

THIHA, MYO. M.A. in English. Co-opting Meritocracy: Deconstructing the Role Agency Plays in Dismantling Affirmative Action in Higher Education (2024.)  
Directed by Dr. Risa Applegarth and Dr. Heather Adams. 27 pp.

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, The Supreme Court ruled that Affirmative Action was unconstitutional and a discriminatory practice. Students for Fair Admissions and Justice Clarence Thomas, in his opinion, argued that since the United States is a colorblind society that values objective ways of measuring and recognizing merit, Affirmative Action threatens that perceived meritocracy. The issue with meritocracy and its rhetoric is that it only focuses on a singular type of agency: personal agency. It disregards cultural agency, material agency, and discursive agency. The discursive agency of the word "meritocracy" itself has changed from a word that was used satirically by Michael Young for why a meritocratic society would prove problematic to the way social and economic elites have co-opted the word to maintain their positions while castigating those on the bottom of the social hierarchy as not being talented, hard-working, or intelligent. This emphasis on personal agency as the singular point of reference when it comes to evaluating college admissions erases the social and educational inequalities caused by systemic racism that play a crucial role in the development of students. This paper will examine the role of agency and how concepts like meritocracy are co-opted to promote inequality instead of bridging the gap.

THIHA, MYO. M.A. in English. Understanding Manga: Deconstructing the Global Appeal of Shonen Through Burke's Theory of Identification. (2024.)  
Directed by Dr. Risa Applegarth and Dr. Heather Adams. 27 pp.

Manga sales have skyrocketed since the start of the new decade as Japanese comics are now outselling Western comics in the United States. Why is manga becoming so popular in the West and how is it able to cross cultural boundaries? This paper argues the success of manga, specifically Shonen manga is due to how the form of Shonen as graphic sequential art with abstract imaging and a focus on action creates a space that promotes identification within an audience that is ubiquitous and multicultural. Using Kenneth Burke's theory identification as well as other rhetorical frameworks, this paper will be a rhetorical analysis on Shonen manga to deconstruct its themes, techniques, paneling, and pedagogy.

CO-OPTING MERITORACY TO DISMANTLE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:  
DECONSTRUCTING THE ROLE AGENCY PLAYS IN HIGHER

AND

UNDERSTANDING MANGA: DECONSTRUCTING THE GLOBAL APPEAL  
OF SHONEN THROUGH BURKE'S THEORY OF IDENTIFICATION

by

Myo Thiha

A Thesis  
Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at  
Greensboro in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts

Greensboro  
2024

Approved by

Dr. Heather Adams  
Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Risa Applegarth  
Committee Co-Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Myo Thiha has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Heather Adams

Committee Co-Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Risa Applegarth

04/25/2024

Date Accepted by Committee

© 2024 Myo Thiha

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER II: CONTEXT.....	3
CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS .....	17
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION.....	30
CHAPTER V: INTRODUCTION.....	32
CHAPTER VI: CONTEXT.....	34
CHAPTER VII ANALYSIS.....	41
CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSION .....	57
REFERENCES .....	58

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: OBJECTIFYING POWER IN PRACTICE .....	35
FIGURE 2: PANEL OF SON GOKU .....	41
FIGURE 3: GOJO ON THE VERGE OF VICTORY .....	43
FIGURE 4: GOJO WAKES UP IN THE AFTERLIFE .....	44
FIGURE 5: EDWARD'S PROMISE.....	48
FIGURE 6: NARUTO'S MOTIVATION.....	49
FIGURE 7: NARUTO EARNING RECOGNITION.....	51
FIGURE 8: TITAN ATTACK .....	55

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

On June 23rd, 2023, Affirmative Action was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States in a 6-3 decision, effectively ending race-based admission policies in universities. The case was brought to the Supreme Court by Students for Fair Admissions led by Edward Blum with the case of “Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard” along with the companion case, “Students for Fair Admissions v. North Carolina”. Initially starting in 2013, the case alleged the university’s undergraduate admissions discriminated against Asian Americans until it made its way to the Supreme Court in 2021. The case result was unsurprising as many expected Affirmative Action to be overturned, with the number of conservative Supreme Court justices outnumbering liberal justices 6 to 3. Still, analyzing the rhetoric behind the decision is essential, as affirmative action will not be the last race-based policy to be targeted. How are race-based policies described and framed? What are the agencies of the rhetorical actors who are against it? This paper will explore these issues.

The group that brought the case up to the Supreme Court is a significant rhetorical actor at play, but it is not the focus of this analysis for several reasons. The information on Students for Fair Admissions is minuscule as their website has little information besides their stated purpose for equality. The only well-known public figure of SFFA is their director, Edward Blum, who has had a long history of political activism for right-leaning causes against race-based policies. He has run against voting policies, race-based admissions, and business diversity requirements. As a rhetorical actor, his motivations are easy to deconstruct as it seems he has made it his goal to fight against policies that he feels are anti-meritocratic, which often are synonymous with rights that benefit people of color. Justice Clarence Thomas, a prominent rhetorical actor in the case, argued against Affirmative Action practices because he



viewed the U.S. Constitution as a colorblind document that ignores race. He also argued that with our meritocratic system, objective grading scales are more effective in equalizing accomplishments and merit than race-based admission policies. This paper will engage in rhetorical criticism of Justice Thomas' opinion document and deconstruct his framework of a meritocratic America, as well as examine the paratextual elements of Asian American discrimination as a factor in abolishing affirmative action. This paper will examine Justice Clarence Thomas as a rhetorical actor, his agency trying to dismantle affirmative action, and qualities, such as the inconsistencies of his arguments.

## CHAPTER II: CONTEXT

In examining the rhetoric of SFFA and Justice Clarence Thomas, the principal argument on why affirmative action is discriminatory focuses on personal agency of student applicants. The general premise of a meritocracy is that people's accomplishments stem from their ability and merit. In the case of college admissions, a meritocratic perspective would hold that the accomplishment of being selected for admission is a result of an applicant's merits such as those who subscribe to a philosophy of meritocracy believe college admissions should function this way in that the admissions process should only factor in objective ways of measuring which students are admitted based solely on their GPA, standardized test scores, and extracurricular activities colleges examine that contradict the notion of objectiveness. How are extracurricular activities measured in an objective way? Are certain volunteering activities considered more altruistic than others or are there certain sports that are valued as superior?

The key argument against Affirmative Action is the focus on measuring students singularly off merit which is a perceived form of personal agency. As a country that values meritocracy and the theme of an individual pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, this argument appeals to American sensibilities. People want to believe they have the agency to achieve their goals based on their own choices and actions. The agents who believe affirmative action is discriminatory argue that the practice threatens the personal agency of students who presumably work to build a resume worthy of being admitted to these prestigious institutions, but who are overlooked because the institution must meet a certain quota for admitting students of color. The anonymous Asian-American plaintiffs of SFFAs used this argument as they claimed Harvard University denied them admissions even though they

scored higher than other applicants on grades, standardized test scores, and extracurricular. The plaintiffs felt they earned their way into Harvard based on their personal agency and merit were denied because of the quota for racial balancing.

The problem with the framework of measuring students solely on personal agency and merit is that personal agency does not exist within a vacuum. An individual's personal agency always exists relative to the presence of other people's personal agency as well as other types of agencies like discursive, cultural, and material agency. This paper will draw on Krista Ratcliffe and Kyle Jensen's work on defining rhetorical agency to argue the ways a framework that focuses only on personal agency is limited due to the nature of agency to always be fluid, abstract, and intersected with social factors. There is a sense of hubris in ascribing agency to individuals because individuals have little to no actual control over their own agency.

Discursive agency is one of several types of agencies that Ratcliffe and Jensen theorize to explain the concept's complexity. Discursive agency is defined by Ratcliffe and Jensen as the capacity of words themselves to act upon and be heard by people. It is the power of words and discourses to socialize people and influence people's personal agency. Words matter because they have the ability to mediate a person's ideas and actions. Words themselves have limited agency as their meanings and connotations can change over time and place. Words function as tropes as they often take their meaning based on their context in relation to the cultural logics in which they are produced and which they are encountered. Words also accrue connotations and meaning over time and within situated discourses. The example Ratcliffe and Jensen provide is how the connotations and meanings of words *black* and *white* have changed over time. Originally used to describe evil and purity within

racialized groups, the meanings of these words have changed over time. Black, A word that originally had connotations of being less than or inferior, influences how Black people in the United States perceive themselves, to now with opposite meanings that celebrate Blackness and promote a message of pride in using Black to describe oneself. Similarly, meritocracy, the primary word and concept this paper is examining, is a word that's meaning has shifted over time.

Meritocracy, or the notion that society should reward people based on their ability and talent rather than wealth or social status, has become embedded in Western culture and political thought. Meritocracy is not inherently a problematic concept but is often co-opted by the social elite class to uphold inequality instead of bridging the wealth gap between the poor and the wealthy. This paper argues instead that contemporary understanding of meritocracy is an elitist framework for considering opportunity, success, and failure in society. It is understandable for individuals to believe that society is egalitarian in accepting all people as equal and thus deserve equal opportunities, but meritocracy narratives can be hijacked to reinforce and uphold existing divisions of hierarchy. By exploiting meritocracy narratives, individuals at the top of the social hierarchy can justify their positions or wealth, resources, and power as earned through hard work and perseverance while blaming people earning lower income or experiencing poverty for not working as hard, thus resulting in their positions in the hierarchy. Not only is meritocracy an elitist framework that legitimizes intergenerational inequality, but it has become embedded and intertwined in culture and media, where narratives of meritocracy perpetuate myths, pedagogy, and the false promises of meritocracy that can engender false ideas of equality and opportunity.

