representation, but you got nothing on Blaxploitation.

At the same time, of course, Black people are smart and not dumb, so what I think is important to recognizing that is not so much, oh, but it did a lot of good for a lot of people in terms of launching their careers, but also that the nature of the exploitation that it made possible on the interpersonal scale was maybe -- was verifiably or falsefiably more intense in the lives of the people who went through it, right, so the actors who did the roles and the musicians and the crew could have been much more super exploited under that system than they are in a similar production today. Those are the measurable things.

But the less measurable things that we need to I think recuperate this sometimes exploitive dynamic with fandom into our genealogy to understand is that the Black audience takes part in Blaxploitation on the level of aggregate demand and that's not the kind of thing for which your individual subjective judgment about who should or shouldn't go see this movie or what movie they should or shouldn't let their kids see is the most important because it is so individualizing and it's so sort of structured in judgment that can't see the forest or the trees that we then can't learn how aggregate demand evolves over time so that we can think about you know what portion of the Black audience today takes part in seeing films or watching TV shows or buying comics that include offshoots of Black exploitation as a system and include or take part in less exploitative versions of it today.

I feel like that's the level on which we can link that era to this one and it's one that I think requires us to honestly forgive ourselves a bit for taking part in a collective practice that formed an economic reality at one time in order to understand what ethical relationships we can have to the production and consumption of narratives in that tradition today, right? Because I'm, like, we can either not forgive ourselves then and now and nobody has any fun. Or we can forgive ourselves in the past and discipline ourselves in the present if that's what we gotta do. And I feel like that works better than the reverse, because I'm sure we're not -- it's not like we were so right then and we're so wrong now. And I feel like we could take things that way if we don't comprehend how our fandom, our interest, our availability for exploitation can be taken up in different ways.

Alfred Martin: I also wanted to sort of point to the ways that history -- like, history becomes sort of about master narratives in some ways and I first sort of want to sort of center the idea that what we call Blaxploitation films are a set of films that were named such by the NAACP because they didn't conform to a particular politics of visibility. So I want to sort of center that.

At the same time, I also want to center that as a master narrative when we talk about Black film in the 1970's, those are the only films that we want to talk about, but we -- like, we need to pay attention to the fact that there was *Sounder*, there was *Traveling All-Stars*, there was *Lady Sings the Blues*, there were all of these -- *Claudine* and all of these other movies that were sort of also simultaneously drawing the attention of Black moviegoers. So there is a way in which Black folks were seen, presumably, were seeing *Shaft* as a Blaxploitation film. But let's also point to they were also *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, which is not a Blaxploitation film although it is the model upon which the cycle is built. Because *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* is actually an experimental film, and so there's a way that I want to avoid sort of getting into this sort of binaristic kind of thinking about if we see Tyler Perry, you shouldn't see Tyler Perry, you should only see Spike Lee or whatever. I also love that Spike Lee had to show up in his tuxedo to the Tyler Perry studio opening because I'm petty like that, but there's a way that we want to continue to balance these things. And Black folks, like spoiler alert, Black folks are post modern, like we will get in the gutter with Tyler Perry if that's what we think the gutter is and we'll rise up and we'll go and see Misty Copeland if we think that's the rise-up.

And so we have to also sort of recognize the post modernism of Blackness and Black audiences that -- we're not just sort of doing one thing. We're doing a whole bunch of things. And I think that's really important, because I think just studies, period, have this way of saying things like the Black community like it ain't be one of them and we need to be pushing back and be, like, there are Black communities and these Black communities will yuck it up with Tyler Perry and they'll also go see something that's "high art," whatever high art is.

Rebecca Wanzo: I mean, if I could follow up back to the conditional acceptance and Rukmini's discussion, because Rukmini knows I've been really fascinated by this last year, certain kinds of South Asian television, like *Never Have I Ever* and *Indian Matchmaker* and what's going on with those shows and I want some people -- I would love someone to do a collection in thinking about these contemporary representations, but this is a panel about fandom and race, but I'm interested in also what we might recognize as sort of similar and sort of in terms of the logic of white supremacist logic in terms of media or community logic in a group not logic and then things that are different.

