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[redacted]: A Lesson in Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Food Accessibility

Food insecurity – an inability to access nutritious food on a consistent basis – continues to be an issue that immigrants and refugees are at risk of experiencing. As an individual who was raised in an immigrant household that was food insecure for much of my childhood – my guardians worked long hours that spared little time to prepare healthy meals in addition to not having enough leftover income to afford fresh produce itself –, I feel that I can attest to how healthy food can be a difficult need to attain for working-class populations with a foreign-born background. My [redacted] still struggles with food insecurity and is dependent on food stamps to ensure there is an at least filling meal on the table at the end of each day. However, even for immigrants and refugees who can qualify for such welfare (as not all can), food stamps alone may be inadequate to ensure food security; as I hope to demonstrate through an analysis of a local community garden, mutual aid – particularly in organizations founded *by* community members *for* community members – may serve as an efficient way to uplift such communities that are subject to systemic inequities by dint of organized abandonment. Such organizations that emerge in response to a community's abandonment by the state are emblematic of a new analytic regarding how immigrants' and refugees' lived experiences – of living in both their homelands and in the US – may offer insight into how to effectively devise and maintain strong social programs. By celebrating their cultures, agency, and expressing and sharing their critiques of US political institutions, immigrants and/or those of refugee status challenge the crisis-rescue-gratitude narrative unceremoniously assigned to them.

[redacted] is a community garden located in the [redacted] neighborhood of San Diego, California, that is most exemplary of how immigrants and refugees can collectively overcome the adverse conditions – like food insecurity and unstable employment – that they face upon settling in the US. Established in 20XX by Somali Bantu refugees with the aid of the [redacted],[1] the garden promotes food security for neighborhood residents, many of whom "live at or below the federal poverty line."[2] The garden encompasses 89 plots on 2.3 acres of land,[3] and about half of the families who the garden serves are hispanic though the farmers come from all throughout the world including from Africa and Southeast Asia.[4] Tending to the garden is a community-building activity as it unites all farmers regardless of language and culture; it also allows for farmers to reconnect with their homelands as the selection of grown crops are often used in cultural dishes or in traditional medicine. Additionally, much of the produce grown is sold in the [redacted] Farmers' market and provides income for farmers and, in line with its goal to offer economic assistance, allows for residents to exchange food stamps for tokens that can be used to purchase the fresh produce.[5]

Akin to the new analytic proposed in *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies,*[6] the garden is a comfortable space that encourages close friendships especially among the refugee farmers who share their insight with one another regarding their displacement and what they feel caused it, as well as the difficulties in adjusting to life in the US and what they wish were different.[7] Their candid observations and insight on what it is like to be a refugee in

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[1] Danemann, Damian. "[redacted] community garden helps immigrants and refugees adapt," *San Diego Union-Tribune.* 2022. https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/journalism-scholars/story/2022-07-14/ -helps-immigrants-and-refugees-adapt
[2] Brown, Patricia Leigh. "When the Uprooted Put Down Roots," *New York Times.* 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/10/us/refugees-in-united-states-take-up-farming.html?smid=url-share
[3] https://www.cityheightscdc.org/new-roots-garden
[4] Danemann, Damian. "[redacted] community garden helps immigrants and refugees adapt"
[5] Brown, Patricia Leigh. "When the Uprooted Put Down Roots"
[6] Espiritu, Yen Le., et al. Departures : an Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies. 1st ed., University of California Press, 2022. pp. 11
[7] Gorman, Anna. "In San Diego, fertile ground for the seeds of understanding," *Los Angeles Times.* 2010. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-jan-15-la-me-farm15-2010jan15-story.html

the US evince that it is a circumstance not without its own misfortune. These refugees and immigrants who make up the [redacted] community do not owe gratitude to the US when, upon their arrival and purported inclusion into the nation-state, they become subject to organized abandonment.[8]