It is crucial to define the discursive agency of meritocracy as the connotations and

discourses around meritocracy can provide the power to affect an individual's ideas and actions, as it has in this situation with how Justice Clarence Thomas and Students for Fair Admissions are championing the word. Words can accrue meanings as meritocracy is commonly understood contemporarily as a society selecting people for positions of power based on their ability. This definition of meritocracy, however, is different from the original contextual understanding of the term, as it was originally used satirically to mock the notion of a meritocratic system of government. An individual that comes up in almost all the work done on studying meritocracy (Mijs, Araki, Tasner, Littler, Civil, Rosen) is political sociologist Michael Young, who originally coined meritocracy in his book *The Rise of Meritocracy*. Michael Young's work is essential to understanding discourses around meritocracy because it shows the associations between words and meanings are not natural or inevitable and can change throughout time or context as meritocracy has gone from being a pejorative term to a term that has been co-opted to reinforce existing social hierarchies. Contemporary studies of meritocracy stem from his satirization of a dystopian future where merit and individual talent have become the central tenet of society. This new merit based government has done away with social classes to create a society where power and wealth is distributed between the meritorious elite and the disenfranchised underclass who are deemed less meritorious. Young used the term pejoratively as he mocked the idea that a meritocracy would be achievable since the meritorious elite could hoard resources and co-opt conceptions of merit to favor transfers of power and resources remaining within the meritorious elite without the trickle-down effect. Young argued that the rich could define their success as merit when they already had the resources to succeed. Meanwhile, people experiencing financial hardship could be labeled lazy or inferior when they do not have the same resources to

succeed.

What Young is describing about power remaining within the meritorious elite is what sociologists call “the Matthew effect of accumulated advantage.” The Matthew effect refers to when individuals who begin from a place of advantage or privilege can accumulate more advantage over time. Conversely, individuals who begin from a disadvantage state who become even more disadvantaged over time. The Matthew effect is essentially the adage “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer,” which conflicts with the concept of meritocracy that argues power is distributed to individuals who have earned it by merit. In relation to higher education, an argument can be made that White Americans have accumulated hundreds of years of advantage, such as wealth, education, and power that has made the process of college admissions unfair to minorities who have been systematically discriminated against based on their race, religion, sexuality, or gender. Years of systemic racism and inequality have created an uneven playing field that is unmeritocratic which is why affirmative action was created, which was aimed to assist marginalized groups to receive opportunities for advancement and inclusion and bridge this gap between advantage and disadvantage.

Cultural agency, another of Ratcliffe and Jensen’s terms, also intersects with personal and discursive agency as it is the capacity of “cultural systems (political, economic, educational, etc.) via their institutions (government, markets, universities) and institutional practices (policies, rituals, traditions, events, etc.) to act upon and be heard by people,” (Ratcliffe and Jensen). It is the capacity of cultural systems to shape words and discourses to dictate governmental laws, policies, and public consciousness. That in turn may constrain people’s personal agency to act and behave in ways that are either in line with cultural systems or against it. The United States Supreme Court is a significant cultural system that shapes

laws and policies in the United States. A woman's personal agency in relation to reproductive rights is severely limited due to the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

In the rhetorical situation of *SFFA v. The University of Harvard*, the Supreme Court has shaped discourse to consider affirmative action a discriminatory practice. The cultural agency of the Supreme Court justices are intertwined with their personal agency as the judges can choose to consider the facts of the case and come to a decision on their reading of the Constitution, but their personal agency is directly affected and influenced by their cultural agency of political affiliations. The six justices that voted against affirmative action were conservative justices and the three who voted for affirmative action were liberal justices. Decisions should be made free from bias, but cultural agency alters how an individual views and interprets the Constitution based on their political leanings. This terministic screen of how to interpret a document like the Constitution shows the limits of personal agency as a person's upbringing, lived experience, and ideology will affect their personal agency.

The final agency that intersects with personal agency is material agency, which is the power of non-human objects, places, and spaces to affect people's individual agency. In her book, *Vital Materialism*, Jane Bennett argues matter itself has vitality, no matter how inanimate or lifeless it may appear. An example of material agency affecting personal agency would be the community a person grows up in. A student may not have the resources they need to succeed based on their circumstances regarding access to quality education, a safe environment to grow and prosper, and economic backing to make decisions many take for granted. An individual may not be able to afford or get the chance to meet with a tutor that will help him study for the SAT if they are only concerned with where the next meal will come from or having an object that will transport him to the tutor whether it be a car or bus. The

materiality of a person's circumstances directly affects how much personal agency they have to engage to overcome their situation. Material agency highlights the shortcomings of meritocracy as it disputes the notion of an equal starting position. If person A earns his position over person B, does person A deserve it more than person B because they were more skilled than or could it have be because they were born into a better situation? One of the many reasons Affirmative Action was originally implemented was to attempt to bridge these inequalities that were caused by racism, but the recent Supreme Court decision tries to undo this progress.

Young uses the term elite when describing those who will benefit from a meritocratic society, and this paper will also use the term, but what or who is an elite? Political Scientist Jo Freeman refers to elites as “an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent,” (Taiwo 22). This means eliteness is not a stable identity but the relationality between small groups of people and a larger population. Assistant professor of philosophy at Georgetown University Olúfemi O. Táíwò, in his book, *Elite Capture*, defines who can be considered as an elite. He argues a person can be viewed as an elite based on how people have decided to relate to some aspect of their social identity. You can also be an elite based on contingent advantages like education, wealth, or social prestige. Eliteness is more related to class than race, as whiteness and eliteness are two separate things, but they often go hand in hand in the United States, where white people have contributed to hundreds of years of exploited free labor from slavery and systemic and structural racism. Black people can also be elites as Taiwo cites E. Franklin Frazier's book *Black Bourgeoisie*, where Frazier argued Black elites exist who will advance the interests of



their subgroup over the welfare of the larger community. Political philosopher Franz Fanon also wrote about this phenomenon when he described how newly independent African nations would repeat cycles of colonialism by running headfirst into neocolonialism and embracing the same power structures of their former colonial powers. This process of class oppression is what Táíwò coins as the concept of elite capture, which occurs when elites can hold power by steering resources and institutions that could benefit the many toward their own interests. This paper argues elite capture is occurring with how Justice Thomas and many right leaning pundits co-opted meritocracy to attack affirmative action and DEI programs to appear discriminatory and racist.

Using Táíwò's concept of elite capture, this paper argues the conservative assault against affirmative action an example of elite capture at play as conservative elites have co-opted narratives of meritocracy to push back against diversity initiatives and maintain a demographic status quo at historically White institutions like Ivy League schools by focusing only on personal agency. Doing so minimizes the role of other forms of agency. The co-optation of meritocracy has allowed conservative elites to paint DEI practices as discriminatory and unmeritocratic to steer resources and institutions away from Minority groups to maintain hierarchies in the guise of maintaining our meritocracy. As Táíwò argues, the practice of elite capture is not a conspiratorial, cynical appropriations of systemic behavior that are predictable patterns. This paper will primarily examine the arguments used by Justice Clarence Thomas in his dissenting opinion as well as Students for Fair Admissions framing Asian Americans as the victims of affirmative action practices, which uphold this-argument that affirmative action practices are discriminatory and anti-meritocratic. This paper argues that these arguments are inconsistent as using meritocracy as the framework of their argument

ignores the context of cultural and societal factors at play.

This inconsistency might not be apparent when meritocracy narratives seem to reflect a truth for minoritized persons. Further, for meritocracy narratives to succeed, there must be minority groups who can prosper in this system and climb the social hierarchy. Enter the model minority myth, which creeps into this more extensive discussion of meritocracy narratives in America. The model minority myth suggests that Asian Americans can achieve socio-economic success and are excluded from the racialized problems that many other minority groups face due to their propensity to be hard working, obedient, and intelligent. The model minority myth claims that because Asian Americans can overcome their minority status and climb the social ladder to be successful, the apparition of racism is no longer an issue in the United States. It promotes the idea of a meritocratic American society that presents all individuals with equal opportunity to succeed regardless of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. The model minority myth also suggests that since Asian Americans can persevere through hard work and effort to achieve economic upward mobility, the other minority groups do not achieve the same level of success because of their own volition. This notion of blaming other minority groups and suggesting they are inferior in work ethic, intelligence, or culture is a dangerous and racist ideology that is perpetuated to reinforce existing class structures and to pit minority groups against each other to prevent solidarity among ethnic groups.

Due to the efforts of Edward Blum and Students for Fair Admissions, Asian Americans have also become the poster children of the victimized and combatant group against affirmative action. SFFA filed lawsuits against Harvard and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, representing Asian American students who they claimed were being discriminated against in the application process because of affirmative action. The framing of

Asian Americans as victims of affirmative action by SFFA advances the model minority myth that Asian Americans can achieve higher levels of socioeconomic success than other minority groups through a combination of innate work ethic or talent and a bootstraps narrative of perseverance and personal responsibility. The model minority myth is harmful to Asian Americans because it erases the diversity of Asian American cultures, sweeps away racism against Asian Americans, and complicates solidarity within minority groups for racial justice.

Furthermore, encapsulating all U.S. citizens and immigrants who trace their roots to Asia as Asian Americans as an umbrella term is in itself problematic because it homogenizes all Asian people, who have a plethora of differences individually and culturally, in a depoliticizing way that feeds into the model minority stereotype. Japanese culture differs from Burmese culture, which differs from Korean, which differs from Bengali culture, etc. Asian Americans also vary distinctly in median household income and college degree attainment<sup>1</sup>. These differences can be linked to the structural conditions in their diasporic communities and their country of origin. East Asian countries like Korea, Japan, and China are wealthier in GDP than Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Thailand, or Indonesia. Migration patterns also have an impact on economic differences as Indians and Filipinos often migrate selectively to the United States as a result of higher education attainment or high-skilled visas (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad). Southeast Asian populations conversely immigrated to the United States predominantly as refugees with limited educational attainment from their country of origin (Shih). By using Asian American as an umbrella term, the homogenization of all these distinct cultures into one dominant Asian occurs as a singular identity produces stereotypes of Asian people who are the “model minority.” The term minimizes each culture’s individualized identities, struggles, and experiences so that the public consciousness

perception of Asian people in America is what is perpetuated by the model minority stereotype. This synchronization of distinct Asian identities into one agglomeration of primarily East Asian characteristics leads to an Asian American identity that does not exist. The term Asian American can be problematic as it is irrelevant whether you are from Myanmar or Laos, which statistics show are not as financially successful as East Asian demographics, as you will still be viewed as Asian Americans with the model minority stereotype.

