

Dimensions of Whiteness:

Middlebury College's Story of Racism, Ableism, and Wealth

By Kyle J. Wright

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

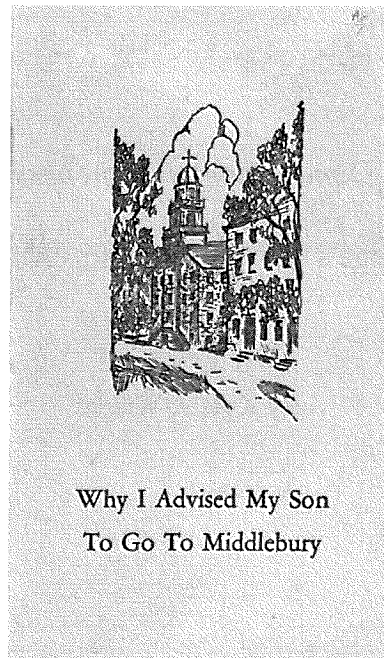
Bachelor of the Arts in the American Studies Program

Middlebury College

Thursday, January 31st, 2019

I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

KJW



The pamphlet pictured above, printed in 1945, is no larger than a modern cell phone. Though the text is faded and the paper itself discolored from age, the figure of Middlebury College's Old Chapel is recognizable above the title *Why I Advised My Son To Go To Middlebury*. While modest in form and structure, this document tells a rich story. It appears to be a piece of admissions literature. Its introductory paragraph indicates that its text is sourced from a letter to the Director of Admissions at the college. This anonymous author was an alumnus whom had hoped to send his son to MIT for graduate school and wanted to understand if Middlebury would properly prepare "Donald, Jr., ... for the arduous work ahead of him." Accordingly, he asked his former undergraduate classmates their opinion of Middlebury. One of them, Judge Thomas H. Noonan, responded as such:

The reasons are so many that it is hard to put them in logical order... The opportunity to live and enjoy surroundings and association with sane people for four years... The chance for social activities with the fine girls who are there...¹

¹ Middlebury College, *Why I Advised My Son To Go To Middlebury* (Middlebury, VT:

This may seem unremarkable given the cultural circumstances of 1945. Yet, this document provides key insight to the larger story of Middlebury College, or, as feminist disability studies scholar Ellen Samuels lends, Middlebury's "master fantasy."² Such stories are at the heart of cultural meaning, of who belongs and who does not. These kinds of narratives, though, exist apart from the lived experience of those whom they purport to represent. In this way, stories are always complex, paradoxical, and powerful. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns us of the dangers stories.³ She warns that, when people are recurrently depicted as a monolith, that monolithic representation grows to become actionable,⁴ thereby having real consequences, sometimes extending as far as enslavement, forced sterilization, and genocide.⁵ I, however, am

Middlebury College, 1945), 2.

² Ellen Jean Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), Location 187 of 5266; Such a fantasy, as Samuels positions it, is a mechanism by which categories of identification are constructed and maintained. That is to say, the master fantasy of an imagined community dictates how they distinguish between themselves and "others." I use "imagined community" here (a term which Samuels herself borrows from political theorist Benedict Anderson) as an acknowledgement the projections of a "community" which one imagines themselves to be a part of may vary significantly from the lived communities which they inhabit. This distinction is also at the heart of the story of Middlebury College - and of stories as cultural phenomena more broadly

³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story* (Filmed July 2009 at TEDGlobal 2009, Oxford, Oxfordshire), 09:26.

⁴ For Adichie, the British stories she grew up with constructed a single story wherein black and African women were nonexistent. This lack of representation caused her to re-deploy the symbols of white power and privilege in her own childhood writings, further perpetuating a culturally dominant fantasy. Adichie's experience shows us that individual stories can contribute to larger *single* stories. Single stories maintain hegemony through the normalization of marginalization. When people are conditioned to such representations, they lose agency over how a dominant narrative distributes power. Again, as history teaches us, stories of this scale provide impetus for real-world action

⁵ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 47;
Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 30.

not singularly focused on the extreme outcome of violence, but, like Adichie, the institutional legacies of exclusion which proceed it.

Why, then, in exploring these questions, examine the story of an elite American college? The position of colleges and universities in the United States is a complex one. Often asserting values such as "free inquiry" or the unbiased pursuit of "truth" as central. These "elite" institutions have in fact been bound up in the deeply biased politics of race, gender, and ability which saturate American cultural history. bell hooks' teaching that this type of neutrality is never neutral for everyone⁶ rings loud and true of American institutions of higher education. Such fantasies are of consequence precisely because they are presented by culturally dominant institutions as self-evident truths, thus systematically evading critique. This is deeply consequential because these are the institutions whereby knowledge is historically produced and validated, having lasting impact on popular understanding and political discourse, sometimes in ways that overtly bolster systems of racism, ableism, and misogyny.⁷ Where, then, might we begin in exploring such a critique? I insist we start small: at the level of the master fantasy of individual institutions, at the level of the story.

Middlebury College is the ideal subject of this study precisely because it fits this description so well. It is an "elite" institution that has claimed an impartial pursuit of "knowledge and virtue,"⁸ of truth. This story is so central to the identity of Middlebury College that it is often

⁶ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁷ Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 227; As Wilder keenly illustrates, the knowledge produced by the American Academy has had real and grave consequences through the development of racialized systems of science and medicine.

⁸ See Middlebury Colleges pre-2015 insignia.

hard to pin down. It is told and retold through college publications, speeches by college presidents, and in promotional advertising films. It is imbedded in nearly everything from admissions literature to the process of conferring degrees. In this way, Middlebury College has so much to teach us about how stories are shaped at all levels by the larger narratives of identity from which they are derived, even - and in some cases particularly when - they do not explicitly articulate messages of racism, ableism, or violence. What I offer here is, in part, an assertion that institutional narratives warrant examination precisely because they often articulate and assign power in ways that are more insidious than explicit racism, misogyny, or ableism. Where, then, might we look to find the story of Middlebury College, the sources where its master fantasy is most evident?

In asking such a question, film offers us rich opportunities. As a medium, film incorporates visual, aural, and textual elements that allow for more robust critique than any one of those elements might alone. The value of examining film as a storytelling medium lies in the relation of these components to one another. An analysis of them creates space for us to recognize contradiction and complexity in the story, to see how it adapts and changes over time. Between the end of the Second World War and the end of the War in Vietnam, Middlebury College produced three promotional films entitled *Campus Scenes* (1947), *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury* (1961), and *A Chance to Grow* (1976). I chose to examine these films both because of their rich imagery and because of the time at which they were produced. The latter half of the 20th century saw formation of many of the fantasies that constitute modern American cultural mythology.⁹ These films, like the decades during which they were produced, provide insights to the danger of single stories and the legacies of exclusion

⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017), 90-91.

they can create. Importantly, these films were produced by Middlebury College and are examples of how the institution tells its own story.

In this project, I have found that Middlebury College's story is based out of a profound cultural anxiety surrounding identity.¹⁰ More specifically, this anxiety surrounds the instability of perceived signifiers historically used to indicate difference in race, ability, and gender. I ultimately conclude that Middlebury College links its identity to a geneticized¹¹ legacy of whiteness, characterized primarily by images of racism, conspicuous consumption, and ableism. This story has troubling implications. It relies on recurring symbols that link Middlebury College to the larger language of eugenic ideology and white supremacy through shared imagery. It translates into systems which excludes people of color, financially poor people, people with disabilities, and queer and trans people from existing as part of Middlebury College's story.

The three films I have considered, each of them a promotional documentary of sorts, present unique opportunities to examine how symbols of power and privilege are deployed¹² (to borrow Michael Berube's useful term) visually. As such, I am not predominantly interested in the

¹⁰ Samuels, in *Fantasies of Identification*, reminds us that this anxiety is part of a larger cultural phenomena that has occurred in the United States since before the American Civil War.

¹¹ I choose use "geneticized" rather than "biologized" or "essentialized" here to indicate that the legacy Middlebury College articulates of itself and its community surrounds the passing-on of desirable traits through a heavily implied process of heterosexual coupling and reproduction. This is to say that the actual legacy articulated by Middlebury is not genetic, as such traits as whiteness, ability, and wealth cannot necessarily be passed along genetically, but merely that the college's representation of itself, as we will soon see, is *geneticized* in that it assumes as much.

¹² Michael Bérubé, *The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, how Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way we Read* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 2; Bérubé uses this term to assert that the appearance of disability in literature can "go far beyond any specific rendering of any disabled character or characters." This term provides flexibility to recognize how representations can exist as both specific renderings, but also as narrative strategies and individual instances of "...thought, experience, and action." This is a framework I use to engage with images throughout this project.

lived experience or intentions of the people associated with these films, but rather the representations that they deploy. Visual storytelling, after all, grounds its cultural meaning in symbols and in what goes unsaid. This project is also neither a study of film history nor an attempt to examine exhaustively the historical circumstances under which each film was produced. I instead focus on how each film lends its voice through moments of filmic representation to the master fantasy of Middlebury College.