As Ruth W. Gilmore notes in *What is to be Done,* public social services continuously lose funding and are privatized through structural adjustment of capital that contributes to the systemic inequity that communities of color are especially vulnerable to;[9] half of all immigrant households alone struggle with food insecurity.[10] Many undocumented immigrants and even immigrants with work visas in California cannot qualify for welfare programs, like CalFresh, either.[11] To make up for what the state does not provide, the [redacted] community has created their own mutual aid organization ([redacted]) that is informed by their own critiques of current existing welfare programs; this also counteracts the crisis-rescue-gratitude narrative that popular media frequently attaches to them. As one [redacted] farmer remarks in an interview with the NYT, "everyone was dreaming to come to the U.S.A, but they were not happy … people were … missing activity, community"; to ameliorate the inchoate disillusionment and isolation that some [redacted] residents experienced, [redacted] has become "the hub of refugee life."[12] Even beyond its practical goal of increasing food accessibility and availability, [redacted] provides a charitable ethos that immigrants and refugees might value as a part of their culture. During a political and ideological epoch of neoliberalism in contemporary American society that stresses individualism, mutual aid organizations such as

[8] Introduction and selections from Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversations on Collective Action and Radical Thought. Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah, eds. Verso, 2022. pp. 173
[9] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "What Is to Be Done?" American Quarterly, June 2011, Vol. 63, No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 251
[10] https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2022/06/california-food-assistance/
[11] https://www.getcalfresh.org/en/immigrants
[12] Brown, Patricia Leigh. "When the Uprooted Put Down Roots"

these are critical to sustaining the collective wellbeing of communities who are at risk of being unable to attain their basic needs.

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An Oral History of Immigration & Labor: What Follows from American Imperialism

The status of having valid US citizenship or residency and the process to attain such is the locus through which American imperialism continues to haunt Asian immigrants who by dint of American neocolonialism were compelled to emigrate in the first place. These same Asian immigrants may be drawn to certain opportunities — particularly in STEM-related industries and military recruitment — and whose motivations may be misconstrued so as to reinforce the model minority myth that is exacerbated by neoliberal ideology. Likewise, the model minority myth misleadingly promulgates the Nation of Immigrants narrative that subsequently serves to buttress public belief in American Exceptionalism. These myriad mythologies are all emblematic of a gross misrepresentation of immigrant realities and Asian American histories; they neglect to consider *why* some Asian immigrants (and Asian Americans) actually tend to work within specific industries or "niches." In reality, immigrants may feel incentivized to work within certain industries because 1) these can provide a quicker path to citizenship and 2) there is an already existing community of fellow immigrants in such fields, which suggests potential for community and additional occupational opportunity itself. Participation in an occupational niche is not tantamount to a stereotypical embodiment of the model minority myth. A close examination of the lived experiences of Asian immigrants will evince a tentative nexus between STEM professions and citizenship primarily as a consequence of American imperialism. Community building — as well as a sense of cultural belonging extrapolated from such — is critical to challenging the hardships, such as the potential exclusion in social environments or labor exploitation, that persist with existing as an Asian person in the United States.

[redacted] is a [redacted]-year-old Filipino young woman who lives in [redacted]. She plans to become a nurse someday and currently commutes to [redacted] for work at a dermatology clinic owned by a relative. Through a "personal connection" related to occupation, [redacted] and her [redacted] have been living in the United States since [redacted] of 20XX. While her mother and grandparents still reside in the Philippines, she has cousins who live in the US that also came through occupation and work in healthcare, as well as some who serve in the US Navy and others in the Air Forces. After already residing in [redacted] for almost [redacted] years – the first few of which were spent without a SSN –, [redacted] is now in the process of getting her green card. As with many other Asian immigrants dating back to the early and mid-20th century, the path to having lawful permanent residency – much less full US citizenship – has been long.

The US acquired the Philippines in 1898 with the end of the Spanish-American war. Filipinos then fought for self-rule against the Americans in the Philippine-American War until – unofficially – 1912. While still being socially treated as second-class citizens, Filipinos were considered colonial subjects and therefore US nationals. This granted Filipinos the ability to visit the US freely in contrast to other Asian groups who, beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act and culminating in the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, were barred from immigrating to the US on the basis of being racially ineligible for citizenship. However, their status of being a US national vanished with the Tydings-McDuffie Act that passed in 1934 and turned the Philippines into a commonwealth. The act barred Filipino laborers from being able to legally immigrate to the US as consistent with the 'era of exclusion' for Asian immigrants broadly. Yet, even after the Philippines secured independence in 1946, the US retained influence in the region through various unequal treaties such as their military base agreements. Any destitution that Filipinos

may have been subject to due to decades of deliberate underdevelopment per American neocolonialism is beneficial to American employers who could then encourage a population of people with any needed skills to migrate in search of work even under exploitative conditions.

