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# More than a Game: Racecraft and the Adaptation of “Race” in Live Action Role Play

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**Abstract:** Live action role players make the imaginative worlds of tabletop games manifest through collaborative storytelling and embodied play. Escaping the everyday, these communities could radically reimagine culture and challenge oppressive ideologies. Instead, they are deeply invested in essentializing “race”. I conducted a three-year ethnographic study alongside 20 semi-structured interviews to explore racecraft in live action role play. Supporting the groundbreaking work of Karen and Barbara Fields, I find that racecraft is a social process—continually negotiated and maintained through intimate interactions and community exchanges. Through this process, the definition of “race” is continually adapted while belief in this category remains entrenched. When participants confront racist stereotypes, practitioners coerce marginalized members into a false exchange. These members are encouraged to share experiences detailing the damage of problematic representations. Practitioners then reduce these experiences to monolithic understandings of “race”. In this insidious manner, anti-racist confrontations become fodder for racecraft. Complicating this further, patterned racism is characterized as an inborn quality of whiteness, minimizing practitioners’ accountability. Responsibility is then shifted onto marginalized participants and their willingness to engage in “racial” education. This trap is ingrained in the double standard of racism, adapting “race” such that whiteness is unrestricted by the monolithic definitions applied to those outside this category.

**Keywords:** racecraft; racism; epistemologies of ignorance; live action role play

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## 1. Introduction

**Eshe:** So the race is called “Elvrani” and it’s an elf race but [in this world] the term elf is a slur. And there’s four or five other slurs in the game. But, it becomes cool to use them because it shows how hardcore your character is. And that’s when it gets weird.

Because this is not real but it’s weird to see you have so much fun using a slur.

**[Author]:** Have you ever had someone use these slurs against you?

**Eshe:** Oh yeah. Yeah. And it’s weird being an Elvrani and a person of color.

I’m offended but two parts of me are offended.

**[Author]:** How do you navigate that?

**Eshe:** I’m kind of dealing with that right now. Because my character just has a lot of rage going on.

And I’m not sure—trying to separate her rage from my rage.

That’s my project right now.

The worlds of live action role play (LARP) are complex spaces of collaborative and imaginative interaction. The stories and characters of this activity are not simply left on the page. They are embodied in meticulous fashion through settings, interactions, costumes, language, props, makeup, etc., and while individuals strive to meet these expectations, it is not simply for self-gratification. This robust embodiment is a part of a communal effort in which the participants work as a whole to transport themselves to fictional lands. As they collectively pursue this activity, live action role players (LARPers) are continually negotiating everyday life and a fantastic escape: a foot in both worlds. LARP is a form of unscripted storytelling, shared between many mouths. LARPers take pride in “crafting” this story. This is to say, creativity is the coin of this realm.

As LARPers work to minimize reality and escape elsewhere, we might assume that their worlds become radical spaces—a departure from “the real” begetting something that looks entirely unlike everyday life. However, the exact opposite often occurs: the mundane influences in LARP reflect how everyday inequities plague these imaginative spaces. Despite high praise for creativity, the landscapes of LARP are restricted to the mental terrain of racecraft. Introduced by the Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields, racecraft refers to the social processes—the “actions and imaginings”—by which the category of “race” is reified, treated as “real”. Those enacting racecraft continually negotiate definitions of “race”, coercing a deep belief in the absolution of this category despite habitual adaptation. LARPers’ dedication to escapism does not overturn their devotion to racecraft: “race” thrives in these stories as a foundational category. This is reminiscent of the tired books and films that promise the fantastic but deliver mere facades of existing oppression. Theorists are left to dig through these cultural products, imagining the intents and interactions that led to such “race” essentialization. Such research has been foundational for understanding racecraft, exposing the meticulous naturalization of “race”. However, LARP provides a different vantage point. LARP is ongoing, collaborative, and improvisational. The interactional storytelling and dynamic world-building of LARP extend observations of racecraft to a case of speculative fiction that is living and breathing. Central to educational efforts, previous research has provided tangible manifestations of racecraft—the “imaginings” of racecraft. However, they cannot speak to the “actions”. LARP’s communal, unscripted storytelling facilitates investigation of the processes—the interactions and negotiations—inherent to racecraft.

To preserve the “living and breathing” aspect of this case, I conducted a three-year ethnographic study of 13 different LARP communities paired with semi-structured interviews. This research exposed racecraft as a social, ongoing, and adaptable process that can incorporate dissenting voices. Through this adaptation, racecraft goes unchallenged, while “race” is continually reimagined. Such interactions facilitate a false educational exchange: oppressed community members attempt to uproot stereotypes by explaining marginalization, only to have practitioners use those experiences as fodder for racecraft. This becomes an endless cycle in which confrontations of racism are redirected to racecraft, encouraging the oppressed to hone “racial” categories and reify them further. Racism is framed as “racial” ignorance innate to whiteness, necessitating the educational intervention of people of color. As a result, racecraft is falsely positioned as the solution to racism, and those marginalized by racecraft are charged with its maintenance. By observing LARP, this empirical research bolsters the Fieldses’ claim that “race” is not inherited, but instead maintained in modernity by racecraft: through intimate interaction and communal exchange. Finally, this research looks at the outcomes of this maintenance, considering how the double-standard of racism is ingrained in the “creative processes” of racecraft. This double-standard is capable of “protagonizing” whiteness—fashioning whiteness in exploratory, inductive fashion—while simultaneously restricting non-whiteness to predetermined roles. Creative ventures and speculative fictions are not simply informed by racecraft, but spaces in which racecraft is a key social process. They are central to the conservation of this mental terrain as these enterprises embed “race” further and further into our social scripts while adapting the logics that define that category.

### 1.1. Understanding Racecraft and Exposing “Race”

Critical race theory has had a considerable tenure in the academic exploration of racism. While initially tackling expansive, structural questions, modern conversations have come to fixate on demographic concerns—cataloging disparity across census categories (Bell 1995; Gillborn et al. 2017; Asare 2018). This has led to a stagnation where the inequitable outcomes of racism are continually unearthed, but solutions remain elusive (Mevorach 2008; Palmie 2008; Weiss 2008). Disrupting this, the Fieldses’ application of racecraft has encouraged research to question the concept of “race” itself and how the essentialization of this ideology is a key mechanism by which racism persists (Fields 1990; Fields and Fields 2012). This work has underscored the rhetorical regression from racism to “race”. This turn has seen “race” explained as identity, biology, evolution, and as an uncritical method of study (Brubaker and Frederick 2000; Buchard et al. 2003; Hill 2017). This is evident in academic debates questioning how best to operationalize “race”, as if perfect, scientific categories are the crux of social solutions (Villarreal 2010; Flores and Telles 2012; Villarreal 2012). The unproductive application of critical race theory has led to a fixation on how best to determine “racial” categories instead of the social processes embedded in that determination.