Each film, indeed, builds on its predecessor in ways that complicate how the master fantasy itself is told, and so my work here will proceed chronologically through the films. The first, *Campus Scenes* (1947), is a silent piece that establishes a visual narrative comprised of recurring symbols. *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury* (1961) supplements and elaborates on this visual narrative with a scripted voiceover, complicating and fortifying images which become central to Middlebury's story across time. The final film, *A Chance to Grow* (1976), further complicates and obscures Middlebury's master fantasy in response to the cultural shifts of the '60's and '70's. The story itself - nonetheless - does not disappear. Produced within thirty years of each other in the latter half of the 20th century, these films establish a narrative of whiteness unique to the place of Middlebury College which is still deeply relevant and worth articulating.

This project is first a study of how stories and culture influence each other omnidirectionally. In a more specific sense, it is a study of how whiteness is constructed through community-specific narratives. This scholarship is significant in that it highlights the construction of whiteness as a system of power that is contextually specific, as something that is linked to larger power structures but that is not necessarily uniform across time and space. It also allows us to see how whiteness as a category is dependent on other systems of power and

privilege for meaning. On a practical note, this finding is important because it provides insights that may allow us to more readily identify whiteness and interrupt the patterns of privilege that surround it. This scholarship is, furthermore, unique in that it foregrounds the study of storytelling as something that is necessarily multidisciplinary and that can teach us much about how cultural categories of meaning are formed and sustained. To engage in the multidisciplinary manner that such a study deserves, I draw on wisdom from disability studies, feminist critique, historical and ethnographic literature situated in the field of American studies, critical race theory, and analytical tools offered by media and literary studies to present an analysis of these films and other primary sources related to them.

Methodologically, I do not rely heavily upon the work of other theorists to test or challenge different existing frameworks or understandings. I, instead, use the theories and histories provided by other scholars in order to deepen my exploration of the primary source material with the intent to generating new knowledge. In terms of my readings of these films, it is worth mentioning that my analysis relies on the work of Stuart Hall, Michael Bérubé, and W.J.T. Mitchell. Hall's "encoding/decoding" framework is useful here in that it both allows us to move away from the consumption narratives that surround media and to consider the ways in which filmic representation is encoded, decoded, and (re)produced differently depending on the positionality of the viewer or producer.¹³ Bérubé's term "deployment" further bolsters this approach, prompting us to focus on the ways in which narrative strategies, individual images, and subliminal messages, invoke identity in ways that have both literary *and* cultural significance.¹⁴ Finally, Mitchell's work on theorizing the nature of images makes these

¹³ Stuart Hall. "Encoding/Decoding" (in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London; New York;: Routledge, 1993), 91.

¹⁴ Michael Bérubé, *The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, how*

frameworks more relevant in that he prompts us to consider film and the many aural, visual, and rhetorical elements that constitute it as language.¹⁵ This is immensely useful when lending concise focus to the ways in which these films build off of each other's central filmic elements.

Using these frameworks, I explore how these films are in conversation with one another. In my first chapter, I will discuss how *Campus Scenes* (1947) deploys representations of heterosexuality, wealth, and ability through its entirely visual narrative. In my second chapter, I will consider the ways in which Middlebury College's master fantasy is developed during the Cold War and through the voiceover narrative that appears in *The Dimensions of a College* (1961). In this section I will explore how the spoken and visual narratives bolster and complicate the representations introduced in the earlier film. In my final chapter, I will discuss that ways in which *A Chance to Grow* (1976) further complicates the master fantasy established in the first two films by obscuring its central features, which in turn yields interesting insights into the ways in which whiteness and privilege adapt to larger moments of social change. By working with these sources and building upon the wisdom of other scholars, I offer new understandings regarding how whiteness is deployed in these films and larger histories of racism, ableism, heteronormativity, and wealth in which Middlebury College is situated. In my conclusions, I will consider the larger cultural implications of the story of Middlebury College and the ways in which it provides us with important insights regarding how stories operate at a cultural level and how institutions are situated within them.

Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way we Read, 2.

¹⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Is an Image?" (in *New Literary History* 15, no. 3, 1984), 527.

Part I: *Campus Scenes* (1947) and the Visual Story of Middlebury College

In the immediate post-war years, despite college president Samuel Stratton's assumptions, Middlebury received a veritable deluge of veterans applying to the school. This was perhaps due to the benefits of the new GI Bill. A number of the veterans who did attend Middlebury were women.¹⁶ Tensions between faculty and the new Stratton administration, all the while, were high in part due to the stress of teaching during the Second World War.¹⁷ Upon close viewing, *Campus Scenes* (1947), establishes a visual narrative comprised of several significant recurring symbols: images of men and women in pairs, demonstrations of athletic prowess, and symbols of conspicuous consumption. It is a silent film, assembled seemingly from semi-formal footage recorded on 8mm or 16mm film cameras. *Campus Scenes* is certainly reflective of the time at which it was produced, imbued throughout with symbols relevant to the Second World War. Unseen, however, are the significant number of women on the teaching faculty of the college at the time.¹⁸ This is merely one example of the distance between the filmic representations of these sources and the realities of Middlebury College's history. It is also this distinction that provides us a window into how the institution of Middlebury College has represented itself and the dissonance those representations are ripe to create.

As far as the representations present in *Campus Scenes*, this film shows aspects of student life, a smattering of campus buildings and their interiors, and some of the landscape around

¹⁶ Middlebury College, *Report of the Registrar 1946-1947* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College, 1947), 73.

¹⁷ David M. Stameshkin, *THE STRENGTH OF THE HILLS Middlebury College 1915-1990* (Middlebury College Press, 1996), 85-87.

¹⁸ Middlebury College, *Report of the Registrar 1946-1947*, 120.

Middlebury College. *Campus Scenes* stands as particularly unique among the films I address in this project as it includes no voice-over narration. The film is comprised largely of footage that seems to have been taken informally. It is riddled with imperfections. Poor framing and poorly exposed scenes are common. Some footage is so dark that the actions of the subjects are unidentifiable. While the film does not seem to be produced to promote Middlebury as an academic institution, it does impart an air of nostalgia that depends on the affirmation of people who have experienced an education at Middlebury College. The images here are truly breathtaking in the sense of nostalgia they are able to impart without the use of words or text aside from the title cards that are placed between sequences, which indicate that this film was, in fact, produced with some degree of intention. This film is noteworthy because of its informal documentary quality. Its representations are fiction, yet its subjects are real people, not actors. They do not seem to have been chosen by the cameraperson for any other reason aside from the fact that they were there. This alone seems to convey a great deal about the story of Middlebury College this film imagines. Every person depicted is represented as white, able bodied, cisgendered, and young.

This sense of youth is evident in that everyone in the film seems to always be smiling. The grain of the film highlights their near flawless complexion and physical fitness from shot to shot. They conform in many ways to white beauty standards. This deployment of youth and beauty represent the College as a kind of utopia, an Eden in which impossible things constitute reality. One of these utopic representations is of Middlebury College as a place where one may pass their youth in leisure. A remarkable sense of time is the product of this representation. What I mean by this is that Middlebury is positioned as a paradise where young white men and women can mingle and socialize, spending their days skiing, flying, and sailing. When not outside, one

can spend time with their friends dancing, enjoying food at the snack bar, or smoking in one of the student lounges. It is fascinating to consider just how little time is spent in the classroom during this film, only about a minute and twelve seconds in total¹⁹ before the film concludes.



This image, appearing in *Campus Scenes* at three minutes and seven seconds, shows four couples, each a white man and white woman, dancing at an unidentified location on Middlebury College's campus.

A significant pattern that arises early in the film is the image of men and women in couples. In the scene depicted above,²⁰ men and women dance together in a room, all in lock step. Each a couple, they wear clothing nearly identical to that of one another. The men wear tweed blazers or beige cardigans. The women, for the most part, are cut off from the frame at the shoulders or neck in favor from framing the men properly. The camera does not track any of the

¹⁹ *Campus Scenes* (Middlebury, VT: Produced by Middlebury College, 1947), 38:10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 02:50.

couples. They move in and out of the frame, turning to a tune unheard by the viewer. At first this may seem somewhat unremarkable given the time period, yet these images of men and women in pairs are so recurring that they seem to suggest this arrangement as a *natural* social ordering, holding within that suggestion an implication of heterosexuality, heterosexuality itself being bound up inextricably with patriarchal politics of reproduction. I am struck by scenes such as this as they deploy heterosexuality in a way that imagines it as compulsory, which is to say no deviant representation exists.