[redacted] was born in [redacted] in the Philippines that, while less urban and internationally well-known than cities such as Manila, is comparatively more technologically advanced than its nearby municipalities. Although [redacted] fondly recalls her life in the Philippines as having been more thrilling, she admits that it was "full of financial worries and hardships." She attributes much of the pecuniary instability she faced to the weak purchasing power of the Philippine peso; a $100 expense in USD would require about a month of work in the Philippines. The weak purchasing power is tethered to American imperialism and contemporary neocolonialism in the region that [redacted] avers has had a "stronger impact in recent years" compared to former imperial powers like Spain and Japan. As with American imperialism itself which according to Simeon Man "emerges historically from positions of weakness," the underdevelopment of the Philippines was conducive to needed growth for the US economy and profit for American businesses.[1] The impoverishment which many Filipinos face is inextricable from the creation of an underappreciated labor force as reified through the mass recruitment of Filipinos in American healthcare, pertinent to [redacted] life with her having relatives specifically in the field as well with her goal of becoming a nurse herself.

Since the time of the Migrant Labor System typical of the late 19th and early 20th century when Asian migrants' "value was derived from their ability to extract profit,"[2] Asian immigrants have continued to be called upon to reduce labor shortages in the United States. During World War II, Asian American and Filipino women in particular became nursing aids for

[1] Simeon Man, "Anti-Asian violence and US imperialism," *Race & Class*, 62(2), 24–33.
[2] Man, "Anti-Asian violence and US imperialism," 24–33.

soldiers while Filipino men began to enlist in the army as a result of the 1941 Selective Training and Services Act; previously, they could not enlist due to lack of US citizenship.[3] WWII offered many new occupational opportunities either through military recruitment itself or through the military's sine qua non health industry that would both eventually become paths to citizenship. The model minority myth that is known today began to circulate, in its most rudimentary form akin to a stereotype, through these two professions. As detailed in Catherine Choy's *Asian American Histories of the United States,* Filipinos who enlisted in the US army "became brothers in arms" through an apparent demonstration of American patriotism[4]. Due to the necessity of their labor – including the role of Filipino nurses – as well as the inception of the model minority myth, the passage of the Luce-Celler Act of 1946 allowed for Filipinos to immigrate and become citizens through naturalization. The later passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 set seven preference categories for legal immigration based on either occupation or family reunification. Such policy, says Choy, "[facilitates] the immigration of Filipino female medical professionals, most notably nurses, to alleviate critical shortages."[5] For Filipinos who do not have immediate family members in the US, the ability to immigrate and attain citizenship generally becomes dependent upon work in specialized occupational fields like healthcare so long as their skills are in-demand.

Not only in her hopes to enter the nursing industry does [redacted] – and her family – reflect a continuity of relying on similar pretense to immigrate as fellow Filipino immigrants did in 40s and 60s; she hopes to be able to enlist in the Air Forces for affordable college tuition. While Filipino veterans in the 40s were not necessarily rejected as recipients to the GI bill, they

[3] Catherine Choy, *Asian American Histories of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2022), 124
[4] Choy, *Asian American Histories of the United States*, 129
[5] Choy, 77

were barred from purchasing property in white neighborhoods.[6] They were not often granted full veteran benefits and various legal attempts to reconcile this throughout the past three decades has led to contradictions between what Filipino veterans are promised in return for their service and what they actually receive. It was only with the passage of an Immigration Act in 1990 that allowed for Filipino veterans from WWII to become citizens at all.[7] Military recruitment is a precarious method to citizenship; though it can lead to naturalization, a green card is required to enlist which can take time to acquire. For [redacted], this means she is unable to enlist while she waits for her green card process to be completed. This prolongment develops into frustration: joining the military force of a country that exploits her own is an ethically-contentious decision that she wrestles with. She opts to enlist in order to assist her other family members in the Philippines – as well to support her home country's economy itself – through remittances. To feel as if she must prove loyalty to the US only heightens her vexation when the US government and military has a precedent of acting at the expense of Filipinos themselves. Regardless, college tuition, without its diminution through military benefits, is an expense she and her family cannot afford without a massive accruement of debt. As she will need to serve, attend classes, and work, [redacted] already expects an idiosyncratic college experience but looks forward to it nevertheless for what social life it can provide. This circumstance of having to juggle between work and military service just to afford college tuition is a consequence of the "neoliberal era" that is denoted by the "slashing and privatizing [of] public service"[8].