The Fieldses assert that fortifying categories of “race” only entrenches racism: “Race is the principal unit and core concept of racism”; “It is an ideology . . . If race lives on today, it does not live on because we have inherited it from our forebears . . . but because we continue to create it today” (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 17, 146). The acceptance of “race” as a real, immutable unit by which we can distinguish experience only obfuscates racism. The Fieldses argue that racism is, first and foremost, a social practice—“the theory and the practice of applying a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideology surrounding such a double standard” (p. 17). Yet the cataloging of “race” shifts the focus from this collective practice, its social actors, and institutionalized norms to a conversation of innate, inborn qualities (p. 261). This naturalization makes racism something that is caused by “racial” differences, perpetually embedded. The ideology of “race” promises that “race” is a constant, hardwired into reality.

Meanwhile, the social actors enacting racism and the practice itself go unchallenged while “race” becomes increasingly accepted as absolute. Disparity comes to be seen as the result of “race” as inequality is reduced to statistical characteristics (Asare 2018). Demographic studies expose the correlation between impoverished areas, crime, and race without considering how the social practice of racism explains this inequality (Knight et al. 2004; Marotta 2017). The reemergence of “evolution-informed” sociology has argued that criminal behavior is lodged in our genetic makeup and that a neglect of biology has curtailed effective explanations (Rebellon et al. 2014; Walsh and Yun n.d.; Williams and Montgomery 2018). This racecraft beckons us to dig deeper and deeper into “race”, as if it were some new frontier promising a bounty of equitable solutions. Yet the Fieldses compare the “invisible ontology” of racecraft to witchcraft: the practitioners of racecraft exist in social spaces that entrench their beliefs in “race”. For this research, practitioners are defined as social members who are invested in, and benefit from, the reification of “race” and the continuation of racecraft. Entrenching belief, racecraft effectively incorporates those empowered and disempowered by the double-standard of racism. Practitioners are those actors privileged by this belief, who cultivate it and espouse it in these intimate social spaces. The Fieldses deny the innateness of “race” as an explanation of racism: “Since race is not genetically programmed, racial prejudice cannot be genetically programmed either but, like race itself, must arise historically” (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 120). Practitioners gesture to the social products of racism as evidence of “race”, simultaneously erasing the former and essentializing the latter.

Racecraft is further entrenched by “epistemologies of ignorance” that allow for racist practitioners to negate accountability by claiming ignorance as the cause for their actions (Mills 2007; Jungkunz and White 2013). This strategy effectively interrupts anti-racist rhetoric and redirects the focus to white ignorance, framing the most privileged social actors as needing assistance and attention (Mueller 2020). As a result, ignorance is portrayed as inherent to whiteness and normalizes a pattern of racist interaction.

This framing has been foundational to diversity training initiatives that enact racecraft by articulating “racial differences” requiring specialized training (Simmons 2020). What’s more, spaces that seek to complicate understandings of racism beyond singularity, stereotype, or essentialism—beyond racecraft—are often waved off as frivolous. However, creative enterprises like afro-futurist fiction and indigenous poetry often challenge the concept of “race” while exploring the complex experiences of racist oppression (Taylor 2016; Chude-Sokei 2017; Steingo 2017; Kristianto 2019).

The hegemonic maintenance of racism is dependent on smoke and mirror tactics that obfuscate institutionalized racism, remove accountability for racist practitioners, and continually spotlight “race” as the paramount concern and obvious explanation of differential experience. Feagin’s “white racial frame” exposed how the centering of whiteness as the normative identity allowed whiteness to persist as an unchecked ideal (2009). While Feagin did not consider the essentialization of “race” in his discussion, he outlined how whiteness came to be defined by a privileged position. This creates a tautological defense of privilege: position legitimizes power and power explains position. Though nonwhite identities are continually dissected and repackaged in disempowering fashion, white privilege is framed as the result of ideal identity instead of racism (Alexander 2020; McDowell 1995). Putting racecraft in conversation with Feagin’s work, privilege and disadvantage come to be seen as “racial” characteristics. Further aligning racecraft and witchcraft, “race” becomes a sort of predestination that explains social power. This becomes foundational for essentializing white ignorance as an innate characteristic versus a product of privilege: if this idealization frames privilege as innate to whiteness, so too is ignorance of marginalized experience. Returning to the epistemologies of ignorance, practitioners can frame racist behavior as a natural consequence of “race” (Mills 2007; Mueller 2020).

### 1.2. Creative Enterprises, Racecraft, and the Case for Live Action Role Play

Considering the “invisible ontologies” that fuel this process, research should not dismiss anti-racist creative enterprises—like afro-futurist literature—as accessorial to “real” change. Equally important, research should not overlook fictional ventures invested in maintaining this ideology. Both ends of this spectrum provide necessary insights into the process of “racecraft”: how it is undone or how it is adapted (Gateward and Jennings 2015). The Fieldses highlight how racecraft is a “mental terrain”, embedded in belief (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 18). They underscore that “race” is not historically inherited or biologically ingrained but perpetuated in the present, through the meticulous work of racecraft. It is for this reason that we have to consider the creative ventures implicated in this process. We cannot neglect fiction as escapist or trite. “Race” itself is fiction that has maximal consequences. The creative enterprises enacting racecraft provide opportunistic insights to examine the actual “craft” itself.

Speculative, fictional worlds are more than symptoms. They are landscapes in which racecraft is made manifest through writing, playing, drawing, etc.: tangible examples that allow us to interrogate just how this belief is negotiated, maintained, or challenged (Dubey 2017). Previous research has focused on online gaming communities that build alternative worlds of play, asking how they essentialize “race” as they create fantastic settings (Monson 2012; Nakamura 2009). Programmers develop speculative cultures, and gamers flock to these virtual arenas to escape. Despite the seemingly endless potential to imagine something new or different—to truly escape—these spaces reproduce ontologies of “real race” that come to define physiology, labor, behavior, culture, etc. (Weiss and Tettegah 2012). Fantastical proxies mimic racist stereotypes and provide fictional shortcuts. These shortcuts allow consumers to quickly digest who is civilized and who is savage; who is the protagonist and who is the villain (Young 2016). Unlike afro-futuristic literature or indigenous poetry, such creativity is racecraft’s keeper. “Race” becomes as real a force as gravity, and ingenuity is crushed under the weight of racecraft.