There is a long-standing misconception as well that Asian Americans excelled solely on this model minority rhetoric and were the also-rans of affirmative action in the perceived zero-sum game of college admissions. In reality, Asian Americans were affirmative action's earliest framers and beneficiaries. Asian Americans were crucial in building the early framework of affirmative action's infrastructure from the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. The Japanese American Citizens League, which was a social welfare/proto-political organization formed during the years of forced subjugation in Japanese internment camps, advocated, lobbied, and testified not only for Asian Americans but for Black Americans too, in racial solidarity for affirmative action programs for minorities. Asian Americans, like other minority groups, benefited from affirmative action programs from the 1960s to the 1980s. However, social elites co-opted and stole the narrative of racial solidarity by erasing Asian American efforts for equity from the record to perpetuate myths of the model minority and pit minority groups against each other. By erasing this part of history through collaboration, the narrative of Asian Americans became one of victimhood instead of a racialized group in society that social programs did not help, and that succeeded despite support. After the number of Asian American college students began to ascend, many universities decided to remove Asian

Americans altogether from affirmative action and evaluate them instead with white applicants, thus releasing the shared history of affirmative action advocacy. Because they were now in competition with White applicants for admissions, White alums, apprehensive about the shifting hierarchies and anxious about their children's chances to attend their alma mater, pressured university heads to take measures to limit Asian student admissions (Chang). Because of these practices, the number of Asian students admitted to prestigious institutions began to flatten. Over the next few decades, Asian Americans would seek fairness in college admissions. The narrative of racial solidarity, which had already been hijacked and reappropriated by social elites, would be distorted by affirmative action's antagonists.

Social elites perpetuated the concept of the model minority to achieve this purpose, as sociologist William Peterson first coined it in his 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article when describing the success of Japanese Americans. He perpetuated and popularized this stereotype of Asian Americans when he described Japanese people as "hardworking, rule-abiding citizens who were able to rise above the adversity of their World War II incarceration in internment camps in merely 20 years" (Shih). Peterson attributed this success to Japanese Americans having solid cultural values, work ethic, family structure, and genetics, which stood in direct contrast to the controversial 1965 Moynihan Report (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965) that blamed African American culture and family structure for the socioeconomic problems African Americans faced in the United States.

Peterson's comparison is ignorant at best and nefarious at worst in the ways this anti-Black racism and anti-Asian stereotyping pits minority groups against each other in an "Oppression Olympics" characterization of the struggles between Blacks and Asians. By pitting minority groups against one another in the Oppression Olympics, "it diverts attention

and racial solidarity from challenging institutional racism and structural inequality and hinders other minorities' demand for social justice" (Osajima, 2000; Zhou, 2003). The overall impact of the model minority myth is to be a deterrent towards racial solidarity between minority groups. Bad faith actors like Edward Blum then co-opt the struggle of Asian American students trying to get into college to strike down DEI programs created to benefit Black and Brown students.

A term that will be encountered in Justice Thomas' dissenting opinion is the notion of the United States being "colorblind." The idea of colorblindness or a colorblind meritocratic society showcase is not a concept as there is an eagerness of White Americans, usually politically conservative, to embrace a new post-racial America, where racism and discrimination no longer play a role in our neoliberal meritocratic society. Through ignorance, apathy, and indifference (Bonilla- Silva, 2018; Forman and Lewis, 2006; Mueller, 2017), racism is obscured, and the racialized hierarchies are kept intact. This new evasive racism, as defined by Angie Beeman (2015), functions stealthily by minimizing or avoiding discussions about race instead of being outright racist. This willful ignorance is the primary tool of liberal white supremacy, which is defined as "behaviors, practices, beliefs, and rhetorical moves by progressive European Americans who deny their role in perpetuating racism to maintain their position as morally superior, not only to people of color but other European Americans," (Beeman, 2022; Melaku and Beeman, 2022). Overt antebellum racism is easy to spot and challenge, so white liberal racism has to function more discreetly by allowing White Americans to claim they reject racism in principle but paradoxically be evasive to combat racism through government policies. This type of evasive white supremacy allows Whites to create a nonracist self that preaches equality and antiracism while upholding the racialized

status quo. It is essential to acknowledge that evasive racism is an issue because often overt racism is framed as the only form of racism, while white liberal racism is allowed to function discreetly to uphold systemic and institutional inequality, preventing the United States from achieving a true hypothetical meritocracy.

### CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS

Having set up the theoretical contextual frame, this next section will draw from those theoretical frames to analyze Justice Clarence Thomas' dissent of *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*. Thomas' concurring opinion and his language on merit showcase the power of cultural agencies to shape identities and conversations. The focus of Thomas' argument is a meritocratic society that values agency and merit overall, but those concepts of agency and merit are shaped by cultural systems. Every conversation that is had is fundamentally influenced by cultural systems and power. Words, gestures, and signs are not self-interpreted but are given meaning by the individuals communicating as a joint action. Because each conversation requires interpretation, a mutual understanding must be established when sharing with the parties. This concept is called "common ground" in philosophy, which is mutual beliefs and assumptions that people rely on to have efficient communication. This common ground that is needed to have productive conversations are directly shaped by cultural systems that affect how cultural norms and incentives govern our conversations.

Contemporary understandings of meritocracy are directly shaped by cultural systems that define it as an individual agency and a behavior one exemplifies to overcome obstacles to become successful. Cultural systems also ascribe scripts for individuals, and with the language of meritocracy, many different scripts can be ascribed to other individuals. The language of meritocracy shapes how successful individuals are viewed as hard-working, intelligent, and talented. Conversely, this language shapes how less-successful individuals are viewed as lazy or unskilled. The way Thomas talks about students who benefit from affirmative action is a language that ascribes behaviors of ill- preparedness, without merit, and undeserving to be in



the room.

In Thomas' concurrent opinion, he repeatedly uses the term “*colorblind*” to describe the United States Constitution as a framework for how the country should operate. He argues, "to offer an originalist defense of the colorblind Constitution; to explain further the flaws of the Court's *Grutter* jurisprudence; to clarify that all forms of discrimination based on race—including so-called affirmative action—are prohibited under the Constitution," (Thomas 2). Thomas also considers affirmative action discriminatory when he argues, "To satisfy strict scrutiny, universities must be able to establish a compelling reason to racially discriminate" (Thomas 23). For Thomas to repeatedly use the term "*colorblind*" in his dissent, it seems Thomas is hinging his argument on affirmative action being a discriminatory process because it embodies a form of "reverse discrimination" that threatens the meritocracy of the United States.

By painting racial preference as a threat to meritocracy, Justice Thomas propagates a white victim narrative that reinforces the trite reverse racism accusations. This narrative supports Whites who contend for social sympathy and for a badge of courage that announces they are receiving systemically unfair treatment and discrimination, too (Hughley 727). Even with the actual small percentage of students of color that get racial preference, the blame is placed on them for the unfair treatment and not the plethora of other ways the wealthy can get into Elite universities. Wealthy families can use their legacy status and financial capital to get their children into elite institutions. Thomas and SFFAs argue for meritocratic traits like hard work and grit but engage in practices that are the antithesis of merit (LaWanda 2021). The normalcy of white privilege is detrimental to all applicants, not just people of color because legacy admissions take admission spots from everyone while being a socially acceptable practice that no one seems to bat an eye at. Meanwhile, people of color are being blamed

when a White applicant does not get into their dream school.

Thomas then issues a challenge to universities by claiming they must address these three aspects to justify their discriminatory practices:

First, to satisfy strict scrutiny, universities must be able to establish an actual link between racial discrimination and educational benefits. Second, those engaged in racial discrimination do not deserve deference with respect to their reasons for discriminating. Third, attempts to remedy past governmental discrimination must be closely tailored to address that particular past governmental discrimination (Thomas 23)

Justice Thomas is insinuating that the discriminatory practices of affirmative action are acceptable if universities can establish the link between racial discrimination and educational benefits. This argument seems counterintuitive to his initial argument that affirmative action is discriminatory and should be abolished because it threatens meritocracy, as he is willing to let this discrimination slide if it proves to have some benefits. Although he doubles down on his argument that these perceived discriminatory practices deserve no deference with respect, the seeming willingness to compromise with a caveat seems bad faith as he will unlikely accept any evidence of educational benefits to his satisfaction. This

inconsistency is further evidenced by the third qualifier he gives on “attempts to remedy past governmental discrimination must be closely tailored to address *that* particular past governmental discrimination (Thomas 23)”, which directly contradicts statements he makes earlier on in his dissent of “two discriminatory wrongs cannot make a right” (Thomas 2) and “today’s youth simply are not responsible for instituting the segregation of the 20th century, and they do not shoulder the moral debts of their ancestors. Our Nation should not punish today’s youth for the sins of the past,” (Thomas 45).

Thomas’ mention of the youth not paying for past transgressions is another attempt at isolating agency as personal agency. By framing affirmative action as the sins of the past that is punishing the agency of today’s youth to get into universities, he isolates agency as something that is personal to the individual. The problem with this framing is personal agency is not equal for everyone, but instead are related to socioeconomic factors. The claim that the nation should not punish today’s youth overall is flawed because today’s youth are already being punished by racist and oppressive laws and policies like Jim Crow, segregation, redlining, or over-policing. Thomas argues since today’s youth were not responsible for past oppressive policies and discrimination, they should not be held responsible, but an argument could be made inversely that the students who are benefited from affirmative action are still affected by hundreds of years of racism and oppression. An opposite claim can be made that affirmative action is not punishing the agency of certain individuals as it is helping bridge the gap between the agency of other individuals whose agencies are affected by their disadvantaged position in society.

This section also is inconsistent because it is a formality for Thomas to appear open-minded and willing to find points of entry of common ground with the three justices that

voted in favor of affirmative action with his initial statement of establishing educational benefits. However, he has already established that he is unwilling to compromise his view that it is a discriminatory practice. Thomas unremarkably cites the opening lines of the Constitution that “all men are created equal” to reinforce his argument that affirmative action makes college applicants unequal as he claims it values Black applicants over White applicants when race becomes a factor in the admissions process.

Political figures universally use this appeal to the American ethos of equality to frame a meritocratic fantasy of America to appeal to their audience. He credits those words to the forgers of the Constitution whom John Locke and Montesquieu influenced to value equality as the foundation of a just government. The issue with this projected altruism on the framers of the Constitution is that they valued equality only in principle and not in practice. Although the words “all men are created equal” were written, the statement only applied to rich White men who owned property as people of color or women did not have the same equal rights. There is an inherent irony in citing the famous lines of the Constitution. How can affirmative action threaten a core principle of the United States equity when equity was never fully established as a core principle for all individuals?