As another essential element to neoliberalism beside economic policy, neoliberal ideology hinges on a purported ideal of meritocracy in which an individual's success is wholly

[6] Choy, 130
[7] Choy, 132
[8] Man, "Anti-Asian Violence and US Imperialism," 24-33

due to their hard work and, through their dedication, this individual may achieve whatever they please. The normative assumption is that they wish to actualize the 'American Dream' or that in some way the primary goal of hard work is strictly material and consumerist; it does not consider the experiences of those whose salient goal is to be a part of a community and to live just slightly more comfortably. It also does not consider the experiences of those who work hard to no fruition even in relation to material desires. The model minority myth of today reflects neoliberal ideology, in which Asian immigrants who work in STEM professions are taken to be exemplary of meritocracy.[9] Yet, the inconsistencies woven into Asian immigrant histories – how their skills, hard work, or credentials do not necessarily translate into professional jobs upon immigration – evince that the system of "meritocracy" which neoliberal ideology and by extension the model minority myth purport to encapsulate is illusory. Such inconsistencies also contradict the Nation of Immigrants narrative – which the model minority myth alone suggests in that it erases the socioeconomic difference among Asian Americans and immigrants to assume an ubiquitous experience – in that they indicate that the 'land of opportunity' may not always be so promising for everyone. Further, as another key component to the model minority myth, the implicit insinuation that Asian immigrants are compliant workers is utterly unfounded. It negates the history of Filipinos who worked in agriculture ("manongs") throughout the early and mid 20th century that, despite the grueling labor and incontrovertibly hard work, were still perpetually burdened with low wages. These migrant workers were not obsequious to their exploitation as can be explicitly shown through the infrapolitics of taxi dance halls, to the Delano Grape Strike of the 60s.[10] These Filipinos are, if even acknowledged, not perceived as having been a 'model minority' because their working-class status and often impoverished living conditions, in

[9] Choy, 78
[10] Choy, 4

concurrence with their resistance, counteract neoliberal ideals of meritocracy. The application of the 'model minority' onto some Asian workers but not others is intended to obfuscate evidence of flaws within neoliberal ideology and core narratives that propagate American Exceptionalism. The myth largely persists in which the presence of some Asian Americans and Asian immigrants in STEM professions are perceived as the 'model minority' under the assumption that they, as a racial group, are naturally skilled in such fields and inclined towards 'success.'[11]

[redacted] has grown up accustomed to a more communal social milieu that is contrary to the individualistic ethos that defines American culture. She has expressed a former interest in law as a profession but ultimately has chosen to focus on nursing. It is not any 'natural' aptitude in math and science that motivates her towards nursing – math was the subject she struggled with the most in high school –, but it is the possibility of having a camaraderie with other Filipinos, as well as to continue to work alongside her cousins, that draws her to that career; a sense of belonging is an important value for [redacted]. Having spent much of the past 4 years at a high school with a majority-minority population and many other first-generation Asian peers in an otherwise foreign environment, she became acquainted with a panethnic Asian community. Such laid a foundation for friendships initially based both on similar struggles relating to documentation/citizenship and cultural familiarity. Like many students from the 60s when these sort of panethnic Asian communities began to emerge over unifying terms like 'Asian American,' [redacted] hopes to continue to form such friendships when she eventually attends college. The school she ideally wishes to attend is [redacted], that has strong pre-health programs in addition to a thriving Asian community on and off campus. Asian Americans and Asian immigrants have always transgressed the expectation of individualism; their

[11] Choy, 78

organizing into a strong community on the basis of solidarity is also a necessity when there are still institutional and structural forces against them in critical areas of American society.

Asian immigrants continue to face exploitative conditions in the healthcare industry. Despite being only about 4% of total nurses in the U.S, Filipinos represented 31.5% of COVID-19 related deaths in nurses[12]; their contribution as front-line workers to protecting Americans from the illness has been largely understated with the rise of anti-Asian violence. Additionally, even in their own government-subsidized small businesses, Filipino women are expected to provide optimal care on extremely tight budgets.[13] To mitigate such difficulties, relatives may want or need to work together in order to ease overall work demand and to pull resources together for funding — like how [redacted] and her cousins all support one another — which may also proffer the possibility of immigration to the US through means of either family reunification or occupation sponsorship. [redacted] decision to enter this healthcare niche like many of her relatives is one that was influenced by decades of community building and immigration law; it is not a reflection of the 'model minority' myth having any sensible empirical weight.