In theory, communities dedicated to the creation and embodiment of fictional play could abandon “race” altogether. Yet they often end up doing the exact opposite (Monson 2012). As the gaming literature has shown, “race” becomes a cornerstone of these fantastical worlds (Behm-Morawitz 2017; Malkowski and Russworm 2017). Following this, existing research has focused on the cultural products

that exhibit racecraft, considering video games or television shows and their elements. We are often left to explore this “mental terrain” by dissecting its products, limiting our scope to the cultural objects that embody its logic. This is important work, as it has overturned the commonsensical use of “race” in such ventures (Nakamura 2009). Yet it limits us to the finished “goods” of this craft, instead of observing the process. We cannot consider the meaningful interactions, debates, and negotiations that shape racecraft. LARP allows us to explore racecraft in process, “the action and imagining”: in the visceral interactions between individuals as they create shared worlds and try to foster community (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 19). The Fieldses argue that racecraft itself is a “fingerprint”, “evidence that *racism* has been on the scene” (19). By limiting ourselves to derivative cultural products, we are stuck with studying evidence of the evidence of racism. This threatens a semantic debate—are the cultural objects that embody racecraft not racecraft themselves? Certainly, but we still lack necessary information on the interactions and negotiations that lead to those objects. Providing new insight, LARP is an interactive, improvisational form of play that requires community embodiment, as participants seek to embed themselves in fantastical worlds (Odom 2009). Gatherings range from a small handful of participants to communities over 500. Inspired by the tabletop worlds of Dungeons and Dragons, they rally around a speculative world and build characters that they embody for the duration of the event (Stark 2012). A hybrid of theater and play, this requires consideration of how they will behave and speak but also how they will physically represent their characters through costuming, makeup, and props (Owen 2019). LARP games explore diverse worlds, from apocalyptic, nuclear landscapes to Arthurian fantasies. Most important, LARP is made rich by its unscripted elements. It provides a case of speculative world-building in which we are not limited to the resulting game, book, or film but can consider the nuanced ways in which racecraft is continually instated through interaction. By studying the LARP community, we can catch practitioners red-handed, in the process of racecraft: negotiated among peers; challenged by dissenters; or perhaps maintained by a collective. The improvisational, collaborative nature of LARP allows us to watch this process unravel in real-time. We are not limited to the rulebooks of these worlds or their published stories. The moment-to-moment negotiations of LARP allow us to venture into the interactional dynamics of racecraft. How might racecraft be collectively upheld? What happens if racecraft becomes challenged or criticized? How do practitioners of racecraft frame their practice? How might racecraft lead to inequitable outcomes for community members? We can observe this ongoing play to understand how speculative cultures are built through the actions and imaginings of racecraft.

## 2. Methods

This research used multi-level qualitative analysis (Hunting et al. 2015). First, I conducted a three-year ethnographic study, participating in 13 different games across the New England region, attending over 30 events between them. These events took place on weekends, in both hotels and campsites. Campsites, often remote, were the preferred rental space. My participation required embodiment, as it would be considered against community rules to refuse to participate in the game as it occurred. This required donning appropriate costuming and being involved in the actual LARP, itself. As an added challenge, this often meant that useful technologies were not permitted during games taking place in “high fantasy”, medieval settings. Field notes, for the most part, were restricted to pen-and-paper journaling throughout the event. This ethnography also included unstructured interviews with community members while games were not running, to learn about the nuances of the activity and ask pertinent questions. It should be noted that I, the researcher, am a white-coded Indigenous person who was often able to enter conversations perceived as having an entirely white audience. While such perceptions immediately expose racecraft, transparency is needed in order to acknowledge positionality, privilege, and access (Muhammad et al. 2015). Field notes and unstructured interviews produced emergent themes that were used for the next phase of the research. Similarly, these field notes scaffolded the accounts in the interviews, providing context for the responses.

Using Kusenbach's "go along" tool, I conducted 20 interviews alongside my participant observation (Kusenbach 2003; Westby et al. 2003). Of these participants, half self-identified as white and half self-identified as non-white. When I mention "LARPers of color" (LoC) this is a self-identified title. These participants were recruited using online forums across a number of different social media sites. After initial responses, I continued to recruit from the forums while also employing snowball tactics. Following Mears' ethnographic work, I applied grounded coding, first analyzing these interviews independently and then developing a coding scheme (Mears 2015). I then coded them utilizing the emergent themes developed from the ethnographic study and the focused coding, which overlapped considerably. An important note: this study reports individuals' self-identification regarding "race". It is not the intent of this study to operationalize "race" nor essentialize it as I try to explore the consequences of racism. As a result, I do not change the self-identified labels to fit a formula or exclude information like ethnicity. It is also for this reason that you see both caucasian and white represented in parenthetical descriptions. However, I replaced all names with pseudonyms, including game names or game-specific terms that could be used to identify participants.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. *A Tour of Live Action Role Play*

Before delving into racecraft and LARP, we have to explore the relational nuances of this dynamic space. Doing so allows us to understand the community organization that foregrounds the racecraft explored in the following conversations. It is important to note that interviewees spanned a number of communities in the United States, and, accordingly, the ways in which they participated in LARP were unique to their sources. The majority of interviewees participated in what are termed "campaign LARPs": episodic events that followed a central storyline over a period of time. This style of LARP typically took place over the course of a weekend on rented, remote campsites. During this time, participants were expected to be "in game" for the course of the event. In addition to campaign LARPs, some participants were active in the convention scene, comprised of sequential "short form" LARPs that took place one after another. These typically took place in large hotels. Despite these distinguishing features, there were horizontal similarities that grouped these efforts. These features were the organizational dynamics, the in-game/out-of-game interactions, and LARP's collaborative, improvisational style.

Field notes and interviews exposed a ubiquitous organizational structure that divided participants into two categories: those managing the game and those playing the game. The managing side was populated by hand-selected staffers that ran the game and volunteers that supported this process. The former had far more authority over game decisions and plot, whereas the latter were often slotted into particular roles without much choice. Neither paid an entry fee in order to participate. Amongst staffers, games had different protocols—either assigning equal levels of control or differentiating positions. Some staffers had increased authority, with titles like "game manager", "story manager" or "camp liaison". Staff selection was often done by the individuals who developed the game concept, funded the endeavor, or did both. These individuals were often referred to as "owners" and typically had the final say on any disputes or controversies. While helpful, volunteers were, for the most part, interchangeable and not individually necessary. For example, if a volunteer were to drop out at last minute this would be a non-issue. Were a staffer to do the same, the weekend's storyline would suffer. Other staffers would have to over-exert themselves to make up for the absence.