Adjacently, one of the most outstanding dimensions of *Campus Scenes* is the representation of the wealth of Middlebury College and its students. For a film entitled *Campus Scenes*, the focus on student work in the classroom is minimal, with montages of college life ranging from depictions of students passing time in lounges to skiing and sailing²¹ and even flying planes²² over the Champlain Valley. This representation lends to an image of Middlebury that is more akin to a high-end country club than to a college. This image is, admittedly, situated within the larger historical context of the consumption boom that would take place in the 1950s, only a few years after *Campus Scenes* was published. An important aspect of this history, as social historian Annie Gilbert Coleman offers us, was that, through conspicuous consumption in response to increased consumerism, middle- and upper-class Americans began to draw new lines of racialized difference that set them explicitly apart from non-white workers and consumers.²³ This tendency towards conspicuous consumption also had gendered effects. Coleman reminds us

²¹ Middlebury College, *Campus Scenes*, 04:55.

²² *Ibid.*, 07:29.

²³ Annie Gilbert Coleman, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing* (Pacific Historical Review 65, no. 4, 1996), 585.

that "...white cultural standards of femininity often required setting oneself apart from women of color. Rather than act as additive characteristics, historians note, race, class, and gender take shape in relation to one another."²⁴ This reflection is important in deciphering the fundamental relationship between these images, though we are still lacking some of the larger picture.

Another common image in *Campus Scenes* are those depicting athletic prowess. Approximately fifteen minutes into the film, there is over eleven minutes of footage of football games and practices.²⁵ This sequence comprises approximately a fourth of the total length of the film, a far greater percentage than any other individual section. Skiing and other physically strenuous activities which overlap with conspicuous consumption only compound the prominence of this theme. Though these deployments of athletic prowess certainly serve to establishing an expectation of able-bodiedness, it is in the shots that punctuate footage of the athletes where we can begin to see distinct connections between the types of images I have mentioned thus far. In these scenes, the moments where the camera lingers longest on its subject - aside from the male athletes on the field - is when it represents women who have come to see the games.

Considering this, I assert that the story of Middlebury is rendered, at a basic level, from the perspective of patriarchal privilege. At the center of this film are white men who can afford access to leisure, athletics, and the specialized training required to operate aircraft, ski, or sail a boat. This deployment of wealth separates Middlebury College as an "elite" institution from its rural surroundings and ties it inherently to Veblen's understating of conspicuous consumption²⁶

²⁴ Annie Gilbert Coleman, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing*, 585.

²⁵ Middlebury College, *Campus Scenes*, 14:54.

²⁶ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 2009).

as he articulates it in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Conspicuous consumption in this context is foregrounded in the ways the film represents the material wealth of Middlebury College. The presence of expensive equipment (such as planes, boats, and automobiles) at this rural Vermont Institution is significant. Though the American Economy is in a period of significant growth after WWII, students have access to a dizzying array of material resources, all of which are represented as being tied to an ever-present culture of leisure. Academic work, interestingly, is seldom depicted. This brings into question what constitutes an "elite" education in the scope of this film. More interestingly, however, is that we can see subliminally in these displays of consumption and athleticism a deployment of women as symbols of conspicuous consumption, as well. They are positioned as both an audience for these events and as the prize for the victors, visually decodable as such by being visible between displays of male athleticism. They are displayed and consumed publicly, which - as Veblen's work provides - positions them as commodified symbols of status.²⁷

In these sequence - most notably those of the football games - we can observe clearly the linkages between the systems. If women, too, are property, then the story Middlebury College represents here is one based in patriarchy and conspicuous consumption. This is the first moment where we can observe the concrete ways in which these systems specifically support whiteness as a constructed racial category constituted in relation to other categories and systems. Cheryl Harris lends us relevant wisdom here by drawing a link between the construction of whiteness and conspicuous consumption by historically situating manifestations of white social status and difference through expressions of property. She posits that "racial hierarchy was legitimated as public identity in law, even after the end of slavery and the formal end of legal race

²⁷ Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*.

segregation.”²⁸ The understanding of “personal property” that Harris presents us with deepens our understating of the radicalized dimensions of conspicuous consumption. Property is both represented in external objects, but also in ones provide to maintain ownership over themselves, the subversion of which has contributed significantly to radicalized social stratification in America in the 19th and 20th century. The status of the white, predominantly male and able-bodied main characters in *Campus Scenes* is represented through the deployment of commodities around them. Let us pivot back to the football game, where we have seen young women represented as one of these commodities. In a neighboring shot,²⁹ two parents walk towards the bleachers, holding the hands of their hesitant. Just after this shot, a group of five women, all wearing similar overcoats, walk past the camera as it tracks them. How might we consider the images we have seen thus far and reflect on the larger story they tell?

Considering Mitchell's note that visual media is essentially a reproduction of existing cultural systems of representation,³⁰ here, I pivot to disability studies scholar Alison Kafer to begin drawing together a theoretical constellation of these seemingly disparate images. Critiquing and building upon feminist scholar Adrienne Rich's framework of compulsory heterosexuality, Kafer offers us the lens of compulsory able-bodiedness. This system, as Kafer writes "works in two ways: first through the use of physical force, and second, through... a 'control of consciousness...' through 'verbal and non-verbal messages.'"³¹ While compulsory able-bodiedness is similar to compulsory heterosexuality in this way, Kafer, in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*

²⁸ Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 1736.

²⁹ Middlebury College, *Campus Scenes*, 16:21.

³⁰ W. J. T Mitchell, "What Is an Image?" 525.

³¹ Alison Kafer, "Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-Bodiedness" (*Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 3, 2003), 79-80.

also indicates how this imposition of compulsory able-bodiedness is bound up in imaginings of *futurity*. Kafer, in this way, helps us to draw significance in relation to this image of the "Child."

Disability, as Kafer asserts, is often assumed to not exist when it is not visible.³² This is the product of political and cultural policing which only allows for disability to be represented, as Bérubé suggests, in certain narrative structures.³³ The product of this erasure is of serious and violent consequence. It has allowed historically, as Kafer and others note, for the sterilization and even euthanizing of people perceived to be disabled.³⁴ In *Campus Scenes*, this erasure occurs through ableist deployments of youth. We have seen this already in the footage of football games and, in one instance, in the case of a child who has gone to see one of those games with their parents. As Kafer theorizes, futurity is projected upon the symbol of the Child in ways that center able-bodiedness and heteronormativity.³⁵ The imagined "Child," it is important to note, is never synonymous with actual children. This symbol is deployed as an object of all political action, a framework through which to project a certain imagining of the future. It is this imagining of certain reproductive futurities which in turn becomes dangerous. As Kafer reminds us, "[eugenic] histories certainly bear the mark of reproductive futurity... the future of the 'race' and the future of the nation... have been wrapped up in fears and anxieties about disability."³⁶ This

³² Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 3.

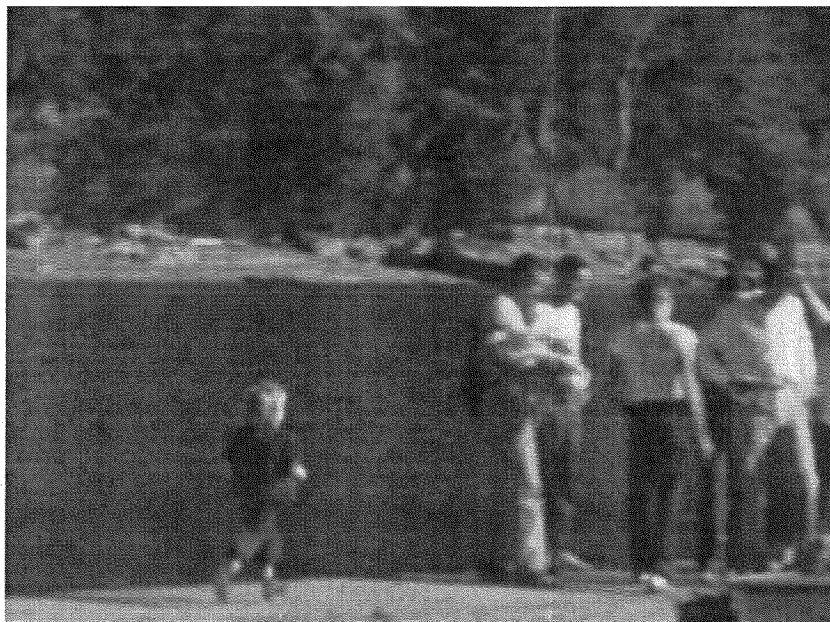
³³ Michael Bérubé, *The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, how Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way we Read*.

³⁴ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 47; Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 30.

³⁵ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 29.

³⁶ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 30.

conceptualization of the child as a political imagination of futurity prompts me to return to the film. Aside from the child at the football game, there is another scene wherein a child joins a group of students and an instructor sail on a lake.³⁷ It seems initially strange that this young child, somewhat androgynous in their red coat, trousers, and boots, was the focus of this scene, but this theoretical background helps to situate their symbolic significance here.



In this frame, taken from *Campus Scenes* at five minutes and twenty-one seconds, depicts the aforementioned child running down a pier to catch up with a group of Middlebury students about to go sailing

The compulsory heterosexuality we have seen represented earlier in this film represents a direct link between the geneticization implied through the focus on the Child as a political symbol and the compulsory able-bodiedness imbedded in that symbol's orientation towards futurity. In essence, this link shows us the centrality of the white male perspective in *Campus*

³⁷ Middlebury College, *Campus Scenes*, 05:20.