And so one of the things I think in thinking about the earlier conversation about facism and nationalism and caste, what are the ways in which caste is totally invisible in some of these shows and how that's serving nationalist discourse and how we read it through. Some of us who are African American might read it through politics respectability which doesn't really get at it, and doesn't get at what these other discourses are and how it can be important in the field to disaggregate and not always compare. And to think about what these differences can tell us about different kinds of logic in various locations. And then various diasporas and how that's operationalizing different kinds of logics around colonialism, postcolonialism, imperialism, and racism and those politics. Like, what are the things that we know when we apply very different specific kinds of racialized sort of histories and logics in terms of different logics and what that

can help us unpack? So I just wanted to put that out there.

Rukmini Pande: Yeah, I think that's very true in the sense that, I mean, of course, there has been a very long history of anti-caste and anti-Black thought. Thinkers have been talking about and connecting these critiques for a really long time and those are -- I mean, that particular viewpoint can be very rich, I feel, in talking about how these texts are being circulated and how the language of representation around them is very different from -- and the way it operates and slots into this white supremacist logic is very different than some of the other films and shows that we've been discussing simply because of the ways in which different communities are positioned and in the ways in which diaspora networks, as you rightly point out, are configured very differently. What gets on to American centric screens in terms of Indian representation is already highly, highly, highly coded and filtered to be upper caste, to be [term], to be Hindutva in a way that is structurally just impossible to not engage with.

And I think that again, the way that audiences and different audiences located in different spaces, you know, we don't have that differentiation anymore. As you said, you were talking about *Indian Matchmaker*, and *Indian Matchmaker* was being aired in India as well, and so you had these whole host of conversations that were happening that needed a really solid critical lens, honestly, to be understood. Because of these layers and layers of power that are, as I said earlier, they're not just kind of informing power relations in terms of individuals or even communities of viewers; they're informing policy; they're informing law; they're informing foreign policy. And so that I think is a really key part of again how these productions and their reception and their fandoms, they're very key to understanding our transnational space, transcultural transnational fandom space. Thank you for that.

Abigail De Koksniik: Okay, let's ask a question from Jasmine. Jasmine Moore says thank you all for amazing talk. I would like to know the panel's take on the social commentary in relation to what used to be marginalized hashtags via Black twitter? For example, I'm concerned with the mainstreaming or trending of #ViShawn, a comedic refashioning of the character Vision from *Wandavision*, as perhaps an exploitation of Black fan cultural processes now that the white mainstream has caught on to Black conversations, including the DemThrones hashtag.

andré carrington: As a frequent Twitter user, when I observe stuff like that happening and then like this most recent one, I love it, because there's -- I think that -- so the theory of it to mobilize, right, is that those instances are illustrations of the way that Black people are undefeated and I think that that understanding prevails because when people employ, and maybe this is just me thinking through, like, what performance means, I think that when people employ a sense that imagery means things but also can be made to do things and exist to, you know, to attest to possibilities other than its conditions of possibility, so oh, my gosh, this problematic film was made under exploitative conditions, but surprise, has yielded up counter-hegemonic conditions that frustrate our attempt to reduce it to the circumstances that put it in place in the first place and mean that it doesn't just reproduce the relations out of which it emerges, but in fact attests to utopian alternatives. When that's what's happening, which I think is happening lots of the time

when people make a meme that really hits or a clever pun that someone else hasn't recognized or God forbid signify on something that is circulating in a dominant discourse, like, that to me is a kind of creativity and a kind of not individual genius but collective investment in doing what we comprehend as intellectual that is also humorous, that is also satisfying on all of these other emotional levels that really speaks to how many different ways there are to interpret imagery that's out there, and how much people take ownership over imagery but also share ownership of it with other people to whom they think it'll be intelligible.