The other category was players: those who paid in order to attend a LARP. On the surface, this was a less nuanced group. Players used game-specific rulebooks to develop character concepts and then paid an entry fee in order to play those characters and interact with the story established by the staff. In a sense, players were the "clients" of these games and staff worked to make their experiences valuable. This led to interesting organizational dynamics in which staff were hand-selected for leadership roles whereas players' demands were complicated by their purchasing power. Conflicts mapped

onto this organizational structure with position and clout influencing outcomes. For example, in the selection process, many game owners would choose staff members with whom they had previously worked or were close friends. When players criticized a lack of diversity on the staff side, they were criticizing the racism and nepotism that made it difficult for nonwhite participants to obtain important positions. However, as they were players—not staffers or owners—they had little authority in regard to organizational titles.

The second important consideration was the “in-game” or “out-of-game” distinction at LARPS. When in-game, participants behave as if they are in the game world. They go by character names, dress in appropriate garb, and try to minimize real-world signifiers. For example, participants would be discouraged from, or policed for, uncritically using their cellphones during a medieval-style game. However, staffing requires participants to jump in and out of the game, as they both organize the event and step in-game to interact with players and deliver the plot. Already intricate, this distinction can get murky when conflicts arise. Is a player dispute in-game or out-of-game? What happens when someone is behaving problematically as a character choice? How might a staffer police unacceptable behavior happening during in-game moments? These questions start to show that these categories are not mutually exclusive and can overlap. There are spaces in which in-game and out-of-game behaviors are simultaneously occurring. It is for this reason that interactions necessitate the frontstage and backstage navigation of conflicts. When controversies arise, players might take issue with in-game embodiment aspects such as problematic costuming (frontstage) or derogatory statements made by another player on an online forum (backstage). One is specific to in-game space and the other applies more broadly to the LARP community, out-of-game. This research deals with both categories and tries to collectively consider how in-game and out-of-game interactions exhibit racecraft in LARP. Indeed, these precarious distinctions and their counterintuitive overlap makes navigating this space all the more difficult as we turn to questions of accountability and racism.

The final consideration for this research is the improvisational, collaborative style inherent to LARP. Many instances of speculative culture make it necessary to consider the producers and consumers of speculative culture as separate categories: programmers versus gamers; writers versus readers; makers versus fans. However, the stories, interactions, and worlds of LARP are built in collective fashion: the product of staffers’ guidance and players’ engagement. Like Jenkins’ “textual poachers”, players do more than consume LARP (Jenkins 2012). However, their interpretations impact the canonical story. They collaborate with staff in unscripted, improvisational fashion to develop the stories and outcomes of these games. While TV or movie fans can pushback or criticize plots, LARP players are the vehicles by which plot actually occurs. LARPer are simultaneously the writers, the audience, the fans, and the critics. Players and staffers work together as a narrative team that dictates how the fiction unfolds. The worlds of LARP are speculative cultures collaboratively built over time. Returning to racecraft, this provides the opportunity to observe the essentializing of “race” through in-person interactions and community dynamics. With these considerations established, we can now venture into the complex ways in which racecraft is enacted in LARP.

### 3.2. *The False Exchange: Ignorance, Stereotypes, and Making “Race” Real*

The interactions in the LARP community revealed that racist stereotypes have a more insidious function than previously explored. Stereotypes, in and of themselves, are a product of racecraft. However, when these images are challenged, practitioners of racecraft demand that understandings of “real race” fill the vacuum. This was often articulated as an educational exchange in which communities of color became responsible for explaining “real race” to replace ignorant representation. I term this “the false exchange”: processes of racecraft go uninterrupted as practitioners of racecraft supplant stereotypes with experiences of marginalization—condensing Blackness, Indigeneity, Asian-ness, etc., into uniform identities that can be used in the place of previous stereotypes. The exchange was ultimately characterized by the implicit understanding that marginalized identities could find belonging if they participated in these interactions, framing their acceptance as self-determined.

Practitioners argued that white ignorance was the catalyst for “misunderstandings”, shifting the focus from racism to an innate characteristic of whiteness. Accordingly, the unique solution demanded the continual labor of participants of color as they tried to displace racist stereotypes. This often relegated participants of color to cyclical roles in which racecraft was framed as the solution to racism. Get rid of racist stereotypes by telling me about your race: “I want folks of color to feel represented in my games. In a respectful way. Like, I want to get it right. I want them to see themselves in my LARP worlds. That means that when they tell me about who they are, I need to listen” (Percy/caucasian/male/48).

As the problem is framed as inherent to whiteness, it can never be truly solved, as there are always new practitioners in need of this educational exchange. This trapped participants of color in ever-evolving crises in which ignorance was the norm and educational intervention was the eternal solution. It was a near ubiquitous experience among LARPer of Color (LoC) that they would arrive at an event only to be surprised by racist representation. From that, they would respond in one of three ways: (A) confront the individual or another individual in charge of the event, (B) ignore the incident to preserve their own experience, or (C) leave the event altogether: “I’ve gotten kind of used to it at this point. And now, it’s honestly like . . . okay, do I have the energy to deal with this today? Or do I just want to play my own game? Sometimes I ignore it but then I feel guilty because like, if I don’t talk to them, who will?” (Eshe/Black/female/29). LoC who decided not to engage sometimes felt complicit and often budgeted these exchanges, coerced into their roles as educators on “real race” when they sought to confront racism. What’s more, practitioners of racecraft often funneled LoC into these exchanges, arguing that LoC were the only ones capable of “speaking to” such indiscretions: “For me, it’s important to give nonwhite LARPer a voice in this. If they see an issue with something, I try to set up a meeting to resolve it between the players. And more often than not, I find that the folks messing up are happy to listen and try to understand” (Nadeen/white/female/36). White participants were framed as passively involved despite the racism that instigated these exchanges.