As a myth contingent on the erasure of the full range of Asian Americans' and immigrants' lived experiences, it is impossible for any group to ever perfectly emulate the behavior that the model minority myth describes. The myth itself brings discomfort to [redacted] as it erases her and her family's own history. When anti-Asian hate is as prevalent as it is now, there is a moral imperative to affirm Asian Americans' and immigrants' agency which the model minority myth dangerously disregards. Though [redacted] is but one woman living amidst the morass of American society, a recount of her lived experience exposes what mainstream American history forgets; [redacted] struggles are the continued struggles of her Asian

[12] Choy, 2
[13] Choy, 77

forefathers to yearn for and achieve the collective freedom to live and exist without being subject to racial division and discrimination that produces unjust legal and social constraint.

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The Youth Obedient to the Wave

Inspired by real life events, The Wave (1981) chronicles the descent of an ordinary high school class into a disciplined and egregiously obedient student body through the gradual guidance and instruction offered by their teacher, Mr. Ross, who leads the nascent community. The film suggests that the power of the situation vis-à-vis the establishment of a group founded on some sort of normative principle(s) will conclude in a requisite –and progressively severe and eventually violent– exclusion of outside members. The founding of such a community in which homogeneity is enforced by its followers (in-group members) is conducive to the perpetuation of injustice against a purported 'other' (out-group members) or dissidents of the predominant ideology within the relevant society. Power, according to Mr. Ross, is explicitly achieved through discipline. The Wave proposes that, first, it does not take much for an individual to become enthralled with an ideology and become complicit to what violence it ordains, if not directly the perpetrator of such violence itself, as people will naturally strive for proximity to power to ensure personal success. Secondly, the danger that this community –via a tyrannical social order– will impose functions through the usurpation of individual freedom in favor of (potentially nefarious) group will. To prohibit this development that engenders such situations in which even genocide or other extreme injustice may be ignored, the film contends that it is imperative for individuals to critically evaluate what they emulate and are asked to obey, as even the simplest forms of discipline can result in the most wicked of acts to be performed and permitted.

The conformist community of the Wave which Mr. Ross curated in his classroom is strongly reminiscent of what John Stuart Mill called the 'tyranny of social opinion' as students are enticed to obey exactly what is asked of them while they denounce any speculation or

criticism that such severe obedience is potentially harmful. In correspondence with James Waller's theory that the will to harm outsiders occurs upon a technique of gradual brutality (Waller 20), the creation of the Wave was subtle as it merely began with the instruction that students ought to sit properly. Through the aggregation of minutiae imposed by Mr. Ross, the students' demonstration of discipline graduated from the adherence to proper posture to then the appropriate 'procedure' to questions and answers. This led into the enthusiastic recital of a motto, symbol, and salute to categorize the class as the Wave. Even the asocial student –Robert, the 'class freak'– becomes quickly enamored with the wave's uniformity and he is even one of the first to replicate such tailored behavior (like proper posture) while outside of the classroom because he feels grateful for what opportunity of community and power that the situation proffers. He also fit wells (though not perfectly apt) with Anne Applebaum's label of a 'voluntary collaborator' who "would, in the normal course of events, never have made successful careers" (Applebaum 4) or, in this case, amicable relationships with peers. Such may be why students like Robert accepted the Wave without critical evaluation. Thus, this particular tyranny of social opinion is in and of itself contingent upon a perception that the Wave will achieve some type of great thing in which there is benefit to be acquired, even if this benefit may solely mean solidarity with other un-thinking students. It appeals to the desire for acceptance. An individual of the Wave is, ideally, not to be judged by fellow members and this is what allows for power over, at the very least, the out-group/non-wave members.

To obey the Wave is to ensure self-preservation as the repetitious demands initially ushered by Mr. Ross and later expected by peers alike (as any dissenters become subject to school fights) are difficult to oppose without risk and –as Bettelheim would say– "the power which is so strong also exercises a tremendous appeal-after all" (Bettelheim 93). It is safer for

