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The Dreams and Nightmares of American Political Thought

POLS 090

Professor Matthews

### Final Exam

#### I. Identification

##### A. The clockworks and the politics of time

Time - the primary status quo which controls everyone's lives. From a 9-5 workday to the impending arrival of death, the concept of time crams experience into a limited frame. In Tom Robbins', "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues", time is analyzed for its detrimental realities through the introduction of the Clock People. Following Mother Nature's outlash of discomfort in 1906, San Francisco's residents fled to the hills, watching the city become obliterated. Immediately, plans for reconstruction commenced. Different tribes of Native Americans watched in horror, bewildered by the people's obliviousness. Earth herself had spoken out against their materialism, giving them a chance to change the principle of their beings, only to be ignored. Aware of this pernicious nature, the indigenous peoples gathered and began their formation of the clockworks. To begin explaining the clockworks, the concept of time must first be analyzed.

What more is time than appointed numbers on a clock? Ask an executive and they will offer that time is money, and time wasted is less profit made. Ask a five-year-old about time and they may offer a vague schedule of when they eat, sleep, and what they'll be when they grow up - the common factor can be reduced to a timeline. The bounds of time have created a standard of what needs to be experienced before Death's inevitable arrival. How can one live with the Earth

and wallow in the gift to her inhabitants when time restricts the fullest amount of ephemeral being?

The deconstruction of time will come catastrophically, wiping out the concept of time and entering the world into the Eternal Joy. The Clock People, living in a burrow among thirteen families, recognize that Earth will eventually place her plan among the people and thus they created the clockworks. A system of two ‘clocks’, the clockworks serve to notify the Clock People of her arrival. The first clock measures ‘time’; however, it does not function like a analog clock and does not conform to the standard twenty-four hour day. Instead, it is an hourglass filled with acorns, flipped every thirteen hours to represent humanities construct of time. The second clock isn’t a clock at all, but rather a pool of water in which a rare breed of catfish resides, used to alarm to the Clock People of when Earth is going to reach her level of utmost discomfort and destroy time. The commentary which is present reads, “[...] It is as if the soul of the continent is weeping. [...] It weeps for the black people who think like white people. It weeps for the Indians who think like settlers. It weeps for the children who think like adults. It weeps for the free who think like prisoners. Most of all, it weeps for the cowgirls who think like cowboys” (215). Once the Earth speaks up against these constructs, the first clock will break and furthermore the end of time will arrive.

Just like any organized practice, the Clock People are flawed. As the Chink says, “The Clock People waiting for the Eternity of Joy was virtually identical to the Christians waiting for the Second Coming” (Robbins, 201). The clockworks were built in anticipation and around an assumption. Nevertheless, through the Clock People and their clockworks, discourse is sparked

regarding the aforementioned politics of time and oppressive nature of humanity's utilization of the construct.

### B. Eve's and Bailey's Cafe

While both Bailey's Cafe and Eve's serve as significant settings in Gloria Naylor's, "Bailey's Cafe", their metaphorical significance is far greater than their tangible locations. Filled with magical realism, Bailey's Cafe and Eve's house serve as commentary on the transitional phases of life and the nature of struggle. In the beginning of the novel, the reader is led to believe that Bailey's Cafe is an actual restaurant set in New York City, but as the story progresses, it becomes unclear where the location resides. The reader is prompted to question whether it's in NYC, San Francisco, Chicago, and eventually, if it exists at all. Don't be fooled, however; Bailey's Cafe is a very real place. It serves as a place of refuge to those in need. It allows them to either have a sense of stability (the weekday customers) or take control of their own choices (the weekend customers). Bailey's Cafe itself represents the state of human nature. The reader is introduced to many different characters derived from diverse backgrounds, concluding that Bailey's Cafe serves as a halfway house, offering a place of sanction to those in need. Though, the most pressing metaphor in this work of magical realism can be found (or rather, not found), at the back door of the cafe. The void. Open the backdoor to Bailey's Cafe and there will be nothing, it will be the edge of the universe. However, the interesting characteristic about emptiness is it can be made into anything that the observer wishes to view or experience. As customers enter Bailey's Cafe, they are usually in some sort of distress, an uncertain point of their life. Looking into the void is telling of their nature, a look into their deepest desires and a

chance to obtain their goals. However, if a person does not have the utmost desire to change an aspect of their lives, the void will just be a void - nothing more and nothing less. They will look out to the edge of the universe and see nothing, there is no hope.