When LoC did engage with stereotypes, their confrontations were often framed as “the first step”. Due to the large size of these communities, this rarely provided them with the opportunity to make a lasting impact. Daniel was a longtime LARPer who had moved from smaller, college-level LARPing to international involvement. Last year, Daniel attended a popular LARP convention only to see the game “Fortune Cookie Kung Fu” listed in the options:

So the LARP designer was white . . . and some friends were like we’re Asian, let’s go play the game. It’s probably a dumpster fire but let’s go and play and then talk to him. And it was a dumpster fire. It was every worst Asian stereotype by the designer . . . But this was a best case scenario. So usually when you go talk to someone to say hey this is a problem—you get this white fragility: hey I’m not racist. How dare you say I’m racist. But in this case, they managed to reach this person and start a dialogue where in the end he was like, yeah okay I see why this is a problem even though I just wanted to do something for fun. But it doesn’t always turn out that way. If you’re a person of color it’s so emotionally exhausting. (Asian/male/33)

Daniel noted the designer’s orientalism, employing Pan-Asianism and clumsily grabbing from different cultures in an attempt to make the plot seem “mystical”. When I asked Daniel if he was aware if the individual was still running the game, made changes, or stopped altogether, he didn’t know. The most recent version ran in 2019 ([Double Exposure 2019](#)). Daniel was not able to see measurable change as the result of this intervention but was simply left to “hope” that something was now different: that an epiphany had been reached.

Practitioners of racecraft often viewed these interventions as opportunities to replace “outdated” concepts with “real world” definitions. Percy was an established game runner who had explored a number of LARP genres, from high fantasy to the wild west. Percy ran one game he termed “weird west”, reimagining the cowboy genre with high-tech gear. He argued that this game became an important learning opportunity for him as a white game owner:

We all make mistakes but if I'm getting it wrong, I need to know. I never want people to feel like they can't call me out . . . We had a nation where players could be from that was inspired by native culture. I honestly thought we were doing a pretty respectful job. But, a native player let me know that she saw it as an issue. And I remember being so grateful because it's like, okay, I'm not doing a good job here. And she pointed me towards some resources that really helped. (caucasian/male/48).

I pressed Percy on these resources and the changes he had made. Unlike Daniel, Percy was the recipient of this intervention and could speak about impact. He informed me that, in response, he read about the "real history of tribes" and tried to make the game reflect that. Though he no longer ran the game, he felt the final representation was better because the conversation took place. Percy argued that the intervention allowed him to transform the native nation from "an issue" into something "real". He could not provide explicit examples of what changes had occurred, simply that the representation was more real because the intervention had inspired research. He also did not change his monolithic framing of native culture. Most importantly, Percy utilized resources that were *always* at his disposal but still underscored the accountability of others to intervene.

Framing the issue as "white ignorance" allowed the very same practitioners to continue to evoke racist imagery, coercing LoC into never-ending, case-by-case adjudication. Each new instance was framed as another mistake needing educational attention:

So I was at this high fantasy game. And I'm having a great time until this [staffer] walks up and starts asking us if we want to try to summon "animal spirits" to act as "totems" to protect our land. And I'm like . . . what the fuck? We're in some mystical kingdom in some far off world and I guess cultural appropriation is a thing here too. Like, come the fuck on. So I swallow it and try to get through the game but it's kind of there—like you gotta deal with this. After the game, I approach the dude running the plot and ask him about it. He's a white dude with no fucking idea what he's doing. I tell him, hey—you know, this isn't great. Here's why. And at first, he resists it. Like, no, no that's not what I meant. But eventually he starts to get it and even thanks me. I think, awesome. I made an impact. Maybe this will be okay. Next fucking game, he comes out and runs a ritual where he burns sage and talks about the "Great One". We just fucking talked about this. And, I don't know. I don't know if he didn't get it. I don't know if he doesn't care (Myla/American Indian—Anishinaabe/female/32).

Daniel defined this as "Schrodinger's racism"—is this person ignorant or is this person racist? Yet this framing fortified the idea that ignorance was instinctive and therefore a forgivable offense. Practitioners of racecraft framed these exchanges as "a part of the process", denying the autonomy of those who enacted racism and shifting responsibility onto LoC as the only ones who could "know their experiences" (Nadeen/white/female/36). This rationalized patterned racism as a product of white privilege and facilitated inaction on the part of practitioners.

Compounding this, LoC's interventions were heavily policed by practitioners. There was a right way and a wrong way to perform this "necessary" education: "The reality is that people don't know what they don't know. We can all do better at LARPs but part of that is trying to help people understand why things are problematic" (Kaylee/white/female/28). Despite the emotional labor involved, LoC were expected to minimize personal distress during such interactions and practice respectability politics. Although young, Tanner had run a small number of games and set expectations for how such interactions should occur: "I think it just can't be a fuck you. That's part of the problem. There's got to be a conversation. There's got to be learning that takes place. So I just want to encourage interactions that let that take place" (white/male/26). Some LoC readily involved themselves in this process: "These teachable moments don't happen all the time so you have to take advantage when things surface" (Anmol/Indian/male/28). When confronting stereotypes, LoC attempted to use personal experiences to explain the damage of such characterization. Yet practitioners framed these criticisms as warranting educational intervention, exposing differential power by demanding further effort on the

part of LoC. Racism was framed as white ignorance—innate and absolute. To remove stereotypes, LoC would have to explain their experiences to white audiences so that those audiences could adjust their understandings of “race”. As a result, LoC were encouraged to supplant these depictions with “real race”: their experiences diluted into new, monolithic categories. Seeking to challenge racist practices, LoC were coerced into exchanges in which “white ignorance” required educational intervention and emotional coddling. Rejecting this exchange to call out racism was seen as “a part of the problem”. Accordingly, LoC were charged with “conversations” that gave new, palatable definitions of “race”. Change was framed as conditional, limited to these exchanges, and narrowing the perimeters to interactions that fortified racecraft.

When LoC attempted to impact change outside of these educational exchanges, they experienced rejection by their communities. Policed behavior included LoC criticizing a lack of diversity in powerful positions, a lack of anti-racist policies in rulebooks, or games refusing to pay LoC for the emotional labor of education. Since being ostracized from his local community, Logan struggled to participate in the hobby despite being deeply passionate about it. He was involved in a post-apocalyptic game that had slavery written into the plot. Logan assumed it would be used to build horror but found that it was often “written for jokes”. He decided to contact staff after interacting with a team playing “The Confederacy”: a group of all-white slavers who were vocally pro-slavery. Logan personally felt unsafe but was also worried that the team would scare off new players, especially new players of color. He tried to schedule a meeting with the local community to discuss the issue and formulate a lasting policy:

I was going out of my way to the point where I literally arranged a sit down with the local staff and the people I knew in game and was like here, let’s sit here and have a long, drawn out conversation about this issue that’s coming up in game. And talk about it. To which most of the staff bailed and the few that were there let me know they were there in unofficial capacity. Only one of my friends walked away saying they got what I was trying to convey. It felt an awful lot like they were all so invested in it that if they were saying there was a shortcoming in the game it was a call against their character. (Black/male/44).