Scenes, which we have additionally seen in some of the framing choices of the aforementioned sequences. Compulsory heterosexuality is a fundamental part of this story because it is one of the most fundamental aspects of patriarchy and misogyny. Compulsory heterosexuality, as Rich defines it, is a system which keeps “numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script because they cannot look beyond the parameters of the acceptable...”³⁸ The guise of heterosexuality as *normal* robs women of the right to self-definition, and as we can see in this scene, women are not visually represented as central. Women are never the subject of heterosexuality in *Campus Scenes*. They are, instead, the object of men’s expectations and sexual agency. This deployment is precisely the compulsory kind of heterosexuality that Rich asserts is inherent to patriarchal hegemony. As made incredibly evident in the sequences depicting football and the women who attended those games, this objectification links women directly to the larger trend of conspicuous consumption, centering the male as the primary subject and consumer in *Campus Scene*'s narrative. This realization, too, has its history.

As disability studies scholar Anna Stubblefield brilliantly illustrates, white women have historically had to distance themselves from women of color but have also been at constant risk of becoming *impure* within the white heterosexual matrix of power. If white women did not produce desirable offspring, they would no longer be considered white.³⁹ We see again, through Stubblefield's work, the overt resemblance between these images and the larger goals of white supremacy predicated on eugenicist thought. But what is the larger *geneticized* legacy

³⁸ Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*.

³⁹ Anna Stubblefield, *Beyond the Pale: Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization* (*Hypatia* 22, no. 2 2007), 176.

represented here? If the women represented in *Campus Scenes* are bound precariously as commodity to a matrix of compulsory heterosexuality as a mechanism of reproductive assurance, what precisely are they deployed to reproduce?

The repeated representations of conspicuous consumption prompt us to consider this as a deployment of this larger geneticized legacy. At a broader level, conspicuous consumption itself is a notable marker of whiteness. As legal scholar and historian Cheryl Harris has noted through her work on property law "[whiteness] at various times signifies and is deployed as identity, status, and property, sometimes singularly, sometimes in tandem."⁴⁰ Conspicuous consumption in this film appears to operate in similar ways. The prevalence of skiing, for example, is evidence to that conclusion. Skiing is positioned as integral to the Middlebury experience in *Campus Scenes*. The film accomplishes this visually in a series of shots representing people at the Snow Bowl (Middlebury College's private ski hill) there to watch a ski jumping competition.⁴¹ The faces of the men and women there look jovial, they are content and comfortable moving through this treacherous white landscape. Indeed, the camera movement does far less to emphasize the landscape than it does the people itself. The camera movement tracks people, adjusting composition according to their movements. Similar camera movement is used to display the athletes in football games in the aforementioned segments. As Coleman has shared with us, the cultural politics of skiing themselves connote whiteness, ability, and wealth in ways that are heavily gendered. The ski culture of this time period, to that tune, was built upon "beauty, fashion, leisure, health, and athleticism."⁴² The other histories offered here connect those

⁴⁰ Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property" (*Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8, 1993), 1725.

⁴¹ Middlebury College, *Campus Scenes*, 03:51 - 04:50.

⁴² Coleman, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing*, 590.

foundations to compulsory able-bodiedness and the exclusion of racial otherness.



Here, in an archival clip not related to *Campus Scenes*, a group of white Middlebury students perform a minstrel routine in blackface

Though the prevalence of skiing in this film is certainly indicative of the whiteness of Middlebury College, more indicative still are other overt displays of whiteness that were occurring at Middlebury in the '40s and '50s. Not included in *Campus Scenes* are the minstrel shows that were popular on campus at this time.⁴³ The historical proximity of this is worth mentioning because it highlights some of the cultural context which surrounds the images we see in *Campus Scenes*. Harris links the minstrel show, as well, to the system of conspicuous consumption which she identified in *Whiteness as Property*:

Through minstrel shows in which white actors masquerading in blackface played out racist stereotypes, the popular culture put the Black at 'solo spot centerstage, providing a relational model in contrast to which masses of Americans could establish a positive and superior sense of identity... [by] comparing whites with a construct of a socially

⁴³ *Minstrel Blackface Performance, Middlebury College, circa 1940s-1950s*, filmed circa 1940 - 1960, Middlebury, VT.

defenseless group.⁴⁴

The politics of whiteness that surround the minstrel show, I posit, are in many ways the same politics which undergird the conspicuous consumption we see symbolized in skiing and in the access to an impressive degree of material resources at Middlebury College in *Campus Scenes*. We begin to see here that the geneticized legacy articulated in this film has to do in part with the assurance of white racial difference and superiority through the intergenerational transmutation of material wealth.

As we begin to identify the prominent ways in which compulsory heterosexuality and conspicuous consumption represented in *Campus Scenes* are tied to athleticism, I find it pertinent to pivot briefly back towards the film's expression of compulsory able-bodiedness. With the historical and theoretical connections of the symbols of this film in mind. We can begin to reflect more deeply on the legacy Middlebury College articulates through this story. It is a story characterized predominantly by a hetero-masculine perspective which seeks to ensure the continuation of the wealth and ableism so characteristic of Middlebury as it is imagined in *Campus Scenes*. This desire for legacy, which is bound up in the language of genetics through representations of heterosexuality and Children as political symbols, indicates a profound parallel to the histories of white racial superiority which have made wealth and ableism metrics by which race difference is gauged. Kafer provides us with important insights here. As she notes, the categories of racial difference are bound up deeply with reproductive futurity and, as such, these markers and the futurity they represent are embroiled deeply in the residual politics and language of eugenics. Though the practice of the eugenics movement may have dissipated after the holocaust, we can still see the disturbing echoes of its symbols here in *Campus Scenes*.

⁴⁴ Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1743.

Unfortunately, *Campus Scenes* only provides so much insight to the viability of this conclusion. Though its visual language is well established and situated within histories of racism, ableism, and misogyny, we might benefit from considering how the story of Middlebury evolves over the coming decade in order to explore any continuity or contradiction in these themes. Thankfully, *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury* (1961) presents us with a rich opportunity to do so.

Part II - *Dimensions of a College* (1961) and Middlebury's Origin Story

“We are fortunate that, in America, we have a diversity of opportunities for higher education.”⁴⁵ With this statement, *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, begins its story. Produced in 1961, *Dimensions of a College* is evidence that Middlebury College's use of film as a promotional medium only continued to grow since the production of *Campus Scenes* in 1947. *Dimensions of a College* is ambitious in that it attempts to tell the story of Middlebury College from its founding in 1800 leading up to the time at which the film was produced. In many ways, *Dimensions of a College* furthers the same visual narrative we saw established in *Campus Scenes* in that the central symbols of that earlier film - men and women often depicted in pairs, the representation of conspicuous consumption, and the foregrounding of displays of athletic prowess - shine through at critical moments. With that reflection and one of the film's opening lines in mind, *Dimensions of a College* begs the overarching question: who exactly are the "we" in possession of such educational opportunity? These two films do also differ significantly in other ways. While *Campus Scenes* presented a story that was far more characterized by leisure and a near total absence of academic imagery, *Dimensions of a College* adopts a rigid and intense language of excellence, eliteness, and heritage.

In many ways, that intensity seems to be representative of the political and social anxiety surrounding the Cold War. Indeed, the entire film is tinted with the hue of Cold War era nationalist rhetoric and anxiety. Students are described as "citizens" or "sons and daughters" of Middlebury. The college's Russian program features more prominently than any other language

⁴⁵ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury* (Middlebury, VT: Produced by Middlebury College, 1961), 00:25.

department.⁴⁶ As we will see shortly, this context is evident in both visual and rhetorical imagery, yet it continues to hold significance that extends well beyond the politics of the Cold War.

Dimensions of a College includes a voice-over narrative that provides additional text to the cinematography we see here. As we examine this film, I find it pertinent to consider more closely the ways in which it is similar to the feature produced in 1947 and the ways in which it differs as we attempt to extract significant from its deployments.

Like in *Campus Scenes*, the masculine subject is always central in *Dimensions of a College*. Faculty are always represented as men, despite there being a significant number of women teaching at the College at the time.⁴⁷ The subject of the narration is often masculine, despite there being many women who appear as students throughout the film. Men and women are, again, frequently represented in pairs. In these instances, however, in ways that are more overtly slanted towards an assumption of heterosexuality than before. We can observe, for example, a moment at twenty-six minutes and fifteen seconds into the film wherein the narrator comments on the rewards of an academic career at Middlebury College. "The search is for excellence, not only in things academic, but in the arts of living, as well,"⁴⁸ he states definitively. As he says this, we are shown a young man and a young woman - both of whom are stated to be highly academically accomplished. But the textual implication here is not that their accomplishment is itself the "rewarding" aspect of their college experience. Rather the social environment that leads to quality "living," encoded deeply with symbols of reproduction and heterosexuality. One such symbol is both of these students meeting with an older professor

⁴⁶ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 18:43

⁴⁷ Middlebury College, *Report of the Registrar 1960-1961* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College, 1961), 90.