Eve's house then serves as an expansion to this concept of the void. Eve's purpose is to help those who wish to help themselves. A good example can be seen through the character, Jesse Bell. Abandoned by her loved ones and addicted to crack cocaine, Jesse arrives at Bailey's Cafe looking for Eve's address. However, Eve only comes when she is directly asked for. Immediately upon seeing Jesse, it is obvious that this woman is struggling, however Eve refuses to help those who have no real desire to help themselves. Eve directs Jesse to the backdoor of Bailey's Cafe and Jesse is terrified - terrified of falling into oblivion, terrified of facing her past, terrified of what she has become. When Jesse has a vision of her childhood while staring over the edge of the universe, Eve sees that Jesse is capable of helping herself, and allows Jesse to stay at her house. However, Eve's house is not a sanctuary. Rather, Eve's represents the purgatory of the human soul. The women (and one man) staying at Eve's are in a transitional phase of their lives, coming out of a hardship and aiming to arrive at a place which satisfies their goals. However, it is up to them to get themselves there. Eve provides the necessary resources, but does not fix a life for another. The void in the back of Bailey's Cafe and the transitional purgatory of Eve's house serve as the primary metaphors in Naylor's "Bailey's Cafe", commenting on the hardships which are a reality in the United States and the nature of humans to either succumb or persist.

## II. Response

A. Freedom, happiness, and enslavement (in all of its forms) are significant themes in virtually everything we discussed. Trace the development of these concepts through any three of the “texts” we have read this term. At least one of the “texts” must be Jefferson, Madison, or Hamilton. What, if anything, do these three have in common? What, if anything, do they think can be done for those who live on, and in, the margin feeling that the pursuit of happiness is impossible because they are entrapped in a system that offers them only illusions of freedom?

Freedom, the ultimate goal of all living beings, can be equated to happiness, and when the absence of the two is prevalent, there is enslavement. Prior to the US Constitution being drafted, lengthy conversation commenced which included these concepts and how the government was to deal with them. The Founders concluded that it is human nature to possess the desire to be free and ultimately the pursuit of happiness should be within everyone’s capabilities. While countless Africans and African-Americans were still enslaved, figureheads such as Jefferson viewed the term ‘enslavement’, as more philosophical and personal than on a tangible level. Similarly, the concept of ‘the enslavement of the mind’ is discussed in both Tom Robbins’, “Even Cowgirls Get the Blues” and Gloria Naylor’s, “Bailey’s Cafe”. Looking at the fundamental concepts of an ideal America to Thomas Jefferson, it becomes obvious that the ascribed fears have become a reality, those living in the margin are entrapped in a system which will never truly allow them to be free.

From foundation to present, the United States has been an endless thread of controversy, struggle, and aspiration. When the Constitution was written, the aim was not to create an utopian

society, but rather a functioning one. However, looking at the outlined goals of American society, we must ask ourselves if today is a reflection of functionality or degradation. The concept of struggle can be both internal and spurred by external conditions. In Thomas Jefferson's letter to Maria Conway, he creates a dialogue between The Head and The Heart, reflecting on the nature of emotion and reason. Ultimately, the balance of emotion and reason are determined to be difficult to exact. In certain situations, emotion will prevail, enslaving reason. This concept can be seen in Gloria Naylor's, "Bailey's Cafe", through the character Jesse Bell. Jesse, never truly being accepted by her husband's family, persisted and remained headstrong. That is until she had come to the realization that nothing in the life that she had been living was truly hers. Her only son was raised by her husband's family with opposite values than her own, and her heart had been too heavy wallowing in the pity which had become her life, that her head did not speak up against these actions, did not demand that Jesse take back control of her life. So, Jesse turns to the bottle, then she turns to something harder. Jesse's freedom of her own being had disappeared and she had been enslaved within her own mind. Jefferson suggests that the remedy for this seemingly frequent occurrence is for the head and the heart to work together. It will not always be in harmony; however, when an individual recognizes that emotion and reason are equivalents instead of resting in a hierarchical position, the enslavement of the mind will be harder to entrap.

While Jesse's dilemma seems like an easy fix of just recognizing that there needs to be an equilibrium of heart and head, the system is setup to keep pushing her down. How is this a reflection of the pursuit of happiness which is promised to all American citizens? In her own familial structure she does not come from the same background, causing exclusion and hidden

misery. Her husband's family being wealthy and well-endowed in the art of 'acting white', and Jesse coming from a family of strong men working on the docks. Strength was reflected in the figures which Jesse saw on a daily basis, however it was the strong women, such as her mother, which really stuck with her through life. So, when Jesse succumbed to the whitewashed family of her husband, she felt hopeless. Even after coming from such a strong background, she was not able to pull herself up enough to speak on behalf of her own interests, so she found an escape the only way she knew how, and then was left to rot - an enslavement of the entire being. This is the nature of the US today.