Pushing for lasting policies implied that the game itself—and its membership—were racist. This type of intervention was met with a collective pushback. After this interaction, Logan left the game. Once, he returned only to experience more patterned, racist behavior—a mod designed specifically for him that made a blackface joke. Then he formally left, for good. By the end, he had lost the majority of his social circle. Other LoC expressed similar dynamics: “So, you’re expected to educate white folks on what’s okay versus what’s not okay. But then they’re like no, not like that. Could you be nicer? You need to be sympathetic to them. Hey, don’t come for me—*that* guy is the issue” (Myla/American Indian—Anishinaabe/female/32). LoC who stepped outside of rigid educational expectations were framed as antagonistic to the community and “troublemakers” (Logan/Black/male/44). LoC who advocated for other alternative interventions—like criticizing an all-white staff—often faced social rejection for “getting it wrong”. Toleration was predicated on the performance of racecraft to educate white ignorance and correct mistakes. Yet these exchanges failed to do little more than frame racism as the unintended consequence of whiteness and posit racecraft as the only respectable solution. To sustain membership, LoC were required to tailor their interventions to white audiences, replacing stereotypes with lived experience. Personal accounts, introduced for educational purposes, then became monolithic narratives. Those who forwent this exchange, denying practitioners their replacements, were viewed as caustic and anti-community. They were often excluded before their criticisms could be voiced more widely.

### 3.3. Colonialist Imaginations: “It’s Fun to Think Them up”

Alongside depicting “real race” in LARP, practitioners were also invested in crafting fantasy “races” specific to their game worlds. As the Fieldses point out, language framing “race” as a “social

construction” often neglects this unit as the product of racecraft. In doing so, such research mistakes the reification of “race” for operationalization. Yet examining LARPer’s fabrication of fantasy “races” exposes the foundational ethos that guide processes of racecraft. LoC found acceptance and inclusion so long as their experiences with racism became fodder for racecraft. In this way stereotypes were swapped out for “real race”. This was contingent on LoC’s willingness to overcome the “innate” ignorance of white practitioners. Yet, when it came to scripting fantasy, developing unique “races” was seen as a creative endeavor that reflected practitioners’ ability to make “immersive” worlds. Racecraft was so deeply embedded in social organization that it became a cornerstone for making the fantastical believable and rewarding. Fostered by racecraft, imaginative processes framed “race” as an unending wilderness of potential and a medium through which to tell stories. Colonial imaginations celebrated worlds with new, exciting “races” but never ventured into worlds that existed without this ideology.

Immersion is highly valued in the LARP community: defined as the ability to feel emotionally, socially, and physically embedded in the game world such that acting as one’s character feels natural. Staffers described themselves as “crafting” immersion by developing game worlds. Yet immersion took place between interactions and was ultimately a collective effort: “It’s something we do as a community. If we all want to be in game, that takes everyone trying to elevate the look, the story, the interactions. One person can break that if they’re not careful. This is a story we’re telling together” (Percu/caucasian/male/48). Immersion was built through cohesive dedication to embodying the game world: in costuming, sets, props, language, interactions, etc. Failure to do so was viewed as “game-breaking” and was seen as an offense to this collective effort. Additionally, game-breaking behavior was framed as failing the expectations of LARPing as a whole: “Like, immersion is the whole point. If you’re not here to live these stories, why are you LARPing?” (Tanner/white/male/26). Yet, when racecraft became a central mechanism for building immersion, it provided the opportunity to dissect practitioners’ understandings of “race”.

Scripting new “races” was seen as synonymous with world-building: “Well, who lives there? What do they look like? What do they wear? What religion do they believe? You have to fill the world out” (Kaylee/white/female/28). What’s more, this process was viewed as entertaining and ingenious—a mark of good storytelling. To practitioners of racecraft, “race” was an unending frontier awaiting categorization and description. It promised a colonial fantasy: there are always new peoples—made different by physiology, ability, behavior, and belief—to discover. The possibilities of “race” were limited only by one’s creative machinations: “I love thinking up new settings. I think it challenges me to try to create a world so different from our own. Because ours is so boring! I want to give my players something they haven’t done before—new enemies, new races, new everything” (Percy/caucasian/male/48).

Practitioners of racecraft viewed “race” as a key mechanism for organizing social worlds. “Race” was an invitation to determine belief systems, labor roles, governance, and other aspects of culture. Immersion was achieved by populating the category of “race” with those details:

If you want to make it feel real, get into it. Don’t just tell me ‘these are orcs’. Tell me what they eat. Tell me what they wear. How do they rule? Do they fight? All of this kind of detail gets players excited. Because then I can make that come to life and add my own creative touches” (Bennett/white/male/34).

A researcher might be quick to criticize this as conflation. Yet this would only seek to safeguard academic definitions of “race” and neglect the process of racecraft at hand. “Race” was treated as an instrument of demarcation; an umbrella under which varied prescriptions could be couched. In this framing, tying “race” to nationality, culture, or physiology was not an act of misguided conflation. Instead, this creative venture relied on “race” as an organizational catalyst that yielded difference. LARPer’s viewed this as a way to create quality game worlds: “All of these things elevate the game. They build immersion. It’s awesome walking into a tavern and seeing all these different types of racial makeup and costuming. To me, it always feels like that scene in Star Wars where they walk into the cantina. Like, okay, we’re on a different planet here” (Kaylee/white/female/28). Games frequently

required makeup and costuming so that characters' "races" could be easily identified: examples included requiring players to wear horns, fix gems to their faces, paint ornate details onto their skin, or wear masks. By doing so, players gained access to unique skills associated with that "race".

Though there was flexibility, staffers used "race" as a launching point to prescribe preferred weapons styles, costuming expectations, mannerisms, etc. Players then took these descriptions and fleshed them out further: "Well, in one of my games I play an elf. And I took a description in the rulebook but I wanted to go further. I think because my character is an elf, he is calm and collected. Anger is, like, foreign to him. He doesn't understand or respect emotional outbursts" (Tanner/white/male/26). Through this collaborative storytelling, "race" became a bottomless mine from which more and more characteristics could be drawn. Immersion and depth were defined by digging deeply into racecraft and explaining every detail of experience—emotionality, belief, morality, etc.—through the frame of "race".