⁴⁸ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 26:15 - 27:04

before coming together to work on what appears to be a highly staged academic assignment. This symbolic passing-down of knowledge is narratively transmuted *through* these students. The subliminal message is that they are of "good stock," a eugenic ideal that connotes reproduction in assurance of imagined genetic excellence.



In this image, taken from *The Dimensions of a College* at twenty-six minutes and forty-one seconds, shows two white students, a man and a woman, working under the supervision of a white male professor.

The history of this language is worth reflecting on here. Returning to Stubblefield, we can reflect on how "intellect" has also been used as an ableist and misogynistic metric to bolster white superiority, consolidate white male privilege, and justify scientific racism. "Intellect," as Stubblefield clarifies, was positioned as a measurement of one's capacity to produce "civilization" characterized by a white perception of science, technology, agriculture, literature,

art, and forms of governance. All of these, interestingly, are implicated in the "elite" education which Middlebury offers its students. Intriguingly, Stubblefield also makes a historical connection which foregrounds the racist and ableist metric of "intellect" as something regularly characterized as hereditary.⁴⁹ The geneticized legacy that Middlebury's story revolves around is in conversation with this larger history as able-mindedness appears more and more through deployments of academia throughout *Dimensions of a College*. As Stubblefield writes, "[at] the time that research into feeble-mindedness was progressing, white elites were becoming increasingly anxious about impure white people, who white elites feared were multiplying astronomically and undermining the supremacy of the white race."⁵⁰ Though the period to which Stubblefield is referring was many decades prior to 1961, *Dimensions of a College* still bears the distinct echoes of its language.

Deriving this subliminal message from one scene alone may seem a stretch if similar encounters between a white man and white woman were not repeated between two other couples before the end of the film. Shortly after the aforementioned sequence, a student named Linda is shown outside of the Wright Memorial Theater speaking with a young man named Gary.⁵¹ This transition is striking as odd and out of place. Why is it not a woman speaking with another woman? Or a man speaking with another man? The representation is such that social interaction is overwhelmingly deployed as only occurring between men and women, and the tone is

⁴⁹ Stubblefield, *Beyond the Pale: Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization*, 169.

⁵⁰ Stubblefield, *Beyond the Pale: Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization*, 169-170.

⁵¹ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 27:51

palpably flirtatious. We see this again between two students named Alaina and David⁵² in a skiing scene only a few minutes later. Alaina is at first alone on a snowy slope, then David skis into frame. This deployment of interaction between men and women symbolizes a converging of ideal accomplishment. Each subject's accomplishments are described by the narrator as they visual meet in the footage.



Two students, identified as Linda and Gary, are shown meeting outside Middlebury College's Wright Memorial Theater

These sequences, taken as the sum of their heterosexual, reproductive, and ableist symbols, are representative of a converging of geneticized desirable traits. It is worth reiterating that these traits are not, in and of themselves, actually genetic, but geneticized by being charged with the language of reproductive futurity. The symbolism of these interactions is further bolstered by the persistent language of able-mindedness throughout *Dimensions of a College*.

⁵² Ibid., 29:58

Direct rhetorical linkages such as "the body, like the mind, must be active, must be challenged,"⁵³ represent an ableist equivalency between mind in body wherein the entire body/mind of an imagined student must be "excellent." Intellectual and physical ability are also discussed in terms of "profit". Of Middlebury students, the narrator posits that they have come from "... many parts of the country... Middlebury has chosen them because they are able and eager to profit by the education this liberal arts college offers."⁵⁴ Able, of course, is an operative word here. Though the employment of the word "many" may appear to be an attempt to champion a diverse student body, the implied meaning of is displayed clearly by the images that accompany the narration: images of overwhelming white, able-bodied/able-minded people.

This representation of geneticized legacy only grows more recognizable as we take into account the rhetoric that surrounds both these themes and the origin story of Middlebury that the film attempts to convey. The language of "birth" is consistently present throughout the film. "Middlebury was born with a purpose..."⁵⁵ the narrator asserts at twenty-five minutes and thirty-nine seconds. "Birth" is deeply tied to value. In the context of Football and the culture that surrounds athletics at the College, memories are "born" that will "...sustain the spirit on some later, bleaker day."⁵⁶ The metaphor of birth to signify the generation of something valuable and that thing, more often than not, is the nostalgia a youth or the "excellence" of accomplishment. Here we begin to see that the heterosexuality symbolically represented in these films has a basis not only in heterosexuality as a system of patriarchal hegemony, but also in heterosexuality as a

⁵³ Ibid., 22:43

⁵⁴ Ibid., 13:59

⁵⁵ Ibid., 25:39

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23:45

point go cultural transmission. The heterosexual matrix is primarily a means of assurance of a legacy. As we have seen, this is a legacy of excellence, one of "good stock" represented by ability and wealth. The geneticization of the legacy is evident precisely in the fact that this rhetoric of excellence converges with points of heterosexual symbolism. This clearly invokes many of the ableist tropes which have been foundational to eugenicist thought and that have made able-bodiedness and able-mindedness compulsory.⁵⁷ This is meaningful because such an overlapping of symbolic representation demonstrates to us the ways in which these systems interact in the context of Middlebury's story.

What else I contained in this legacy? Material wealth and abundance remain central to Middlebury's narrative of self and place in this film. Conspicuous consumption is still prominent, but more so in the context of campus facilities and infrastructure than in the use of extravagantly expensive equipment. This is evident in a number of sequences. Most notable, perhaps, is a sequence representing the Chateau.⁵⁸ Though initially described as the first language house on an American campus, the narration over this sequence promptly pivots towards the materiality of the Louis XVI room, which was moved to Middlebury from an 18th century Parisian mansion. It contains significant markers of material wealth, such as gilt panels, crystal chandeliers, and hand painted doors. It might go without saying that the presence of this room on campus seems hardly rooted in the actual practice of learning the French language. The deployment of these markers, furthermore, denote inheritance, donation and material reproduction. Compounded with earlier observation of the geneticized nature of Middlebury's legacy, this sequence attaches conspicuous consumption as a signifier of material wealth to that same legacy of "excellence."

⁵⁷ Kafer, "Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-Bodiedness."

⁵⁸ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 19:11.

This narrative aspect is deepened by the role of "the Snow Bowl" (which featured prominently in *Campus Scenes*) in this film. The Snow Bowl "draws nearly all students during their life at college," the narrator states.⁵⁹ There is thinly veiled significance here. This reinforces observations pertaining to skiing and the conspicuous consumption it demonstrates while harkening back to the critique Coleman provides of how skiing is and has been an incredibly expensive pastime saturated in the cultural politics of whiteness.⁶⁰ Skiing, of course, also toes the line between ableism and conspicuous consumption, or perhaps – more appropriately stated – foregrounding and overlapping aspects of both systems. Though these deployments are significant, they still seem somewhat nebulous insofar as they constitute a legacy specifically bound up in *whiteness*. In order to understand these specific connections, we will have to dive deeper into the ways in which this film departs from *Campus Scenes*.

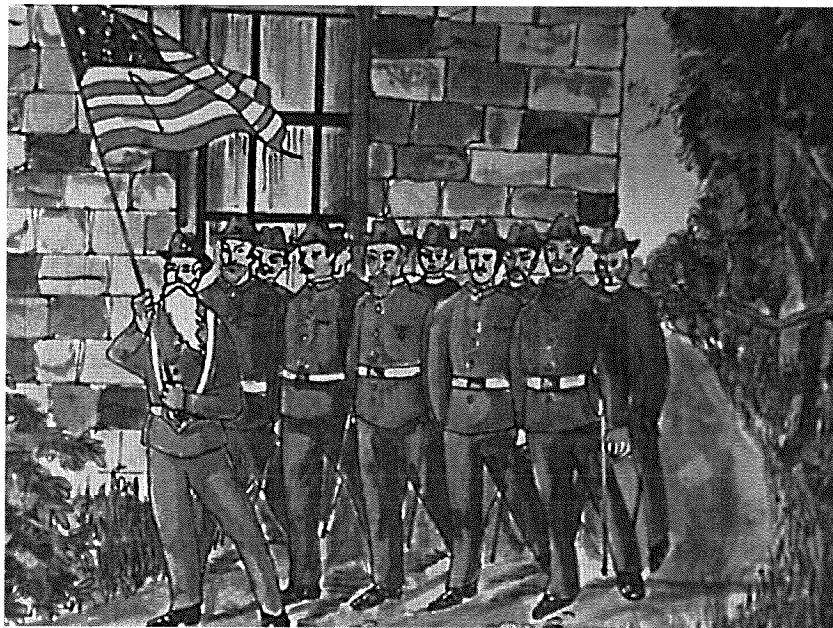
Unique to *Dimensions of a College* is the persistent language of liberty and freedom that is deployed throughout the film. Though this is befitting of a film produced during the Cold War era, it is also deeply revealing of the fears that shape Middlebury's master fantasy. One of the first significant sequences in this film is one which tells the origin story of the college. The mythology that it presents associates Middlebury directly with the mythology of westward expansion and "Yankee" ruggedness so emblematic of the patriotic mythology behind Cold War era nationalism.⁶¹ The college is represented as a direct product of imagined "yankee" ruggedness and vitality. The narrator proudly tells how the "resolute" pioneers of the northeast carved their destiny out of "the rude wilderness." This is intriguing, as the "frontier" itself in

⁵⁹ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 24:37.