students to simply follow through with what the ideology asks of them no matter if the facade of being well-intentioned is evidently questionable by how its dissidents are cruelly dealt with. Students who oppose the Wave and its attempts at behavior modulation are subject to such hostility from its members that the mode and fear of punishment imbricates with Foucault's panoptic model and Plato's allegory of the cave. During different periods of the film, student Laurie exemplifies both concepts through her personal experience with the Wave as a former diligent member to eventual critic who becomes the victim of various threats and taunts from peers. Laurie – like an individual confined to the cave (Plato 2) – had been an unthinking member of the Wave as well who, in retort to her mother's concern, lauded its emergence and 'positive energy.' She, however, is transformed into the individual who wanders outside the cave and attempts to return with information about the true world when she tells David that she will not attend the meeting for new Wave recruits. David cannot fathom her response; he chastises her lack of conformity while he claims that she is just bitter because she is no longer the most 'successful' student since every student is now equally important. When Laurie publishes her article which inveighs against the wave, she is mocked with 'enemy' written over her locker and pushed by David after he, along with other members, insist that she must be stopped for the propagation of 'lies' against the Wave. The 'cavemen' (Plato 6) would rather hurt Laurie than have their belief be contested. Additionally, later when David and Laurie are reunited as foes of the Wave, they tell Mr. Ross that it has become difficult for students to speak their true mind as they can never be sure who secretly listens. Together, their depiction of the Wave's consequences are evocative of the panoptic model as the blatant non-member and wave member who actually disagrees with its principles cannot freely express their disapproval because they are uncertain as to who (as the figurative prison guard) will punish them for their opinion. Complicity becomes a

requisite sacrifice to protect an individual's own livelihood as neither wishes to pique suspicion and become an ostracized victim of the Wave's inordinate social power.

Though the overall actions of the in-group Wave students simulates extraordinary groupthink, they concomitantly betray the condition of deferred responsibility that Milgram posits in which a perpetrator is "alienated from [their] own actions" (Milgram 8). The Wave members do, at times, feel that the success of the movement is reliant upon their individual selves, such as when Mr. Ross tells his class that a "record turnout" of the youth program announcement is a matter of each student's "personal responsibility." The students want to believe that they specifically, as a person, contribute to something great. It is this partial proximity to power (through membership of an authoritative group) that allures students to obey the wave, such as with David who argued that Laurie was only critical of the Wave because it meant she was no longer one of the best students in class. The Wave also contrasts with Milgram's idea that "the rebellious actions of others severely undermines authority" (Milgram 8), as Laurie's article was ineffective in encouraging Wave members to doubt the ideology they were subsumed in. Why some students like Laurie –a former dedicated Wave student– were able to recognize what danger the Wave proposed is because of a gradual recognition that occurred in which, as Applebaum states, "the choice to become a dissident can easily be the result of a number of small decisions that you take" (Applebaum 21). In Laurie's case, her role as a dissident began with her decision to not join the recruitment meeting. Further, David's dissidence which bloomed from the direct violation of a personal value– Laurie's happiness and safety– may suggest that individuality may be recovered after a student becomes cognizant of injustice that resonates on a personal basis that then facilitates critical thinking between the ideology and personal belief.

The proclivity for complicity to injustice to gradually occur through manipulation ought not imply that culpability is impossible to assign. The Wave is not in favor of the thesis that perpetrators of injustice are “only a pawn in [a] game” (Dylan 1). Every member who blindly follows with the crowd can eventually recover their sense of independence and free-will just as Laurie and David managed to but perhaps –for students who have already forgotten their former values that are independent of groupthink– it will take a blatant confrontation or unappealing comparison to realize what hypocrisy underlies their community. Just as Applebaum speculates, “the calculus of conformism will begin to shift" (Applebaum 24) if there is no longer any social benefit to discipline and complicity with a particular regime. It is incredibly improbable that, after it is clear that the Wave is synonymous with the Hitler Youth, any student still devoted to the Wave would be respected by peers. Students like Robert are so ashamed that they can only cry once they become aware of their own capacity for cruelty, as they realize that they are not innately special or immune to evil regimes like the Nazis. The desire for acceptance –and the extent of it achieved being an enviable measure of success– may perhaps explain some of the students’ faithfulness to the Wave. However, this desperation for commonality is a foolish reason to permit injustice as it is not like community can only exist under a condition in which individuality is impermissible; would such not suggest that American patriotism itself can never truly live up to its own ideal of a land united with free people? These young students – and perhaps it is relevant to recall that the film is based on a real American high school incident – were selfishly blinded by the power bestowed to them that rendered them temporarily immune from bullies so long as they could act as the bully. It is, after all, as Mr. Ross reminds the audience: “we are all responsible for our own actions.”

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