The Supreme Court has a dubious track record for past discriminatory decisions, including *Dredd Scott v. Sandford*, *Korematsu v. United States*, and *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In Justice Harlan’s concurrent opinion of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, he argued, “the white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time if it remains true to its great heritage and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty. But in view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior,

dominant, ruling class of citizens" (Harlan 559). This decision and other past decisions tell us that the United States Supreme Court has a precedent for being an antagonist of meritocracy. Justice Thomas supports a logic of meritocracy and is right to question elites, but the Supreme Court is a part of the power elites that maintain existing hierarchies that is unmeritocratic by nature.

Justice Thomas also argues that racial preferences in college admissions stamp Black and Hispanic students with a badge of inferiority. He also argues that this practice taints the accomplishments "taint the accomplishments of all those who are admitted as a result of racial discrimination" as well as "all those who are the same race as those admitted as a result of racial discrimination" because "no one can distinguish those students from the ones whose race played a role in their admission" (Thomas 41). As previously mentioned, we see Thomas' personal experience as a beneficiary of race-based admissions becoming a factor here as it seems he is projecting his experience of proving himself as a Black student at Yale Law School to future Black students who will attend similar elite universities.

Although not explicitly stated, Thomas seems to address perceptions against Black students resulting from affirmative action. Based on his own experience, he feels these perceptions of Black students not belonging in these spaces are harmful to Black students. Thomas' argument that affirmative action muddies the distinction between who deserves to attend a college off of merit versus students whose race played a role in admissions speaks to the country fetishizing meritocracy to the point where we constantly question if one belongs. This argument is an example of the meritocratic framework falling short, as people of color are continually being challenged on whether they belong. This act of racializing space plays a part in this as when a person enters a predominantly White space, they are questioned if they

belong. By placing the “badge of inferiority” on Black students, Thomas is projecting his insecurities as a beneficiary of race-based admissions to current Black students by not wanting them to experience the same questions he faced. In analyzing his opinion, it seems Thomas truly feels he has the best interest of Black students in mind as he thinks that for Black students to feel like they belong in these elite spaces, Affirmative Action must be abolished so there will be no discussion whether or not they got in strictly off merit. The question that should be considered is whether these questions of belonging will end for Black students or if other questions arise that question their credibility as students. However, Thomas’s argument is missing an acknowledgment of the prevalence of legacy admissions that also play a massive role in college admissions for most elite universities. More students get into elite universities because of legacy admissions than race-based admissions. However, they do not receive the same level of public scrutiny as no current Supreme Court cases are challenging legacy admissions at universities. The concept of meritocracy is co-opted and politicized to portray race-based admissions as being unmeritocratic while ignoring another practice that can be argued as being just as unmeritocratic.

Justice Thomas' internal inconsistencies also question whether Black students belong in these spaces when he argues, "many blacks and Hispanics who likely would have excelled at less elite schools . . . in a position where underperformance is all but inevitable because they are less academically prepared than the white and Asian students with whom they must compete", (Thomas 40). The reasoning Thomas gives for why Black students will struggle at Elite universities of them being "less academically prepared" shows the fallacies of the meritocracy framework as Thomas acknowledges the inherent inequities in public education. Here, Thomas is taking away the agency of Black and Brown students as he seems to be

arguing that they should not be allowed to enter these elite spaces because not only are they undeserving, but also because they will undoubtedly struggle. Thomas seems to think that these racialized barriers exist to the benefit of Black and Brown students because by using this argument, he is implying Black and Brown students are academically inferior to their White counterparts.

Not only is Thomas taking away agency from Black and Brown students, but again focuses only on personal agency. Thomas states that Black and Brown students will struggle at elite universities but does not ask why. Is it because of their personal agency as students, which implies a notion that Black and Brown students are academically inferior? By focusing only on personal agency, this limited and racist logic is implied, but by relating other forms of agency, a bigger picture can be viewed in understanding why Black and Brown students struggle to perpetuate racist notions that they are inferior to their White counterparts. Not all students get an equal starting point or education opportunities, so the college admissions process is, by nature, unmeritocratic. Because of these inequities in education, Thomas believes Black students should aim for less prestigious universities because they are less academically prepared than their White counterparts.

Thomas's argument is at odds with that of others as he claims affirmative action is dangerous to the nation's meritocracy while acknowledging that the education system is unequal and unmeritocratic. He also backs this argument with claims of studies that show Black and Hispanic students disproportionately receive mediocre to poor grades in competitive collegiate environments without properly citing any of these studies in his dissent. By citing these presumably real studies and using the term "inevitable" to describe the likelihood of Black student underperformance, Thomas is taking away personal agency from

Black students. It is difficult to reflect Thomas' position with this argument as he is seemingly buying into the notion that the hierarchy that exists currently is beneficial for Black students because they should be aiming for less prestigious universities because they tend to be less academically prepared. Thomas seems to be embracing these hierarchies as a net positive for Black students and attempts at "forced" equity through affirmative action as unproductive. To summarize Thomas' argument, Black students will struggle at elite universities, so they should aim for less prestigious ones where they will be more successful. In his opinion, the hierarchy of higher education exists for the benefit of Black students and not to discriminate against them.

With all this in mind, Justice Thomas suggests that objective grading scales are critical to meritocratic systems as they serve as the great equalizer in which universities can offer a metric for achievement free of bigotry (Thomas 56). He feels these objective scales allow students to prove they are worthy of these elite institutions by demonstrating their academic accomplishments. However, what exactly are objective grading scales Thomas refers to? Thomas never states these objective grading scales but implies grades and test scores. Are standardized tests or grade point averages, and are these grading methods objective? Based on the articles' previous academic work on this topic, this paper argues that there are not any well-founded objective grading methods. Standardized test scores disproportionately favor white students (Lynn & Dixon). LaWanda W. M. Ward, in her article, argues that the validity of standardized tests is never challenged because they appear neutral and colorblind. The claims of structural racism embedded in them are never interrogated because there is no evidence of "intentional" discriminatory practices. The illusion of neutrality ignores the implication of race and racism, where white students are placed in honors and advanced



placement classes at disproportionately higher rates than Black students. It is reasonable to consider then why White students perform better at standardized tests as they have access to better teachers, resources, and curriculums than Black students. For Justice Thomas to say affirmative action is unnecessary when there is an apparent education inequality is another inconsistency in his argument of a meritocracy that favors a level playing field.

In summarizing Thomas' argument, his focus is on the agency of students applying for college, mainly personal agency. Thomas believes applicants should be judged objectively based on their merit. The issue with this focus on personal agency is that it is influenced by cultural agency. Cultural agency affects how an individual's identity is shaped and how power is distributed throughout each identity. Black and Brown students may have less personal agency to succeed on standardized tests due to cultural systems like education inequality, access to tutors, or proximity to poverty and violence. Affirmative action exists to enhance modes of cultural agency for individuals who do not have the same personal agency. Black and Brown students may have less personal agency to succeed on standardized tests due to cultural systems like education inequality, access to tutors, or proximity to poverty and violence. Thomas, however, seems to argue that personal agency should be the only factor colleges should consider during the admissions process without regard to cultural agency.

In defense of dismantling affirmative action programs at universities, conservative Justice Clarence Thomas wrote in his opinion that affirmative action was an affront to our constitution, which is colorblind and treats all citizens as equal, without regard to our race. He adds, "In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved"

(Thomas 2023). This quote reinforces the framework that Thomas views universities as inherently hierarchical. This meritocratic framework views specific individuals as objectively more exceptional and fit to enter these prestigious spaces.

Any attempt to bridge the gap by allowing perceived less exceptional individuals into these spaces is unmeritocratic. The inconsistency in this framework is that the disparities in exceptionalness and preparedness exist based on the existing structural inequities and not because of something inherently biological like race. White students are not more exceptional than Black students because of biology but because of the structural differences that affirmative action is trying to reduce. This framework acknowledges the conflict of multiple perspectives, where people should theoretically earn their success based on merit and exceptionalism. However, if there are inequities in how an individual can develop and showcase their exceptionalism, should these inequities not be factored in when judging the merit of candidates?

For meritocracy narratives to thrive, there must be an assumption that race no longer plays a part in determining social status. A strict meritocracy framework does not factor in the social context of race, gender, sexuality, or class. The notion that the United States is now a colorblind society that has moved past racism is also a problematic trope because it pretends racism does not still exist. It camouflages the ways systemic racism is still rooted in society. This framework also isolates agency as personal agency, pushing away the relevance of other forms of agency. A colorblind society argues against how cultural and material agency are embedded in agency. Colorblind racism functions in the same ways as good Jim Crow era racism did, as it denies the lived experiences of people of color, and by purporting not to see race, one can deny systemic racism still occurs. Instead of outright racism to keep hierarchies in place, race-neutral language is used in place to defend racist policies like the notion of a

colorblind constitution or Justice Thomas' assertion that the Fourteenth Amendment "did not intend to authorize racially specific efforts to alleviate inequality." Colorblind racism refers to how nonracial explanations can be used to justify racist practices (Armenta, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado, 2018; Welsh et al., 2021). Frequently, colorblind ideology will advocate for racial equality in principle but at the same time support policies that maintain racial inequality in practice (Embrick, 2011; Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). Colorblind ideologies are then supported by neoliberalism, which prioritizes profits and the market above all. These economic and social policies engage in systematic practices that defund social services and increase spending on policing, increasing the rate of criminalization of minorities.

In examining racial color-blindness in upholding the status quo, Watoii Rabii examined the narrative of successful diversity initiatives in Buffalo neighborhoods. He argued that immigrants and refugees are used as symbolic capital to construct a neighborhood brand of revitalization and diversity. To create the illusion of a colorblind meritocracy, "The revitalization frame credits immigrants and refugees with contributing to the neighborhood through homeownership, entrepreneurialism, and school enrollment. The diversity frame celebrates people of different races, cultures, and ethnicities coming together while evading and obscuring racism" (Rabii, 2023). Refugees and immigrants joining a community are often used as a symbolic gesture to construct a narrative of a welcoming community that embraces immigrants to assimilate into society and climb the social hierarchy because we live in a colorblind society where anyone can prosper. The opposite occurs, however, as immigrants are often racialized and placed into racial hierarchies (Rabii, 2023; Brodtkin, 2000; Hing, 1993; Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 2004). These performative acts of diversity and inclusion

provide the narrative that racism no longer exists and that anybody can succeed in our meritocracy.

## CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

What this narrative of a colorblind, post-race narrative promotes is the emphasis on making personal agency the only factor that should be considered for college admissions. For a society to be colorblind signifies that race, gender, or class does not matter anymore because everyone is viewed equally solely based on their merit. By moving away from other forms of agency and focusing exclusively on personal agency, one denies the roles the other forms of agency still have on an individual's overall agency. By only focusing on personal agency, Justice Thomas and SFFA can present affirmative action as a discriminatory practice because it aims to bridge the gap of cultural and material agency that is not present when only focusing on personal agency. Meritocracy is not an inherently problematic concept; people want to be rewarded for their hard work and talent. The problem lies with our current understanding of meritocracy, which Michael Young originally coined in his satirization of it in his critique, as the ruling class always co-opts it as a tool to justify and sustain hierarchies. With the Supreme Court case between Students for Fair Admissions vs. Harvard and North Carolina, meritocracy is again used to keep the hierarchies in place by dismantling policies to address these massive educational and class inequalities. By framing affirmative action policies as a threat to meritocracy and discriminatory practice, Justice Thomas can frame the ruling class as the victim and the people who are trying to climb the meritocratic ladder as undeserving perpetrators who are cheating their way to the top of the hierarchy at the expense of more deserving candidates. With the end of affirmative action, the co-optation of meritocracy and the focus on personal agency looks to abolish other forms of race-based programs like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs that aim to bridge the gap for individuals who have underrepresented discriminated against based on their identity. This

regressive approach speaks to the initial warning and criticism Michael Young had when he coined the term meritocracy as a concept that would be used to keep hierarchies static instead of it being a tool to promote social mobility.

## CHAPTER V: INTRODUCTION

Shonen manga is more popular than ever. Japanese comics are now outselling Western comics in the United States (Statista). Part of this is due to anime, which is the anime adaptation of manga that this paper will use interchangeably because, as a form, it is almost a one-for-one facsimile of manga, as panels are often adapted precisely to their manga form as graphic art on a page. Why are these once-niche Japanese stories becoming so popular, and why is there such a universal appeal to them? This paper will examine the universality of Shonen manga through Kenneth Burke's theory on identification. Division arises as individuals are born and exist as biologically separate beings and, therefore, seek to identify through communication to overcome separateness. This paper argues that by using Burke's theory of identification, the global appeal of Shonen manga/anime to break through language and cultural barriers can be understood and deconstructed.

Manga is essentially the Japanese word for comic books or graphic novels and although they are similar to Western comics, they differ in a variety of ways. The first difference is that manga is primarily in black and white, whereas Western comics are in color. The reason manga is in black and white is due to publishers wanting to cut costs and making volumes more affordable to readers. Shonen manga, which this paper will focus on, is an editorial category mainly targeting adolescent boys ages 9 to 18. The Japanese word shounen roughly translates to "young boy" or "juvenile" in English. Shonen narratives are didactic in nature as there is a distinguishable pattern where the majority of them aim to teach adolescents valuable life lessons along with entertaining them. The didactic lessons promoted are values of perseverance, friendship, courage, not giving up, and believing in your talent. All these themes relate to a meritocratic ideology Shonen has in the world where Shonen

believes in a society that rewards individuals based on talent, intelligence, and merit.

Children's graphic art magazines have existed in Japan since the early 1900s, emphasizing targeting specific audiences based on age and gender. While early magazines were primarily unisex, they started targeting young boys and girls differently, with Shonen targeting adolescent boys and Shoujo targeting teenage girls. Shonen, from the early 1920s, to pre-World War II, primarily focused on patriotism and pride, with many graphic texts focused on the samurai of the past or stories of the future with robots fighting facsimiles of the Allied West. The subject material contrasted with Western comics, which depicted the opposite, portraying the Axis powers as the antagonists. This difference in propaganda separated Western comics from Eastern comics.



## CHAPTER VI: CONTEXT

To understand Shonen manga as a form, it is important to understand how comics function. Manga is a form of sequential art that uses images that by themselves can be understood just as images, but when placed in a specific order, graphic storytelling takes place. While Western comics move from left to right, manga moves inversely from right to left. As Scott McCloud mentions in his book *Understanding Comics*, a reason comics are successful in identifying with the audience is due to the abstractness of its images and characters. By not having a super realistic model, the cartoon becomes a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled. The empty shell allows the audience to become and identify themselves as the cartoon.

Where manga succeeds more effectively than Western comics is in the art style of manga art. Often called chibi art, characters in manga tend to be drawn in exaggerated styles that overemphasize the eyes in reference to the pupil size and iris color, oversize the heads, and give minimal detail to facial features. Since anime characters look so drastically different from how a person looks in the world, they become a vacuum that the audience can inhabit and relate with. This viewer identification is a specialty of cartooning, which has helped manga/anime gain the advantage of breaking into world popular culture outside of Japan. Japanese comics also use a technique called objectifying power. Objectifying power is a technique that manga authors use to design the central characters abstractly to help the audience identify with them. In contrast, other characters are drawn more realistically to make them stick out and objectify them into “otherness.” By othering these characters, the author can communicate to the audience that these characters are dangerous, antagonistic, or simply not belonging to a space.

Figure 1: panel from *Jujutsu Kaisen* chapter 209 page 19



An example of this is in the Shonen series *Jujutsu Kaisen*, where American military soldiers invade Japan to capture Japanese citizens to harvest them as renewable energy. As shown in the figure above, objectifying power is used to differentiate the American soldiers from Akutami's usual art style as they are realistically portrayed, which sticks out from the exaggerated character models of the protagonists. Their presence is intended to make audiences uncomfortable as they do not fit the series of conflicting sorcerers using

supernatural powers while the soldiers use conventional military weapons. There also is an underlying anxiety of American invasion that stems from a post-World War II anxiety that communicates different feelings to different audiences.

The history of Shonen manga can be traced back as early as 1895, but the initial boom of Shonen magazines took off in popularity during the 1920s and 1930s to promote values of perseverance, friendship, courage, etc. Many Shonen manga follow a formulaic meritocratic empowerment narrative where the protagonist progresses from a social outcast without meaningful friendships or connections to the best, self-actualized version of themselves while forming meaningful relationships and bonds. Their challenges are just enough for them to overcome and prosper. In many Shonen manga narratives, meritocracy becomes an actualized practice. The social structures of these narratives are explicitly tied to meritocracy, as skill and hard work determine who is successful in these narratives. The meritocratic nature of Shonen can be attractive to audiences as Shonen allows individuals to remove their physical identity and all the possible trauma that can be associated with one's physical identity. The meritocratic fantasy of Shonen will enable individuals to project themselves to a reality where everyone is equal and everyone is judged on their merit and contributions. The appeal of Shonen manga to many is that these narratives tell us if one is persistent enough, skilled enough, and resilient enough, they will be met with success.

The themes of Shonen manga have changed throughout its history as a form, but a significant turning point was after World War II as it adapted to be a survival skill. Manga authors used the form as a tool for identification to appeal to Japanese pride post-war. Before branching out to a more multicultural grouping, Shonen storytelling shifted as a means of grappling with the militarism of World War II. During the American occupation, despite

being under foreign rule, there was a new freedom to discuss things previously forbidden under Japanese imperialism. Narratives changed post World War II, where narratives focused on war, combat, and most competitive sports, intending to discourage belligerence and hinder the use of manga for pro-imperial propaganda from Western sanctions. Shonen shifted towards more long-running serialized story manga, with Astroboy being a very influential and successful series that crossed cultural boundaries and became a hit in the West. After the post-war censorship ended during the economic boom of the 1950s, sports, and battle manga returned in a big way, as this made room for the modern era of shonen manga that became popular in what we know the industry today. Battle manga with successful Shonen, such as *Dragon Ball*, gave manga whole wide success, as they tend to follow a formulaic plot that focuses on fights, with the story and narrative taking a back seat frequently. With battle manga, Shonen was successfully able to invade the West and win over readers and audiences in a way previous types of manga could not.

Given the ubiquity of Shonen today, it would be irresponsible not to address the persuasive power of graphic discourses in Shonen as a political force. Popular culture in the form of media has a massive effect on knowledge and how we perceive it to shape public consciousness. Media can shape individual and collective opinion, what is accurate, and revise the past. This revision is essential to examine because the way that the public perceives its collective past is not purely of academic concern as it impacts ongoing political and social narratives. The public perception of the past is not constructed solely in the political or educational realm, as one of the greatest influencers of collective memory is popular media and how it represents history. In post-war Japan, manga has a long history as a medium in which one can contest and shape popular memory.

From the revisionist narratives of Yoshino Sharin and Kobayashi Yoshinori to the anti-war memoirs of Mizuki Shigeru, the Asia–Pacific War and the political turmoil of the 1930s have been debated extensively in the pages of manga. *Rosenbaum and Lewis* write about this in their articles that an important aspect of pop culture’s impact on collective memory is its impact on collective identity or the perception that a generally accepted perspective of the past is vital to the present community.

Certain pop-cultural media can influence collective memory with an immediacy and impact that often surpasses other modes of transmission, such as textbooks. Moreover, mass popular culture can create and shape the national and collective memory. Collective memory becomes recursive and self-perpetuating, relying on a nesting doll effect of ideas and images that reference previous ideas to evoke meaning and memory that is always in flux. Manga also longs for a level of realism and emotional authenticity. Collective memory does not allow an objective “truth” because although the stories being told are fictional, they can be considered emotionally “true” by the audience. John Bodnar of Indiana University also writes about the idea of collective memory in his book *The Good War*. Bodnar argues that a collective memory is the accumulation of past narratives that are objectified into a material culture. One dominant narrative usually emerges that overshadows and often erases other narratives in totality to become the presumed collective memory. This problematic practice creates a homogenized interpretation of the past, as manga authors would have done with the revisionist history of World War II.

Manga authors have used manga in the post-World War II period to perform revisionist history to explain imperial Japanese wartime history, asserting the benignity of Japanese attempts to liberate their nation and the region’s peoples from the yoke of Western

imperialism. Manga authors tend to reframe the narrative, so Japan is presented more as a victim than an aggressor and a nation that always puts the altruistic goal of liberating Asia from Western imperial domination. In pursuit of justifying unjust military campaigns and colonization efforts, manga authors instead use storytelling to advocate for Japanese restoration to create an imagined community that probably never existed and envisions an imagined social consensus that probably never will. Culturally, Shonen authors are not just cartoonists but also influential commentators whose views can shape the collective consciousness of adolescent youths, as Manga as a medium is typically loaded with didactic themes and strong political messaging. Yoshinori Kobayashi is a manga author who engages in this revisionist history as his Manga Gomanism Sengen attempts to paint a post-truth interpretation of imperial Japan.