⁶⁰ Coleman, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing*.

⁶¹ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 2:20 - 3:50

1800 was considerably farther west. The narrator goes on to assert Middlebury College's pedigree as that of the larger Ivy League universities which preceded it, specifically Yale University. This pedigree is not without its historical significance. The very foundations of "elite" American higher education were directly financed by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its associated economies.⁶² Middlebury is posited as such a community, as embodying the ruggedness of the frontier. It is from this imagined crucible which the college emerges, and it is from this legacy of oppression and enslavement which this story is ultimately derived.



This image, taken from *Dimensions of a College* at six minutes and forty-two seconds, presumably depicts students and/or faculty marching in Union Army uniform under a Union flag sometime during the American Civil War.

After repeated allusions to this ruggedness, individuality, and liberty throughout the

⁶² Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, 114.

piece,⁶³ the film ends with an ominous warning:

The *dimensions of a college* are many, but most important of all, perhaps, is the pursuit of the excellent, the love for truth that motivated the founders of this liberal arts college, and that must continue to motivate free men today if they are to keep themselves free.⁶⁴

This is profound because of the ways in which race has been constructed (in part by the American Academy) in the United States as a category by which blackness is tied to enslavement and whiteness is associated with freedom. In considering this historical information it appears that the impetus behind Middlebury's master fantasy is a profound fear of enslavement and by extension, of racial otherness. This effect is compounded by some of the revisionist history presented in the origin story towards the beginning of the film. In that sequence, Middlebury remembers the American Civil War in a way both erases the cultural divides it produced and erases the reasons for which it was fought. This imagining of national history in which Middlebury is positioned as an idealized neutral space, one in which, despite conflict and the realities of enslavement and emancipation, unity was achieved with little effort. This is indicative of a "victors' story" told from a position of white privilege, one which, in some ways, undergirds the fears articulated at the end of the film.

The ominous conclusion to *Dimensions of a College*, taking into account the sum of this film, invokes tropes that parallel those characteristic of white supremacy that assert a threat to the white race and a need for "excellent" offspring in order to ensure its survival.⁶⁵ Additionally, the deployment of "eliteness" by which Middlebury distinguishes itself is tied to ability and the

⁶³ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 2:20.

⁶⁴ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 31:34.

⁶⁵ Stubblefield, *Beyond the Pale: Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization*, 172.

geneticization of that "excellence" through symbols that consistently imply heterosexual reproduction as the mechanism by which the college's legacy is ensured. Middlebury's master narrative, then, is significant because of its basis in fear of blackness and disability. Much has changed since 1961, but these themes have remained central, albeit complicated as Middlebury College's story of self has adapted and changed. Other notable aspects of this film that inform this finding include the foregrounding of male identified subjects and faculty. Indeed, all of the professors represented in this film are men fitting the "resolute and rugged" description provided of Middlebury's founders,⁶⁶ despite there being a considerable number of women teaching at the college at the time.⁶⁷ This trend extends to rhetorical devices invoking the masculine. "Men" is employed as a blanket noun to refer to any and all Middlebury students, and though women are shown frequently in classroom footage, the centrality of gender in referring to *who* Middlebury is always tends toward the masculine.⁶⁸ The appeal the college makes early in the film to solicit alumni giving, directly after the "origin" sequence, evokes the patriarchal hegemony by associating alumni who contribute to the college with the "pioneers" who founded Middlebury. This moment further bolsters the transmission of material wealth as a part of a legacy of whiteness, or perhaps vice-versa, that surrounds the college. The anxiety here, reflected in a need to reify the colleges elite pedigree, comes immediately across as fragile and precarious.

This fragile response is somewhat unsurprising. As Harris notes, when the imagined borders of a community are threatened by the presence of perceived otherness, those "on the

⁶⁶ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 14:30 - 15:45

⁶⁷ Middlebury College, *Report of the Registrar 1960-1961* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College, 1961), 120.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:49

inside" may begin to question the basis of their communal beliefs and identity. In this way, hearing stories that contradict one's own can spark fragility and can be perceived as threatening.⁶⁹ Yet these stories, acting as the basis for the cultural imaginary *Dimensions of a College* presents, operate on the level of the "commonsense." Culturally dominant stories, such as those defining the central values of a given nation or the racial "characteristics" of a group of people, seem to often be perpetuated from within institutions that claim to exist as part of a larger dominant cultural mythology.

To say that *Dimensions of a College* is uniformly characterized by these aforementioned patterns, however, would be a misrepresentation of the film's complexity. The narrative here, at times, begins to tend towards more flexible standards of participation. The importance of "diversity" is even hinted at. Yet it is ultimately only "[diversity], of interest, [that] is another dimension that reveals the personality of the college."⁷⁰ A diversity of people has not yet been represented. Indeed, *Dimensions of a College* seems to largely compound the anxieties surrounding categories of identity with the social and political anxieties of the "atomic age."⁷¹ But how would this story change throughout the coming decades? The following years would see the height of the American Civil Rights Movement, the intensifying of the Cold War, the eruption of a rich youth counterculture, and eventually the war in Vietnam and the anti-war sentiments that surrounded it. How would these larger changes effect Middlebury College, and would they spur its master narrative to change? It is with these questions that I pivot to the next film, one of substantially different tone and structure from its predecessors.

⁶⁹ Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 1730.

⁷⁰ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 27:04

⁷¹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 90-91.

Part III - *A Chance to Grow* (1976): New Narratives and Anxieties Transformed

As late as 1971, a decade after *The Dimensions of A College: The Story of Middlebury* was produced, the president of Middlebury College referred to Middlebury as a place that must "remain a community small enough to gauge rightly character and ability, to bring out those authentic features which mark an individual,"⁷² demonstrating that - in the midst of a remarkable era of social change - some exclusive qualifiers of "excellence" continued to harken back to the master narrative of prior decades. In 1976, the year after the United States withdrew from the War in Vietnam, Middlebury College published *A Chance to Grow*. The changes in how the college represented itself in this film represent a significant departure from the prior films. The progressive sentiments of the civil rights and anti-war movements features prominently both in the film's representation of the college and in its narrative structure. It is the only film of these three that includes the voices of students. Indeed, its entire narrative is comprised of the words of Middlebury's faculty and students. The rigidity and sense of "solemn ceremony"⁷³ that surrounded Middlebury in *Dimensions of a College* (1961) has made way for a softer, more speculative tone that privileges exploration and growth over accomplishment and citizenship.

The college represented here, it is clear, has changed substantially. Middlebury's study abroad program features for the first time in any of these three films as a significant component of the student experience.⁷⁴ This foregrounding of cross-cultural learning is notable considering

⁷² David M. Stameshkin, *THE STRENGTH OF THE HILLS Middlebury College 1915-1990* (Middlebury College Press. 1996), 81.

⁷³ *The Dimensions of a College: The Story of Middlebury*, 13:35.

⁷⁴ *A Chance to Grow* (Middlebury, VT: Produced by Middlebury College, 1976), 6:05

the fearful rhetoric of nationalism in *Dimensions of a College*. Yet, certain notable aspects of the master narrative do not compromise. Faculty, again, are represented (with the one subtle exception of a female professor I infer to be teaching in Middlebury's Russian language program)⁷⁵ as male, despite there being many women teaching at the college at the time and being admitted to the faculty.⁷⁶ Representations of able-bodiedness, though less overt, still feature prominently. Able-mindedness remains a central deployment in Middlebury's representation of itself as an "elite" institution. Yet, we do see *more* representation. People of color and women have speaking parts that feature prominently in this film, representing at least some valuation of certain types of diversity. "Teaching," as one professor notes, "is really helping others in their own attempts at self-discovery, more than knowledge for the sake of knowledge, it's knowledge for the sake of action."⁷⁷ This represents a massive pivot from prior depictions of Middlebury. Self-discovery, activism, and non-violence are all at the center of how Middlebury is represented as a space - but how is that space still inherently white? These narratives are, as we will see, ultimately situated within a piece that still adheres to a master narrative based in a fear of racial otherness and disability, this time cloaked in a rhetoric of acceptance.