While Jefferson discusses the importance of the head and the heart living in harmony, he also realizes that at points, to ask that of both is unrealistic. Outside circumstances may demand a reaction, prompting either the head or the heart to act on behalf of the entire being. Reason cannot always be pursued and it is detrimental to set up a system in which emotion is not protected. While other founders did not agree with 'the pursuit of happiness' being put into the constitution, its importance was to serve the common people; allowing a refuge to weighing emotion and the capability to persist regardless situations. However, the pursuit of happiness is seemingly meaningless in modern society. With factions, specifically that of economic classes, creating a great divide in American society, it is seemingly impossible to persist while others have greater opportunity. An example being seen in Naylor's, "Bailey's Cafe", through the character of Sadie. Growing up under incomprehensibly horrific conditions, Sadie eventually finds herself addicted to alcohol, homeless, and selling her body for money. However, she runs into an encounter with police as prostitution is deemed illegal and finds herself arrested for trying to make less than \$3. Sadie, just trying to remain alive and keep her home, is unable to

satisfy her goals and is left to sleep in different homeless shelters and on the street. While Thomas Jefferson would not comment on prostitution as the way in which Sadie is trying to make money, he would argue that the gross incompetence of the system to protect the poor is abominable. His vision of The United States did not include people dying on the streets and without a source of income which would keep them alive. Instead, he envisioned the United States to be a place of freedom, including freedom intellectually, emotionally, and physically.

Looking at these two hardships outlined in Naylor's, "Bailey's Cafe", what can be said about the themes of freedom, happiness, and enslavement? As Jesse Bell and Sadie both demonstrate, it is impossible to be happy in a system which is continually ensuring that breaking out from degrading situations is nearly impossible. With the lack of happiness, refuge is sought in other ways, causing (if not physical, than emotional) enslavement. Freedom is an intangible concept as it is not offered to those who are not already well-endowed, such as the husband of Jesse Bell. While both the head and the heart are enslaved by the crushing pressure of outside circumstances and expectation, the illusion of freedom was found through the abuse of substances.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants". While such a great divide (both of wealth and of mind) was not present in the late 18th century, Jefferson understands that conditions will change as the country develops. He proposes that a new constitution and existing laws be revisited every 19 years with the coming of a new generation. This proposal offers a solution to the enslavement of the mind and an insurance of freedom (both physically and emotionally) by reworking the system to support those with addiction problems and those who do not have enough money to



survive in a way which would make society less divided. The illusions of freedom would have the capability to be more than just illusions if the concepts from Jefferson's "The Head and The Heart" were incorporated into the Constitution, allowing for the recognition that struggle is bound to be prevalent and emotion has the tendency to overshadow reason.

Another example of the themes of freedom, happiness, and enslavement can be seen in Tom Robbins', "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues". The main character, Sissy Hankshaw, learns the ways of growing up with a deformity. Always being told that she is different, and her mother voicing her concerns of Sissy ever finding a husband, Sissy decides that her true calling is hitchhiking. Hitchhiking to Sissy is an escape, it allows her to be in control, it is freedom. As Sissy explains, freedom is more important than happiness because you can control what occurs with freedom. However, later in the novel, the concept of enslavement is introduced as Sissy marries a man who does not share the same belief of the importance of freedom. Spending her whole life on the road, Sissy never had to answer to anyone but herself. Her being was entirely her own. When Sissy marries, her husband does not share these same values, trapping Sissy inside of her own mind, always yearning for the freedom of the open road again. While to Sissy happiness and freedom are not equated, she is not happy being enslaved in a dull relationship, having nothing substantial to occupy her time. Sissy would argue that the pursuit of happiness is trivial and practically meaningless if not all people share the same level of freedom. Because to Sissy, freedom must always come first and then it is up to the individual what they are to do with that freedom. In, "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues", the issue of gender inequality is discussed, showcasing that the cowgirls, if anything, are even more capable than men. They embrace emotion, they are equally as strong, and they are logical. This is the aftermath of total freedom

and breaking out of the enslavement of gender normalities. This commentary on the gender constructs which have shaped the United States offers a solution to the problem in pursuing happiness. Take down societal norms and reshape the image of society to include the importance of individuality and those who are marginalized. Such as Sissy found sanction in hitchhiking, everyone should be able to freely express themselves and that will be the trademark of a progressive and productive society.

Looking at Gloria Naylor's, "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues", Thomas Jefferson's ideas about reason and emotion, and Tom Robbins, "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues", the themes of freedom, happiness, and enslavement (both physically and of the mind) are discussed, prompting consideration of how modern society treats those who are incapable of escaping pressing situations and enjoying the pursuit of happiness. Freedom is a subjective term as it not only means equality, but the ability to expand on current conditions and make them better. As showcased, the US has transformed into a goldmine for oppressing those already at a disadvantage. If the country were to follow Jefferson's proposal to adopt or adapt a new constitution every 19 years, the country and its status quos would ever be progressing, leaving no room for a minority or the disadvantaged to become obliterated in a system ruled by the elite.