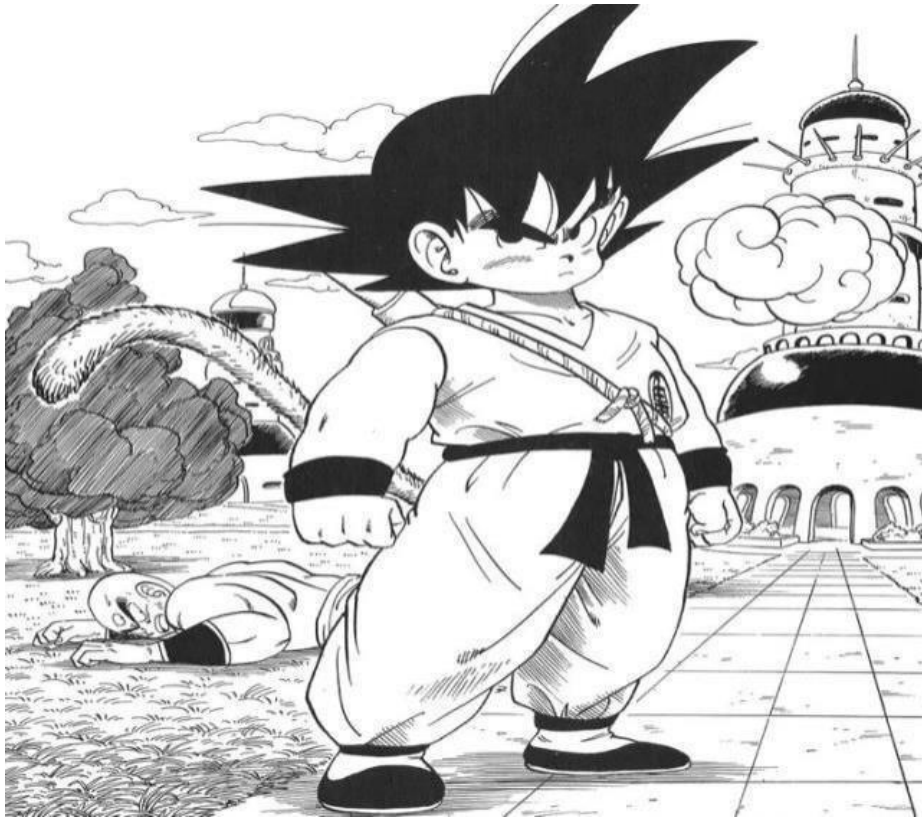
During the 1960s, the Japanese manga medium proliferated and transformed from a radical youth culture into a new national medium. Manga provided a public space for communicating interests and desires and often dissident political attitudes that could not be expressed elsewhere in Japanese society. The manga industry exhibited a distinctive 'populism' and actively recruited young manga artists from all sections of society in contradiction to the dominant social mechanisms of educational meritocracy and promotion by gender and seniority. The sociological and political accessibility of manga is the reason for its continued dynamism and popularity and its historically low and controversial status in Japanese society. The technical simplicity of manga production has also encouraged a remarkably open, or democratic, participation in the medium. Manga writing does not involve the use of bulky, expensive machinery or industrial technology; it is engaged in by hundreds of thousands of professional artists, amateur manga fans, and most ordinary

Japanese youth in everyday life (Dentsu). Anyone can make a manga; they need a pencil and some paper. There is a sense of rebellion and an appeal to authority in the manga in that readers learn specific values that appeal to them and shy away from a dominant mode of expression and thought. Shonen manga, as a form, effectively reaches adolescents in the limit in which text or actual dialogue is distributed in the series. Manga authors tend not to focus on feature-heavy texts in the manga chapters and instead put an emphasis on art and action.

The growth of Shonen is heavily attributed to its ability to adapt as a form. Shonen is not limited to sequential comic art; the most popular series are adapted into animation and are called anime. Anime is a significant reason Shonen broke through to the West, as many anime series are among the world's most popular and most viewed series. The power of anime is that it offers a unique way to study how a dominant culture reaffirms its control over subordinate cultures and nations by re-establishing, on a day-to-day basis, their preferred view of the world as proper and primary. Precisely because of animation's (assumed) innocence and innocuousness, the filmmakers have a broader spectrum of tools and much leeway (Lippi-Green, p. 111).

## CHAPTER VII: ANALYSIS

**Figure 2: panel from Dragon Ball, Akira Toriyama**



To go back to *Understanding Comics*, Scott Mccloud argues that the universal appeal of cartoons is because of the abstract nature of cartooning itself. He pulls from Burke's theory on identification and speaks on how cartoons pull in the audience's identity and awareness into the characters themselves. When observing an image that is realistic, the audience sees another separate individual that they cannot identify with. Mccloud argues, "When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details." The more simple and abstract a cartoon is, the more people it can describe and the more people it can identify with. By stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way realistic art cannot. This effect allows the audience to not just observe, but also participate as the character in the action occurring. Many Shonen



protagonists follow this template as they are never drawn to hyper realism. Shonen protagonists are drawn abstract and simple with unrealistic hair and exaggerated features. See figure 2 above with how *Dragon Ball* protagonist Goku is drawn by manga author Akira Toriyama. He has simplistic facial features, exaggerated hair, and a pronounced tail that is influenced by Sun Wukong from Chinese folklore. A plethora of other shonen protagonists follow this trend including Luffy from *One Piece*, Astro Boy from *Astro Boy*, and Gon from *Hunter x Hunter*. A Shonen protagonist can make or break the success of a manga as there is a short leash on manga serialization as publishers are quick to axe a series so it is crucial for Shonen series to have a protagonist the audience can identify with and participate in the action. Participation is a powerful force in any medium and it allows comics to excel in allowing the audience to identify and attach themselves with the material.

Furthermore, participation by the audience is heightened by comics as a form of how comics operate. In comics, the space between panels is called the gutter, which is essentially what is not shown in the comic and that the audience has to fill in using their imagination. The degree to which this space between panels varies depending on how much action the author wants to communicate, but the less action that is shown, the more the audience has to participate and fill in the actions. Scott McCloud writes about this effect as the reader becomes a partner in the action. He uses an example of a panel where a person is killing another individual with an axe. The action is now shown in two images, one of the person using an axe and the other of an individual screaming. There is not much else in terms of context, but this leaves room for the audience to participate and fill in the action. Did the axeman kill the bystander? Is this paper putting assumed roles on the two characters by calling one man “axeman” and the other “bystander”? Perhaps the axe man is using the axe in self-defense? Maybe the bystander took the axe from the axe man and turned it against him. Overall, a

murder can be assumed to have happened, and as McCloud puts it, the audience becomes an equal crime partner in completing the action.

**Figure 3: Last Panel of Jujutsu Kaisen chapter**



Figure 4: First Panel of Jujutsu Kaisen chapter 236



Manga authors use this guttering space to allow the audience to participate actively in the action. *Jujutsu Kaisen* author Gege Akutami did this guttering effect notoriously in his infamous chapters 235 and 236. To summarize, the chapter was the culmination of an epic 13- chapter serialized fight between two of the critical characters of his manga. He ended chapter 235 with the idea that the character Gojo Satoru won the fight, which delighted the audience of the manga as he was a fan- favorite character fighting antagonist Ryumen Sukuna. The chapter was released on September 10, 2023, and after a two-week break, the following chapter was released on September 24, 2023, with the first panel signaling Gojo waking up in a representation of the afterlife greeted by

his long-deceased friend Segeru Geto. The chapter was shocking and jarring for most of the audience because the guttering space was infinite. How did Gojo go from appearing to win the fight to being dead? The audience had to participate extensively as Gege Akutami only gave a brief description of how this happened, and the audience had to fill in many details and participate in a beloved character's death.

Gojo Satoru has a technique called "infinity" that creates an infinite amount of space between him and any object coming towards him. The metaphor Akutami uses is the Achilles and the tortoise paradox. No matter how fast or powerful an object comes to Gojo, the object will never arrive because there is an infinite amount of space constantly being created. This means Gojo is virtually untouchable, as attacks can never reach him. Because of this, the audience had to participate in finding out how Sukuna was able to touch and kill Gojo. This meant the audience had to figure that Sukuna now possessed an ability that allowed him to cut space itself as a plane of existence. The cut is not so much as to reach Gojo, but to cut the space Gojo resides in. The action is never shown, but fans of the series spent weeks online engaging in discourse on how the action occurred, thus creating a space for the chapter to live on in online public discourse long after the chapter ended. Much of the audience was upset with Gojo's death partly because they were the ones who participated in the action. This identification allowed discourse around the series to heighten, causing the series to trend on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, allowing the series to reach a wider audience.

Identification with Shonen protagonists occurs outside of appearance and action, as a major proponent of Shonen identification occurs in the virtues and behaviors the Shonen protagonists exhibit. Shonen protagonists are portrayed as hardworking, virtuous, compassionate, tenacious, and with an unbreakable sense of ideals. These values showcase the inherent pedagogy of Shonen, which is aimed at adolescent boys, as these are the traits Japan wants to foster in them. These values speak

to the universality of Shonen's identification, as these values are valued in almost every culture and society. Especially in the United States, where hard work and determination are critical to the mythos of the American Bootstraps narrative, Shonen's pedagogy allows American audiences to identify with the protagonists.

Characters like Goku from *Dragon Ball* go through a myriad of "training arcs" where Goku is training for countless chapters. Characters like Tanjiro from *Demon Slayer* are put into impossible situations, such as having their family killed by demons, to show an indomitable spirit of staying optimistic and overcoming. Luffy from *One Piece* exemplifies childlike joy and optimism when looking at difficult situations to stay true to his character and always do the "right" thing.