The film opens with a montage depicting a lone, long haired male student, driving his VW bug across the country to eventually arrive in rural Vermont, at the gleaming white campus which prior films have also leveraged visually. This time, rather than the collegial bells of Middlebury's Mead Chapel, banjo music is the sonic backdrop to this scene. In terms of the major indicators of whiteness we first saw established in *Campus Scenes*, displays of athleticism,

⁷⁵ *A Chance to Grow*, 20:02; For the first time, a seemingly non-male professor is featured. She provides no narrative of her own.

⁷⁶ "New Faculty Faces '76," Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College, 1976.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15:17.

unsurprisingly, still feature prominently. Yet, here, they are more considered, more diverse than simply football, and seemingly less indulgent. Sports are framed as opportunities to grow, consider identity, and understand self. Accomplishment is framed in terms of dedication and commitment rather than victory situated at a nexus of patriarchal politics of heterosexuality and reproduction. Conspicuous consumption is less obvious than in prior films. This is perhaps a product of the countercultural influences characteristic of the 1970's. The materiality of the campus matters less than it did in prior films. Yet the consumption of *experiences*, of self-discovery begins to arise as a new method of consumption. Access to such discovery is encoded with the significance of wealth and class. Examples of this include the participation of Middlebury students in study abroad programs, in participation in niche extracurricular activities and sports, and in the very lives they are able to lead - in many instances lives that seem free of stress and additional work obligations. In this way, it is the college experience itself that has been repositioned as a commodity.

Middlebury's aforementioned refined narrative of the college as a place to better oneself is a theme that undergirds the larger work of *A Chance to Grow*. Faculty grapple with questions of coexistence and diversity, of "how we will live together."⁷⁸ This general tone makes some of the old imagery hard to identify, but it is there nonetheless. Shots of men and women in pairs still creep into the film. The materiality of the campus, of student's possessions, of the services and opportunities at Middlebury are still inextricably linked to conspicuous consumption. Blackness is still represented as otherness and Middlebury as a place notably apart of how blackness is deployed in this film. This time, however, the deployment of these symbols is conveyed through the narratives of actual students and faculty. This is messy territory. I find it critical to not fall

⁷⁸ Ibid., 13:40.

into the trap of mistaking these interviews for wholistic representations of their narrator's lived experience. These voices, just like any script or narration, are encoded and redeployed in service of a larger story.⁷⁹ In the context of documentary film, they are merely another form of representation, not necessarily an indicator of an individual's intention or experience.

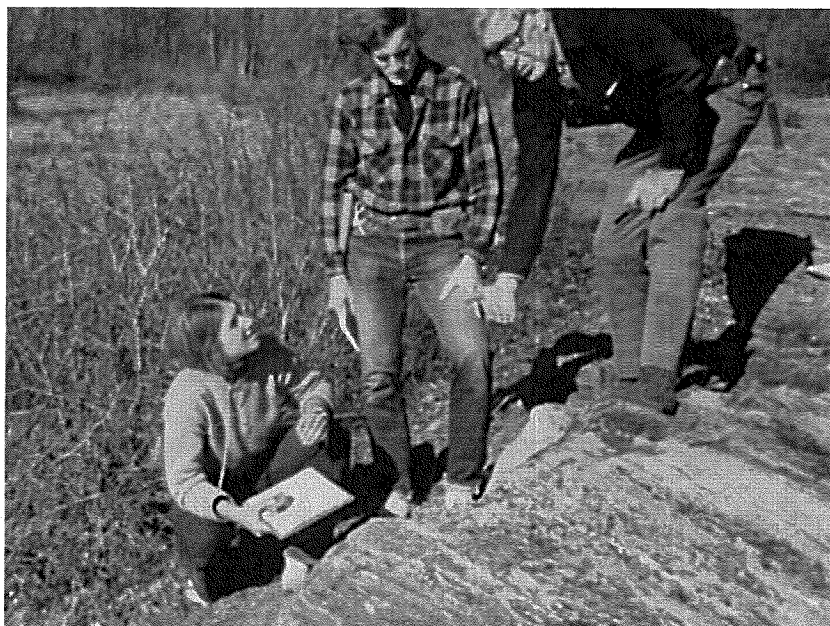
With this in mind, let us explore some key examples of points at which the familiar imagery identified in this study resurfaces. At nearly nine minutes into the film, we are introduced to an unnamed Kayak racer and geology major.⁸⁰ In this shot, she is seen with another young person, perhaps a Teaching Assistant or other student. He is confident and poised, explaining things to her that she seems to already be aware of (responding confidently with "uh-huh" throughout). This is the image of the couple re-instituted. Similar images occur later in the film. At seventeen minutes, there is a montage not dissimilar to the footage of couples dancing in *Campus Scenes*, of students dancing. This time it is in a variety of contexts: at a party, in a formal setting, and at a square dance.⁸¹ These students are, at a cursory glance, all white and predominantly dancing with someone of the opposite gender. Athleticism, as we can see in the sequences depicting sports and recreation between narrated scenes, is still a central part of a representation of student life. Consumption, as previously noted, seems to have shifted to the level of access to experience and knowledge. In many ways, though, it seems as though many of

⁷⁹ It seems appropriate to fall back to Stuart Hall's work here. An encoding/decoding approach to this media prompts us to acknowledge that the testimonies and voices of students go through many layers of encoding (by producers, film editors, etc.) prior to reaching us. Furthermore, our systems of meaning permit us to decode this media only through the images and symbols which we recognize to be significant. I reiterate that this approach is integral because it allows us to fundamentally separate the images and rhetoric of this film from the narrators and consider its cultural significance in terms of representation rather than intention.

⁸⁰ *A Chance to Grow*, 8:41

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17:00 - 17:26

these images are toned down and less overt than in the films that proceed *A Chance to Grow*. So where are the markers of a legacy of whiteness here? In this case, the answer presents itself in the narration of one significant student.



In this frame, taken from *A Chance to Grow* at eight minutes and thirty-one seconds, depicts a white female student crouching near a rock formation as two white men stand above her, one of them apparently lecturing on the formation

As I have noted in conversation with Hall, the "televisual signs" apparent in these sources are dually encoded through their narration and visual language. In order to understand the significance of a given moment, it is then necessary to situate it in terms of how it is both encoded through a certain cultural context and potentially decoded within another. This is a component of this study which requires us to rely on historical knowledge, techniques in media studies, and frameworks in literary studies in order to deduce the significance of a representation. Such an approach is certainly warranted in the case of the narration provided by Mario Cooper, a

student who would go on to become a noted HIV/AIDS activist and Civil Rights advocate. After Cooper's death in 2015, Middlebury College would publish an online piece featuring his segment from *A Chance to Grow*, claiming his story as their own. At the time, however, Cooper had not yet become a major activist. He is represented as a passionate, curious young person, and he is also represented fundamentally as a cultural outsider to Middlebury. His narrative begins like this:

It's just so peaceful, you assume every place else is peaceful and everyone else is well-fed. Knowing that I'm going to have to be in the city for the rest of my life, probably, I'm taking sort of the easy way out and enjoying this while I can.⁸²

These words from Cooper are striking. He is deployed as a black man from the city and his reflections on Middlebury highlights a juxtaposition that focuses sharply on experiences of privilege and place. Not only is this the case, but the deployment of urban and rural settings here invokes subliminally a language that parallels eugenic tropes surrounding anxieties about white impurity through the euphemism of *urban vs rural* - a code deployed in place of *race* and *class*. Samuels lends us an important glimpse into history here. As she writes in *Fantasies of Identification*, "a crisis began to emerge... regarding the identifiability and governability of the individual bodies making up [a nation's] bodies politic. This crisis of identification was driven by... greater geographic and class mobility; urbanization, colonialism, and expansion; the beginnings of the welfare state; and challenges to racial and gendered hierarchies."⁸³ Though the cultural settings in which these anxieties arose has long since passed by 1976, its echoes ring eerily familiar in the sequence depicting Mario Cooper.

Mario goes on to talk about how accepting and open minded the other students at

⁸² Ibid., 09:33

⁸³ Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*, Location 140 of 5266.

Middlebury are. All the while his narrative is introduced in such a way that he is almost immediately identified as "other." I find this position evident in that representation made by Mario that he has not necessarily known any cultural context like Middlebury College prior to arriving there as a student. He expresses sentiments of gratefulness for how lucky he is to be at the college, thereby escaping the violence, hunger, poverty, and overall strife of the "city." *City* serves as a euphemism for cultural otherness here because Mario's narrative of coming from such a background is unique among the students represented here. He is the only one to express a gratitude for the opportunities presented to him by Middlebury in this way. Because Mario is deployed as the only black man in this film, this positioning represents blackness as being tied distinctly to alienation from the privileges Middlebury affords. Mario is deployed as one of the lucky ones, and his display of gratitude is central to his significance in *A Chance to Grow*. Given the literary significance of this section, the college's online honorarium for Cooper comes off, in many ways, as an appropriation of his work in the face of their tokenizing of him in this film. Mario's scene ends with him discussing winter term and the "practical opportunities" the college affords its students. Moments later he is shown working on the campaign of an individual during what is presumably his winter term. "Now I'll tell you where we stand in terms of the black community..." he tells the candidate.⁸⁴ Mario section concludes with his representation as the token black representative - as speaking somehow for all black people. This representation reinforces white hegemonic cultural understandings of blackness as a monolith.