Through this process, "race" became a paradox: it was simultaneously an absolute determinant and yet a source of unending qualities and characteristics. This framing allowed "race" to stay as a fixed, necessary unit while allowing racecraft to function as a creative, collaborative process. LARPer framed such interactions as necessary for improvisational play. Kaylee, a theater major and involved LARPer argued, "Our community is built on 'Yes and ...'" (white/female/28). "Yes and ..." meant that interventions seeking to undo foundational tenets were viewed as antithetical to collaborative creation. Resultantly, LoC could try to impact existing imagery by correcting stereotypes but were policed when they stepped outside of this exchange. They could call out problematic representations but needed to tend to the creative ego of the practitioner in question: "It can't just be a fuck you". Such ventures expose how racism can function in artistic, aesthetic ways that weaponize creativity to fortify racecraft. The celebrated move from stereotypes to "real race" shows the adaptability of this process. Practitioners view these colonial imaginings as becoming more astute, more representative, more toothsome. Creative enterprises are not simply accessorial avenues in which the products of racism play out. Instead, they can act as spaces in which the idea of "race" is continually re-tinkered until it is "right"; where racecraft can insidiously exist as artistry.

### 3.4. *The Double Standard in Racecraft: "You Can Never Really Escape Your Race"*

Though LARP is touted as an escapist endeavor, LoC found that the veil between fantastical "race" and "real race" was thin. The two instances of racecraft were intertextual, with nonwhite stereotypes informing primitive "races" like orcs and "racial" descriptors listing white-coded characteristics like blond hair and blue eyes. Eshe argued that in her community there was an unspoken acknowledgement that forest elves were somehow white: "In the world settings, it's inevitable to run into the Celtic, Gaelic, traditional, Scottish things. And like, at this point, the games already been written. It's established. You can't change it. You can add to it. *Maybe*" (Black/female/27). But Eshe acknowledged that even as she transgressed into white-coded races, peers projected stereotypes of Black female aggression despite her playing a pacifist elf:

I try to play characters that don't fight on purpose. Mostly because LARPS swords are expensive. But also I don't get to really experience that. Even when we're in situations where none of my friends are armed. Where it doesn't make sense to be a dominant aggressive force. That's still expected of me to be that ...

Other LoC echoed this experience, arguing that nonwhite folks often found their choices up for debate as practitioners explored appropriate ways for LoC to exist in fantasy worlds:

I remember being on [a LARP forum] and people were there discussing if Black people could play elves. And one guy goes, yeah but they have to be dark elves. And then another asshole pipes in, well, if they're dark elves they'd have to paint their faces black for it to be immersive to me. And then the first is like, okay but they just have to play dark elves and the two of them were good with leaving it there" (Myla/American Indian—Anishinaabe/female/32).

While white folks could seemingly play any “race” and adopt the necessary characteristics, nonwhite-coded LARPer seemed to vex the standing logic and require further consideration. LoC’s role-play decisions were often passed over for the very stereotypes they worked to uproot.

Such debates exposed that the distinction between fantasy and “real race” was arbitrary: these products were derived from the same systemic racecraft that fortified whiteness as the default. In previous work, this has been explained as the means by which whiteness is made to be the ideal (Feagin 2010). But in the world of LARP, this default meant that white players’ engagement was not restricted by their “race”: “Well, LARP is exciting because I can be anything. I can be a savage warlord. I can be a highly priest. I can be a monk. I can be a Viking king! The potential is in what you can think up” (Freddy/white/male/37). For white players, their “racial” coding did not define expectations of gameplay. The idea that white participants might be playing elves, orcs, and goblins all at once did not invite concern or confusion. The hegemonic treatment of whiteness—that allows whiteness to exist as unspoken, assumed default—meant that despite employing racecraft, white practitioners were not *limited* by racecraft. White participants could assume any role, exist in any space, and behave in whatever manner they saw fit. Their whiteness was not the means by which they were organized into predictable roles. However, LoC found themselves boxed into stereotypes or questioned when they transgressed outside of acceptable or expected play. Whiteness was framed as a neutral foundation for endless possibilities: a blank slate for creativity. Again, this exposed the weaponization of creativity for the purpose of racecraft.

LARPer’s hegemonic treatment of whiteness framed it in an exploratory, inductive fashion in which whiteness could be anything. However, practitioners of racecraft did not enact these same narrative tactics for nonwhite stories: nonwhite “races” were treated in a confirmatory, deductive fashion in which everything could be explained by “race”: “Like, a white guy can play anything. Fuck, he can play a Black person if he wants. But if you’re a person of color, you can never really escape your “race”. You might be a noble in the grand high courts. But you’re still a Black noble” (Imene/Black/female/31). Eshe actively created characters that were peaceful healers. But regardless of her actions, peers assumed she would be aggressive and encouraged her to engage in situations that demanded that.

Sarah experienced a similar restriction when she joined a medieval-inspired LARP. As a brown-skinned woman, Sarah enjoyed escapism but found that players and staffers alike often felt the need to address her “race” during the game. To practitioners, it was more “immersive” to find an in-game way to explain Sarah’s presence than to take no notice of her skin tone:

It’s a bit of a racism when you have to face questions like ‘where are you from originally’ or ‘did you happen to travel here’ or ‘are your parents really from this village’. At first I’d be like, no [my character is] actually from far south of here because I didn’t want to deal with the questions. But then I actually started to push back like she’s actually just from here and sort of attack their questions. Because I know people don’t mean any harm in these questions. They think [my skin tone] is something [in the game] that needs to be explained. But they’re actually bringing their off-game views into the LARP. And that makes it difficult ... We go into LARP to be a different person, to have a new experience. And they’re like ‘oh you’re colored’ and why? Why do you need to go on about my skin like that during a LARP? (Swedish-Sri Lankan/female/33).

Sarah’s skin tone led to continual interrogation, as other participants felt that her non-whiteness warranted in-game explanation. Sarah expressed how she just wanted to “exist” in the game without having her “race” define her experience. Though other participants’ backstories were entirely open, Sarah’s was restricted by her skin tone. While it was not “game-breaking” to question Sarah’s character, it was game-breaking for her to push back on these questions, exposing a double standard. It was considered immersive to bring out-of-game logics to a fantastical setting in order to practice racecraft, but it was game-breaking to confront racism.

Much in the way that LoC were expected to explain “experience” so others could understand “real race”, LoC had preordained roles that persisted, regardless of the choices they made. For those marginalized by racecraft, “race” is a paramount characteristic and determinant that provides restrictive expectations. Everything can be reduced to “race”, and practitioners prescribe endless descriptors to cement those categories. Yet for those privileged by racecraft, whiteness is a limitless prospect, persisting as the unquestioned norm. The Fieldses define racism as “a double-standard based on ancestry” (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 17). White-coded LARPer could play Asian stereotypes in games exhibiting orientalism without any confusion. However, Sarah could not exist in a medieval-inspired fantasy without an explanation. These findings exemplify how racecraft fabricates the logics of a bifurcated racism. Feagin contended that the white racial frame functioned in two-fold fashion—venerating the value of whiteness while simultaneously degrading Blackness, Indigeneity, Asianness, etc. (2009). In this equation, racecraft becomes the “how”, the means by which this happens. Racecraft defines the participants and the rules: it is a rigged game in which “race” determines outcomes without restricting whiteness. In this manner, practitioners of racecraft use it as a limiting force without restraining those privileged by its implementation.