What all these characters exemplify are values Shonen authors have deemed essential and necessary for adolescents to develop and become valuable members of society. These values are universal and allow any audience to identify with them. To showcase an example of this, *Dragon Ball* is massive in South America, a culture that is massively different from Japan. When *Dragon Ball* author Akira Toriyama passed on March 1, 2024, funerals and celebrations were held for him in many South American countries. His passing sparked a great deal of online tributes worldwide to him as French President Emmanuel Macron also posted a signed picture of him with a heartfelt message. Mexico's love for *Dragon Ball* can be attributed to a combination of factors, including nostalgia, shared cultural values, the influence of the Latin American Spanish dub, a thriving fan community, and the integration of *Dragon Ball* into Mexican pop culture. What the tributes to Akira Toriyama represent is the shared identification audiences had of *Dragon Ball* as a multicultural text, containing identifiable traits and themes that can cross-cultural and language barriers.

Dramatism plays a massive role in the identification process, as according to Burke's theory on dramatism, people are motivated to behave in response to rhetorical situations, similarly to how

actors in a play would behave or perform. Burke viewed the world as a stage and the actors as the people who would parallel their actions according to that drama. This concept is prevalent in the manga, where there is a shared experience of learning from the didactic nature of manga and individuals wanting to perform in ways the Shonen protagonists would perform. Audiences not only identify with Shonen protagonists, they are motivated by them. They often want to look like them, train like them, and mold their actions according to them. There is an anime-to-gym pipeline on social media platforms where many individuals are motivated by anime/manga to start weight training to look like their favorite Shonen protagonists. There have not been any studies to track this trend, but this paper is a call to action for such a study. Many manga start with the protagonists as underdogs, and the authors give them constant obstacles to improve and find social acceptance.

Failure is an accepted part of life and an essential aspect of indication that occurs with the audience. In the manga series *Fullmetal Alchemist*, Hiromi Arakawa writes, "A lesson without pain is meaningless. That's because no one can gain without sacrificing something. But by enduring that pain and overcoming it, he shall obtain a powerful, unmatched heart. A fullmetal heart." Failure is inherent in Shonen storytelling as it serves as a motif for how Shonen authors want to communicate to the audience the importance of failure. Failure is something that is unavoidable and something all Shonen protagonists face on their journey of self-improvement. The Shonen series recontextualizes how failure is perceived as something that is crucial for self-improvement. Failure in the Shonen series marks an inflection point where characters not only learn from their mistakes, but the failure is essential for their growth. In *Fullmetal Alchemist*, failure occurs initially when brothers Edward and Alphonse Elric, in their grief, try to revive their mother from the dead using alchemy. They are unsuccessful in reviving their deceased mother, and their failure leads to Alphonse losing his body and Edward losing his right arm and left leg due to a concept in the series which is

called the law of equivalent exchange: anything received means you have to give something equal or more significant. This is a fictionalized version of the law of thermodynamics that states energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed. This law also represents a core tenet of Shonen, which is that there are no shortcuts.

**Figure 5: Edward promising to restore Alphonse's body**



In order for characters in Shonen to achieve their goals, they must reach them through perseverance. By misusing alchemy, Edward and Alphonse are punished for their failure. Still, the series communicates to the audience that they should not give in to failure but learn from it as the Eldric brothers endure this failure and pain and find a way to eventually become "whole" again, as Edward can recover his arm and leg. Alphonse can heal his body. Another

aspect of failure that is taught to the audience is the idea of not giving up when experiencing failure. Many of the protagonists reach their nadir when something traumatic has happened to them, but what is communicated to the audience is the ability of these characters to show resilience and overcome their failure. What these narratives of failure communicate to the audience is personal agency's role when it comes to failure. Many of the cases of failure that are presented in this Shonen differ in terms of agency that is associated with the cause of the failure, but it is up to the protagonist's personal agency to overcome this failure. Shonen believes that individual agency is the most critical aspect an individual can have as it is often up to the protagonist to work through any obstacle, hardship, or adversity to reach their goal.

**Figure 6: Half-page panel from page 6 of Chapter 4 of Naruto**



An identifying theme of manga is the emphasis on meritocracy, a core theme of most Shonen. Shonen manga has an inherent meritocracy, as the protagonists are often rewarded for their hard work and merit. Individuals are usually given their positions due to their skill and merit, as the strongest and most competent individuals tend to have the highest positions of



power in Shonen. In an almost formulaic pattern, many Shonen manga follow a trope where the protagonist starts as an underdog who is frequently a social outcast. Throughout the manga chapters, the protagonist steadily rises the ranks through upward mobility. This trope engenders the same ethos as American bootstrap mentality narratives of self-reliance and the personal responsibility of an individual to pick themselves up by their bootstraps and work hard to become successful.

Apropos of Figure 6 above, Naruto Uzimaki's goal in *Naruto* is to earn the title of Hokage, essentially the president of his village. Naruto believes if he becomes Hokage, he will gain social acceptance in his town, where the villagers hate him. At the start of the series, Naruto is a social outcast and orphan who has lost his parents in a previous shinobi conflict. The village's adults despise him because there is an ancient demon fox sealed inside his body that causes great suffering in the town, and the adults of the village hold resentment towards Naruto even though he was just a baby when the demon fox was sealed inside his body. Naruto is unaware of this fact early in the series and believes they despise him because he is unsuccessful as a shinobi and student, and in order to win over their affection, he needs to climb the shinobi hierarchy so they can finally acknowledge his existence. This is in relation to Figure 5, as the first person who acknowledges Naruto as a person instead of a demon-fox spirit is his ninja academy teacher, Iruka, who is won over by Naruto's perseverance and effort. This first experience of affection motivates Naruto and gives the reader a framework for life: if you work hard enough and persevere, you will earn the respect of others. This meritocratic ideal that one's character is strictly based on one's own accord is deeply flawed, however, as it does not account for race, sexuality, gender, and class.

Figure 7: Full-page panel from page 45 of chapter 1 of Naruto



Naruto's social hierarchy follows what is often highlighted in contemporary studies as the false promise of meritocracy. Meritocracy argues that social systems should function solely on merit, where people are rewarded primarily for their skill and intelligence. If one works hard enough, they will be able to climb the social ladder, and their skill and effort are the only things required of them. If they are successful, they ultimately fall short. One should be able to climb the meritocratic shinobi ladder in Naruto. Still, the success of the characters is limited based on what family they come from and who their parents are. The characters who earn high-status positions in Naruto are from elite shinobi families with inherited abilities.

It is easier for the shinobi of established families to earn high positions in the hierarchy because they are naturally born with more latent ability and skill than other less established families. This trend occurs throughout the series as the first 4 out of the 5 Hokage are descendants of established families. Most of the elite ninjas are also from established families. This pattern showcases an inconsistency of meritocracy in that it often turns into an aristocracy where the highest positions of power in society are held by a particular class or family of people, and these positions of power stay in that class of power. The shinobi at the top of the social hierarchy in Naruto stays the same throughout the series, even with the initial promise that anyone can climb it. By substituting ninja powers for wealth, we see how coming from a wealthy family gives an individual a huge advantage and a head start over someone from a lower-income family. This inconsistency strikes as one of the fundamental flaws of meritocracy in that everyone does not start from the same place.

With all this in mind, Naruto seeks to break this notion of aristocracy in the Shinobi world. Naruto should break this idea that your family matters about one's social status and that

an individual can rise from the bottom to the top strictly on hard work and effort, except Naruto is extremely gifted from birth. Not only does he come from an established family, where his father was the previous Hokage, but his mother also came from one of the founding clans, the Uzumaki clan. As previously mentioned, Naruto has a literal demon fox spirit that gives him a boundless chakra, the currency of a ninja's ability. In Naruto, ninjas can use abilities like shooting fire or spawning clones of themselves through chakra consumption. Because Naruto has endless amounts of chakra due to having the nine- tailed fox inside his body, he can perform abilities that no other shinobi can, like spawning hundreds of clones of himself at will or creating energy balls of wind that rival the process of splitting atoms in a hydrogen bomb. If that was not enough, towards the end of the manga, the readers discover that he is the reincarnation of one of the two sons of a God who created chakra.

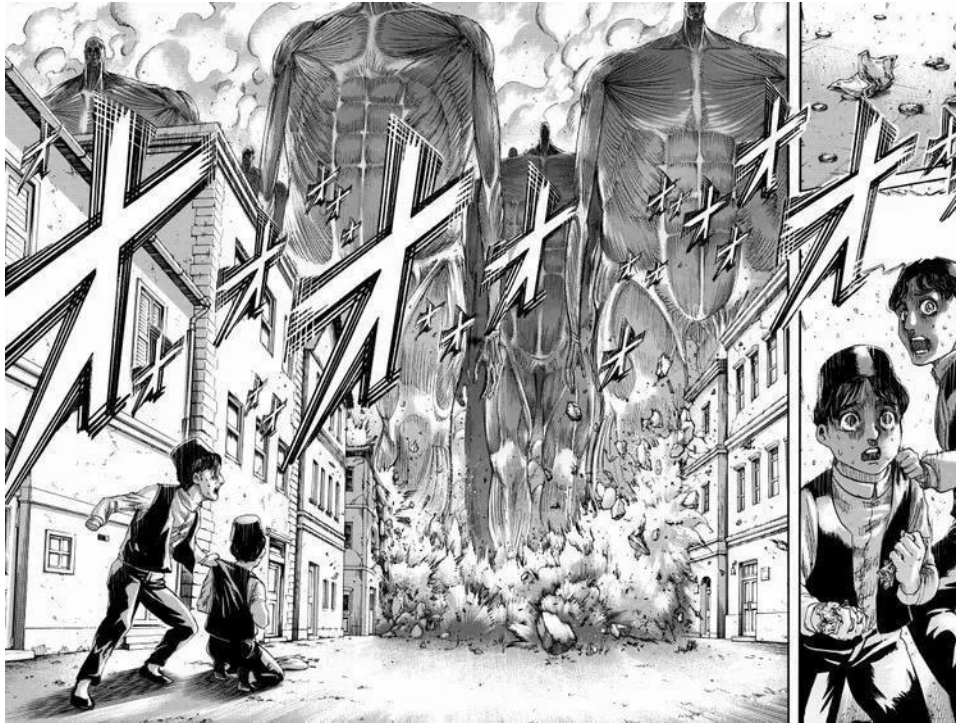
As readers find out throughout the series, Naruto is not precisely the depiction of an underdog who ties his bootstraps tightly and works hard to climb the social ladder strictly on hard work and effort. Sure, Naruto works diligently in the series, but he can climb the social hierarchy and eventually become Hokage with his latent gifts and abilities. This revelation highlights the inconsistencies in relating the theme of meritocracy to adolescents, and the question of intentionality comes into position. Is the author of Naruto, Masahi Kishimoto, slowly revealing that Naruto was gifted all along, critiquing hegemonic ideals of meritocracy? This paper argues this is usually the case for many Shonen manga. Many Shonen starts with the protagonists being underdogs who come from nothing but are revealed to be gifted in some way.