And I think when those things can be captured and noticed by the platforms themselves, when Black women think of things that are suddenly and, like, carry into scavengers appropriated for Internet communication purposes to make them into news or to make them into temperature taking or mined as resources without crediting or acknowledging or citing their authorship. When those things happen like when we see a #gomainstream be noticed as trending, I think that that's just another instance of observation and study, but it is not necessarily in opposition to the creative process that gives us things like that. It's only sometimes in opposition to it. It only sometimes frustrates that creativity, because I think what we see with memes and hashtags that people invent that give us a chuckle is that they are ephemeral and they do endure in the way that performance does where like it's funny and you tell the joke and you can tell the same kind of joke, but if it ossifies to an extent it's no longer funny, it's no longer the same kind of thing. And so then it is not necessarily something that can be used against you or against its original purposes, because it's over. So I think that we can both be mindful that stuff like that can be co-opted or noticed or surveilled while not being worried about it. And certainly without being, like, anxious to avoid notice. Because people are still going to think of, like, funny and unexpected and obvious can't miss it things that are so entertaining. And I don't think that that creativity can be frustrated by the methods of surveillance it's sometimes subject to.

Abigail De Kosnik: Nobody else has any thoughts about Black Twitter today? Racquel?

Racquel Gates: No, I guess I'm trying to -- I'm a little wary of wading too far into waters that I'm not terribly familiar with. I guess I'm just also fascinated by this idea, the idea of co-opting something on Twitter -- like, I'm really interested in sort of tweets and memes as intellectual property. Which I know is not exactly what we're talking about, but it feels like it's related to what we're talking about, right? And this kind of territory that we're in, whereby there's a cache or there's -- I don't know, whatever, like, in retweets and going viral and things like that, but you don't own that, do you know what I mean? There's something interesting about mapping language on to Twitter, right?

I think Twitter is just a weird unique space, but it's interesting to map language on to that that we would use to talk about, I don't know, like a Black artist who recorded a song and then somebody re-recorded it. That's a different type of property and ownership and I'm not saying that to dismiss the work people are doing on Twitter, but the contradiction of doing a thing which is public facing which is meant to be disseminated and also then having the desire which I understand to not have it disseminated beyond boundaries that are largely not policable. Do you

know what I mean? Like Black Twitter -- I know Black Twitter is a thing, that's not what I mean, but Black Twitter isn't a separate part of the Internet, so it's interesting to think you're doing a thing and participating in a practice that is meant to be shared and it feels like the obvious result is that it will get away from you, right?

And I like what André said about not having anxiety about that and that's a different thing. At that point, it's potato salad with raisins, we don't claim it anymore, go on, have it, right? But there's something interesting about trying to think through those logics regarding stuff like on Twitter, on social media.

Rukmini Pande: Just to quickly add one thing would be I think notions of fan label as being used by media industries and I think that people are talking about the way that the kind of operationalization of things like Black Twitter and the kind of the use of those for not just kind of sharing and kind of going in that kind of disorganized space, but the actual use of it by media industries as promotional work and labor is I think an interesting layer to that which, of course, as scholars, fan scholars are talking about in terms of K-pop and fan labor and stuff like that. And I think that might add something to that conversation also.

Abigail De Kosnik: Al or Rebecca? If you want to contribute last thoughts, we're two minutes from done, so anything? Rebecca has been on Zoom for twelve hours. Thank you so much for sharing your last couple zooming hours with us. Al, any last thoughts from you? To close us out? No! [LAUGHTER] Okay. Well, my thoughts are, wow, I have typed a lot of notes. I have, like, twenty pages of notes from this conversation. This was so generative and productive and so rich.

Thank you all tremendously from the bottom of my fan-ish heart for sharing all of your wisdom, ideas, insights, provocations, great questions with us. Thank you to our audience for joining. Thank you again to our staff for platforming this whole thing. Everybody please tune in next Thursday at 5 for our piracy and capitalism scholars panel and wherever you are in the world, please give a round of applause to our amazing panelists. Thank you so much for joining us tonight.

[APPLAUSE]