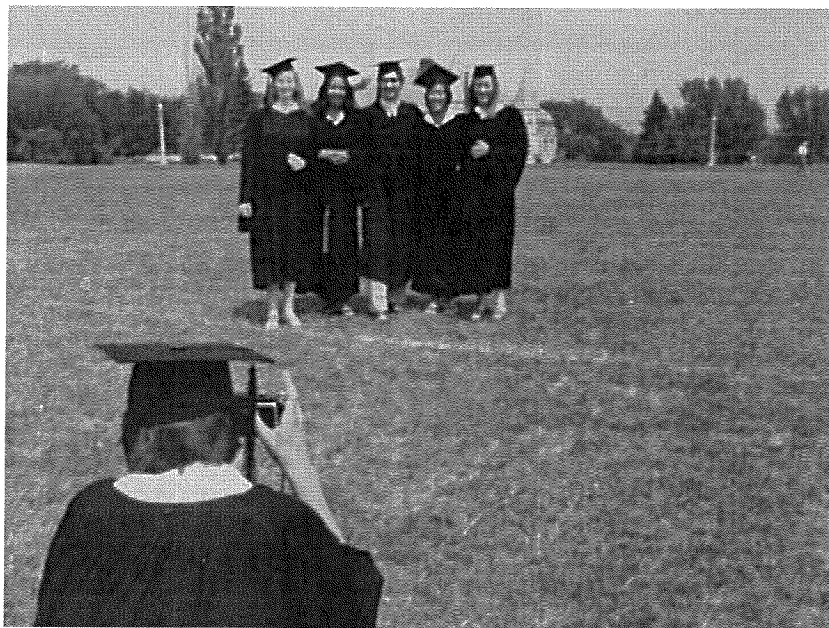
⁸⁴ *A Chance to Grow*, 11:40.



This frame, appearing in *A Chance to Grow* at eleven minutes and thirty-eight seconds, shows Mario Cooper speaking with a political candidate at an unidentified location

It is the rhetorical deployments in Mario's section that identify the ways in which Middlebury's master fantasy has developed. Though people of color and women may be allowed to be on campus and even have a voice in 1976, people of color in particular are very much represented as outsiders in *A Chance to Grow*. This deployment challenges the norms of representation seen in the earlier films, but ultimately reflects many of the same anxieties surrounding racial otherness. Diversity, to some degree is achieved, but *inclusion* of people of color is represented as fundamentally incompatible. This represents a significant finding, as this conflict demonstrates how Middlebury's own recurrent narrative of "eliteness" - marred always by the whiteness of the consumption, misogyny, racism and ableism that undergirds that category - does not allow certain people full participatory status centrality in its story despite their presence in it. Representations of disability, as an extension of this, remain entirely nonexistent, lending to a profound sense of erasure even in the face of a more "liberal" narrative. This is

perhaps because this narrative is still fundamentally about *futurity*. In revisiting Kafer's work, this absence reveals itself as a limiting of possible futures, representing only those narratives in which disability does not appear. This is perhaps more revealing than the presence of marginalized groups because, as Kafer reminds us, an absence of disability is itself a political statement implicating *the* ideal future exists without disabled people.⁸⁵ We can note, given these key moments, that the major implications of Middlebury's master narrative have not substantially changed by 1976, but merely transformed. They are less recognizable, but still ever-present.



This image, taken from *A Chance to Grow*, at twenty minutes and forty-eight seconds, shows a white female student taking a photo of a group of five other students.

One of the final scenes of *A Chance to Grow* represents a group of students in their

⁸⁵ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 3.

graduation robes. They are men and women representative of a variety of racial identities⁸⁶ - many more, in fact, than most moments in any of these films have represented prior. They are all represented as able-bodied/able-minded. They smile at each other in excitement as they prepare to leave Middlebury College as young alumni. A white woman, in graduation regalia, prepares to take a photo of this group. The camera cuts to her, and she occupies center-left frame as the group gathers to look at the camera. The frames that follow continue to gravitate towards the faces and expressions of the white men and women present, panning only briefly to show the fleeting presence of people of color. This final sequence, depicting the process of graduation, indicative of a greater culturally symbolic rite of passage into true citizenship and adulthood, illustrates with resounding clarity the centrality of the hetero-patriarchal values that constitute the ableist and consumerist whiteness of Middlebury's story. This is a story with profound implications both in the experience of Middlebury College as a community today and in our understandings of how whiteness is constructed and reinforced through institutionalized master fantasies.

⁸⁶ *A Chance to Grow*, 20:50.

Conclusion - Conceptualizing the Whiteness of Middlebury College

In 2017, two black players on the Middlebury College football team took up the practice of protesting police brutality and racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem at football games. At a game on October 28th, 2017 against Trinity College someone yelled a racial slur at the players from the stands. In his response to *The Campus - Middlebury College's* student newspaper - one of the athletes referenced the ways in which these pervasive and constant representations of whiteness at Middlebury contributed to his decision to protest.⁸⁷ This is merely one example of the ways in which the story Middlebury College tells about itself has come to have an effect on the lives of real people. And though this study does not focus on how the stories told by Middlebury translate into reality, the findings of this work raise interesting questions surrounding the cultural meaning those stories have. The geneticized legacy of whiteness, ability, and wealth that is so frequently the implication of Middlebury's stories of self shows us the clear ways in which Middlebury College as an institution is situated within larger histories of racism, ableism, and consumption, despite not being directly responsible for the overt exaction of these power structures such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade or the forced sterilization of people perceived to be feeble minded.

A larger conclusion of this research I draw from the new knowledge generated here. Though Middlebury is a particularly excellent example of an institution saturated with the cultural language whiteness, it is ultimately merely an example of a larger possibility: that all communities constituted by the stories they tell about themselves and that those stories are

⁸⁷ Will DiGravio, *Why Two Middlebury Football Players Decided to Kneel During the National Anthem* (*The Middlebury Campus*, December 6th Issue, 2017).

always bound up in the cultural histories and privileges that serve as the basis for their position. The myth of colleges and universities as places of free, open, or impartial inquiry, then, does not seem to hold up the actual actions or narratives of places like Middlebury College. The "Ivory Tower," so to speak, has its own politics which hold significant power over political and social discourse. The lack of significant change in Middlebury's master narrative between 1947 and 1976 - perhaps the most significant period of social upheaval in the 20th century - provides important insights to us as scholars regarding how whiteness constructs, operates, and obscures itself at an institutional level. A major conclusion here is that whiteness itself is constructed and reproduced in ways that are particular to individual communities, further reifying whiteness as a social construction that demands increased context-specific attention to understand both conceptually and practically the ways in which is maintained as a power structure constituted of patterns of privilege.

Yet, more questions may ultimately be raised here than answers, presenting room for intersectional scholarship to grow in a variety of directions from these sources. It would be interesting to gather information of the production of these films to better understand the roles they played at the time they were created. A historical study of these materials, then, seems in order sometime in the future. Equally fascinating would be a study of how institutions have used similar mediums to tell their stories. Yet another approach might take into account only one of the categories of identity explored here and dive more extensively into the way's disability, race, or class are called into conversation by these sources. Most pertinently for me, indeed, are the questions that still remain surrounding how story operates. Though whiteness as a system of power is certainly hegemonic, stories may yet give us the frameworks to make the language of whiteness identifiable. If whiteness is socially constructed through stories such as those I have

explored in this study, it stands to reason that stories may also be a mechanism by which the patterns of privilege surrounding whiteness are interrupted.

In a final word, this research does highlight another significant takeaway. As we have observed through the progression of these films, stories of whiteness cannot be merely forgotten after people have ceased to tell them, even after periods of significant social change. Ellen Samuels acknowledges this in *Fantasies of Identification* by observing that movements of social change have, at least recently, failed to disrupt the actual categories by which difference is qualified.⁸⁸ This us to an assumption that whiteness does not disappear or necessarily grown less privileged as a result of certain types of political and social upheaval, indeed, under some circumstances it appears to only grow more insidious. This begs a final question which I borrow in part from disability studies scholar Mia Mingus: how do we move from legacies of whiteness toward legacies of belonging?⁸⁹ This is perhaps the most resounding question this research leaves me with. Perhaps, the stories which reproduce such toxic systems must be actively retold to a degree which contradicts the master narratives prior iterations. Though this scholarship provides only speculation in this regard, perhaps similar interdisciplinary explorations of stories will continue to yield valuable knowledge in the future.

⁸⁸ Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*, Location 301 of 5266.

⁸⁹ Mia Mingus, *Finding Each Other: Building Legacies of Belonging*, (2018).

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