The multiculturalism and ability of manga to appeal to different populations has certain shortcomings however as terministic screens come to play a role in interpreting certain manga. Terministic screens, as defined by Kenneth Burke, are rhetorical devices and

language systems that can interpret how individuals perceive the world and respond to rhetorical situations. Since manga is exclusively created in Japan, certain aspects are lost in translation due to the terministic screens of Western audiences from Eastern audiences. There are transformations of interpreted meanings that occur when a localized series becomes globalized. To use the shonen *Attack on Titan* as an example, the series is about a world where humans are forced to live in enormous city fortresses that protect them from giant human-eating titans. The humans eventually fight back against the titans and realize they are being genocided by other warring nations for retribution. *Attack on Titan*'s narrative implies a rhetoric of retributive violence that is connected to the right-wing sentiment in Japan.

Ito, Rika, and Bisila write about how the messages in anime are interpreted in relation to Japanese contexts and how these interpretations are transformed as anime is imported into American contexts with *Attack on Titan*. They attributed the main protagonist, Eren's retributive violence, to be understood through the context of Japanese collective memory as a rejection of American control over Japan. Eren's experiences mirror the Japanese collective memory of World War II, with the loss of his mother representing the symbolic loss of the home that was Imperial Japan. A lot of this context and interpretation is lost, however, by Western audiences. This interpretation differs drastically from how *Attack on Titan* is interpreted in the West as it has been conflated as a Holocaust allegory comparing the genocide being committed on the Eldians to the Jewish people during World War II. The comparisons are not without merit, as the antagonists of the series wear gear that is similar to Nazi regalia, and the Eldians must wear armbands with stars on them to mark themselves.

**Figure 8: Eren running away from Titans in Attack on Titan**



The interpretations are taken even further as Amin points out that American far-right and white nationalist groups radicalized the show's interpretation. Far-right message boards on 4chan propagated interpretations of *Attack on Titan* as “a brilliant way of normalizing white supremacist ideology for a mainstream audience.” In a sense, the death of the author theory applies here as the meaning of the text is not determined by the author but by the audience, but there is an inherent danger in a medium like Shonen that is not heavily examined here culturally and academically. The bad faith interpretations do not exist only on right-wing message boards, as this message went to the United States House of Representatives. Representative Paul Gosar posted an edit of *Attack on Titan*, replacing the titans with migrants and political adversaries like Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and President Joe Biden. In place of the protagonists, right-wing leaders like former President Donald Trump and Gosar are presented, killing their political

enemies. Thus, *Attack on Titan's* opening was recontextualized and spread widely to a right-wing base, leading to a formal censure of Gosar and his removal from his committee assignments. With the global appeal of Shonen, examining and emphasizing context is crucial because it is essential to understanding fragmented texts, including Shonen, or they will be recontextualized and reinterpreted to promote false narratives such as white nationalism.

## CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

Shonen is more significant than ever, and it continues to grow at a rapid pace (Statista). The universality in Shonen's identification has allowed the initially intended audience of Japanese adolescent boys to reach an audience that was never considered achievable. Shonen's universality reaches people of all gender, race, sexuality, and culture. As mentioned in this paper, the most critical aspect of manga's growth was the form of comics as a space that allows identification to prosper. The character design's simplicity and abstraction, the audience's active participation, and the values the characters exaggerated and abstracted. All these factors led to Shonen creating a space that spoke to a universal audience. This paper briefly mentioned the shortcomings of this identification, as cultural context can be lost. Still, this paper proposes that more work and deconstruction be done to better understand Shonen as a form that is becoming canonized everywhere. As audiences are moving away from Western comics and towards Eastern manga, this paper proposes that more work be done in academia to understand this medium, which the collective knowledge on is still scratching the surface. This paper also showcases how Burke's theory on identification can be used as an effective tool of rhetorical analysis for other forms of texts and other forms of medium.



## REFERENCES

Paper 1:

- Araki, Satoshi. "Beyond 'Imagined Meritocracy': Distinguishing the Relative Power of Education and Skills in Intergenerational Inequality." *Sociology*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385231156093>.
- Armenta, Amada. "Racializing Crimmigration: Structural Racism, Colorblindness, and the Institutional Production of Immigrant Criminality." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2017, pp. 82–95.
- Bañales, et al. "The Impact of a Diversity Intervention on White College Students' Colour-Blind Racial Attitudes." *Whiteness and Education*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–18.
- Beeman, Angie. "Walk the Walk but Don't Talk the Talk: The Strategic Use of Color-Blind Ideology in an Interracial Social Movement Organization." *Sociological Forum*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2015, pp. 127–147.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists : Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Sixth edition., Sixth ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.
- BONILLA-SILVA, EDUARDO, and TYRONE A FORMAN. "“i Am Not a Racist but ...”:  
Mapping White College Students' Racial Ideology in the Usa
- Brown, Michael K. *Whitewashing Race : The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*. University of California Press, 2003.

- Chang, Jeff. “Asian Americans Spent Decades Seeking Fair Education. Then the Right Stole the Narrative.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 13 Apr. 2023, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/13/affirmative-action-asian-americans-us-universities](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/13/affirmative-action-asian-americans-us-universities).
- Civil, David, and Joseph J. Himsworth. “Introduction: Meritocracy in Perspective. The Rise of the Meritocracy 60 Years On.” *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 2, 2020, pp. 373–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12839>.
- DiTomaso, Nancy, et al. “White Attitudes Toward Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action.” *Critical Sociology*, vol. 37, no. 5, 2011, pp. 615–629.
- Harel Ben Shahr, Tammy. “Redefining Ability, Saving Educational Meritocracy.” *The Journal of Ethics : An International Philosophical Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2023, pp. 263–283.,
- Kwate, Naa Oyo A, and Ilan H Meyer. “The Myth of Meritocracy and African American Health.” *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 100, no. 10, 2010, pp. 1831–4.
- Littler, Jo. “Meritocracy As Plutocracy: The Marketising of 'Equality' Under Neoliberalism.” *New Formations*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2013, pp. 52–72., <https://doi.org/10.3898/NewF.80/81.03.2013>.
- Littler, Jo. *Against Meritocracy : Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility*. Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2017, <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/gdcebookspublic.2020719535>.
- Mijs, Jonathan JB, and Mike Savage. “Meritocracy, Elitism and Inequality.”

The Political Quarterly, vol. 91, no. 2, pp. 397–404,  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12828>.

Pavel, Sonia Maria. “Two Concepts of Meritocracy: Telic and Procedural.”  
Journal of Political Ideologies, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 26–41,  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.1990546>.

Rabii, Watoii. “Global Appeal: Colorblindness, Neoliberalism, and  
Neighborhood Branding.” Critical Sociology, 2023,  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205221146268>.

Rouse, Carolyn Moxley. “Liberal Bias: The New ‘Reverse Racism’ in the  
Trump Era.” American Anthropologist, vol. 121, no. 1, 2019, pp. 172–  
176., <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13187>.

Shih, Kristy Y, et al. “Impacts of the Model Minority Myth on Asian American  
Individuals and Families: Social Justice and Critical Race Feminist  
Perspectives.” Journal of Family Theory & Review, vol. 11, no. 3, 2019,  
pp. 412–428.

Stonecash, J M. “Liberal White Supremacy: How Progressives Silence Racial  
and Class Oppression.” Choice, vol. 60, no. 8, 2023, pp. 832–832.

Tašner, Veronika, and Slavko Gaber. “Is It Time for a New Meritocracy?”  
Theory and Research in Education, vol. 20, no. 2, 2022, pp. 182–92,  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14778785221113619>.

Taussig, Doron. What We Mean by the American Dream : Stories We Tell About  
Meritocracy.

ILR press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2021,

<http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=62254>

67.

Tran, Hoang Vu. "Teaching Affirmative Action in the Classroom: Locating Justice and Interrogating Meritocracy." *Critical Questions in Education*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2020, pp. 101–

18.

Ward, LaWanda W. M. "Radical Affirmative Action: A Call to Address Hegemonic Racialized Themes in U.s. Higher Education Race-Conscious Admissions Legal Discourse." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (Qse)*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2021, pp. 315– 329.

Winton, Sue, and Lauren Jervis. "Beyond Rhetoric: How Context Influences Education Policy Advocates' Success." *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, vol. 14, no. 7, 2019.

Wu, Ellen. "Asian Americans Helped Build Affirmative Action. What Happened?" *Slate*

Magazine, Slate, 2 Nov. 2022, slate.com/human-interest/2022/11/affirmative-action-proportionality-history-activism.html.

#### Paper 2 References

Ambrester, Roy. "Identification Within: Kenneth Burke's View of the Unconscious."

*Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1974, pp. 205–16.

*Bodnar, John E. The "Good War" in American Memory. Johns Hopkins*

*University Press, 2010, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/11161084>.*

Dentsu Inc. "The Numbers Speak for Themselves! Anime Is Killer Content for Gen Z - Showcase."

*DENTSU INC.*,

[www.dentsu.co.jp/en/showcase/anime\\_is\\_killer\\_content.html#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20anime%20manga,massive%20industry%20by%20any%20measure](http://www.dentsu.co.jp/en/showcase/anime_is_killer_content.html#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20anime%20manga,massive%20industry%20by%20any%20measure).

Diaz Pino, Camilo. "Weaponizing Collective Energy: Dragon Ball Z in the Anti-Neoliberal Chilean Protest Movement." *Popular Communication*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2019, pp. 202–218

Greene, Barbara. "Re-envisioning the Dark Valley and the decline of the Peace State." *The Representation of Japanese Politics in Manga*, 29 Oct. 2020, pp. 27–45, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003007180-2>.

Hanchey, Jenna N., and Peter R. Jensen. "Organizational Rhetoric as Subjectification."

*Management Communication Quarterly : McQ*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 261– 87,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/08933189211043253>.

Heylen, A. (2013). Reading history and political illustration in taiwan popular culture. *Archiv Orientalni*, 81(3), 411-0\_3,625.