#### 4. Conclusions

Drawing on science-fiction, the mental terrain of racecraft is dependent on the ability of practitioners to terraform the landscape. They adaptively essentialize “race”, overcoming critiques and confrontations. Those oppressed by stereotypes come to challenge the veracity of these depictions, knowing their own experiences to be radically different. They educate—often at the expense of social clout—on experiences of marginalization. And here the insidious terraforming begins. This education is intended to transform the community such that LARP can exist as an anti-racist activity that countermands the commonsensicality of racist stereotypes. Yet practitioners reduce the plurality of these critiques to a singular account and fold this reductive narrative into their definition of “race”. Stereotypes come to be supplanted with something “real”, further fortifying “race”.

In this false exchange, educational accounts detailing marginalization are corrupted into monolithic portrayals of non-whiteness, characterizing oppression as a “racial” quality instead of the result of racism. Consequently, oppression becomes embedded in Blackness, Indigeneity, etc., instead of in the actions, beliefs, and behaviors of racist practitioners. Intertextually, white ignorance also comes to be seen as the result of “race”—how could whiteness comprehend oppression if it is characteristic of the “racial” other? White ignorance is preventable racism disguised as inborn “race”. Moreover, and key to this research, racecraft takes place during intimate exchanges and community conversations. This terraforming is the reason that Percy—the owner of the weird west LARP—bragged about his ability to make the game’s fictional natives “real” after he was confronted over stereotypical portrayal. It is a treacherous shift that adulterates anti-racist dialogues and makes them fodder for racecraft. This framing makes racism an eternal problem, as (1) “race” is absolute, (2) whiteness is absolute, and (3) whiteness’ innate ignorance requires continual educational intervention. In these duplicitous exchanges, “race” can take on a new meaning so long as the entrenched belief in “race” continues. It also shifts accountability onto those who experience marginalization. Practitioners of racecraft frame the solution as dependent on the educational efforts of marginalized communities, regardless of visceral reactions or inaction. This is accomplished through micro-interactions in which “race” is reinvented intergenerationally, but also daily, intimately. Such interactions simultaneously inform practitioners that “race” must be real and permit those devout actors to continually redefine the parameters of that reality.

These transformative agents terraform the mental terrain of racecraft: shifting discourse to new understandings of “race” without dismantling “race” as absolute. In so doing, the false exchange presents unending racecraft as the solution to falsely naturalized racism. Anti-racist movements have benefitted from research detailing the imaginings of racecraft—the cultural products that evidence its logic. Yet exploring racecraft in action exposes how it functions as a social process that informs and

is informed by individual and community-wide conversations. Racecraft is dependent on invested practitioners who perform the necessary labor of adapting these logics in order to essentialize “race”. Contradictory to naturalizing rhetorics, “race” requires constant maintenance and adaptation. Cultural products become emblematic, but investigation of the interactions themselves expose the Achilles’ heel of this process: the transformative social dynamics wherein racecraft can be confronted. If “race” persists not because it is inherited but because “we create it today”, then that creative process is a clear vulnerability (Fields and Fields 2012, p. 146). We should continue to critique the cultural products of racecraft, but we must also interrupt the production itself. Otherwise, we risk falling into this educational trap: confronting racecraft’s progeny while allowing its production to continually reimagine the category of “race”.

The example of LARP is “on the nose”, as LARPer’s openly speak to the process of “crafting race” in their world-building. It is a relatively easy-to-access activity wherein most participants engage voluntarily because they are deeply passionate about LARP. In this space, we can see that radical disarticulation as creativity is the central mechanism by which the play continues. And yet, we do not. It is for this reason that research cannot neglect creative ventures as mere examples of the issue. “Race” is an ideology, and, like any doctrine, it requires a creative narration that entrenches belief. When challenged, its adaptation necessitates practitioners’ reimagining. These ventures are embedded in this process. The resulting conflation is not some misguided understanding of “race”. Conflation is the goal of racecraft, wherein “race” is cemented as a foundational means by which to perceive our society, inequities, hierarchies, and experiences. Importantly, the double-standard of racism is ingrained in this conflation. Much like Feagin’s white racial frame, racecraft is simultaneously liberating for whiteness and restrictive and reductive to those outside this category. Whiteness is framed as limitless potential: fashioned in exploratory, inductive fashion. In these fictional ventures, whiteness is a blank slate—a foundation—that invites radical creativity. Outside of this ideal, “race” is treated in a deductive, confirmatory fashion. Everything an indigenous person does, feels, believes, etc., can be rooted in a stereotypical, reductive understanding of indigeneity. To be white is to imagine. To be non-white is to be continuously reimagined.

In this way racecraft perpetuates double-standard practices that liberate whiteness and imprison non-whiteness through meticulous categorization. Practitioners of racecraft exercise targeted monolithism. Why do I stress this point? Because it shows that we can have a radical discourse in which “race” is not a paramount determinant. However, this creative capacity is currently only applied to whiteness. Taking this a step further, why does this matter outside of these creative enterprises? Exploring and confronting oppression—racism—without fortifying categories of “race” is necessary for targeting racist practitioners and dismantling their institutions. Yet there are strategies in place that can trap critics of racecraft. The false exchange showed the adaptive means by which racecraft and its practitioners can incorporate dissenting, marginalized voices. Practitioners offer exchanges that redefine “race” instead of uprooting racism. They offer participants of color roles in this process—roles that cater to white audiences. Within this, practitioners warn that the abandonment of “race” as factual—as real—will make understanding racism an impossibility. In reality, the fortification of “race” is the pivotal means by which this oppression continues. The adaptive capacity of racecraft attempts to coerce the oppressed into conversations on new categories, parameters, or definitions that might salve immediate concerns or offer individual opportunities. However, this coercion beckons us to give up imagining solutions for racism and invest in reimagining “race”. This research has identified these interactions and outlined coercive strategies that seek to derail anti-racist work. Additionally, it has outlined the consequences of racecraft’s adaptive process and the outcomes of its application. Going forward, countermanding strategies need to be expanded such that intervention can occur across diverse social interactions and prevent the insidious reinstatement of “race” in anti-racist dialogues.

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