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Blood and Soil in The Vampire Diaries

ABSTRACT

The third season of The Vampire Diaries introduces the story of the “Originals”, a family who came to North America with Vikings in the eleventh century and became vampires as a way to protect themselves against ‘native werewolves’. This mythology draws on the legend of Vinland, a paradise supposedly settled by Vikings in North America and recounted in thirteenth-century saga of the same name. The Vinland story has been used since the nineteenth century to legitimate white nationalism in North America. Further, medievalism more generally permeates both vampire narrative and the mythology of the ‘Old South’ so important to the fictional Mystic Falls where The Vampire Diaries is set. Focusing primarily on season three of The Vampire Diaries, I argue that the series’ emphasis on a Nordic origin for its “Original” vampires, combined with obfuscation of the history and legacy of slavery and racism in the United States, results in a narrative that ultimately, if inadvertently, legitimates white nationalist claims.

Keywords: *The Vampire Diaries, The Originals, Vinland, Medievalism, Race*

In “Bad Moon Rising”, the third episode of the second season of *The Vampire Diaries*’ (2009-2017), Tyler Lockwood (Michael Trevino) asks his mother, Carol (Susan Walters), about a cellar hidden on the grounds of their estate:

Tyler: Have you ever been down to those old ruins in the woods?

Carol: The old Lockwood estate?

Tyler: Yeah. What do you know about it?

Carol: It was the original plantation house. Beautiful antebellum architecture and if it hadn't burnt to the ground we'd probably be living in it.

Tyler: What's the deal with the freaky underground cellar?

Carol: We don't talk about those kind of rooms.

Tyler: Why not?

Carol: Well, this *is* the South, honey, but no one likes to reminisce about the old slave days.

Carol Lockwood’s selective memory reflects the approach to history in *The Vampire Diaries* franchise more generally. In *The Vampire Diaries*, the personal and family histories of the characters carry enormous importance and characters participate in seemingly endless dances, balls, and other events commemorating the town’s past. However, the fictional history of Mystic Falls, the town in which the series is set, intersects with actual history in a manner that parallels Carol’s selective and occluding perspective on the “old slave days”, for the history of early settlement, plantation slavery, and the legacy of enduring racism in the United States are equally obscured. Season three, however, introduces alternative American history, based on the story of the fabled Vinland Viking settlement. This article will examine the third season of *The Vampire Diaries*, specifically the show’s depiction of a Nordic origin for the “Original” vampires. Nina Auerbach has shown us that “every age embraces the vampire it needs, and gets the vampire it deserves” (1995, 145). What does it mean that the vampires of *The Vampire Diaries*, which garnered millions of viewers, celebrates vampires whose origin story derives from a history that has been long intertwined with white nationalism? Writing of the figure of the vampire after 9/11, Lorna Piatti-Farnell suggests that:

the contemporary vampire—entangled as it is with metaphors of blood, persecution and supremacy—can be read as an allegory for the preoccupations with conflict, war and strife which have become a recurrent presence of political frameworks in the U.S. (2014, 154).

As *The Vampire Diaries* completed its eight-season run in March 2017, the political framework of the U.S. seemed to undergo a seismic shift. Some on the right wing of American politics refer to the political climate of the United States after the 2016 presidential election as a “cold civil war” (Wilson, 2017). The “recurrent presence” of “conflict, war and strife” might, however, be more aptly described as a continual one

that dates back to even before the founding of the United States. *The Vampire Diaries*, a teen supernatural melodrama, is seemingly completely divorced from politics, but its refusal to deal with the difficult histories it invokes is emblematic of contemporary political debates in the U.S. over history, memory, and identity.

Critics such as Dale Hudson and Evangelia Kindinger have already begun to unravel the complicated ways that *The Vampire Diaries* appropriates U.S. history and how the show, in presenting what looks like a post-racial world, actually re-inscribes familiar racial dynamics onto a manicured Southern Gothic. Less explored is the show's use of the reputed Viking settlements in North America as the basis for the 'mythology' of the Original vampires, whose origin story figures prominently in season three of *The Vampire Diaries*, and which inspired a spinoff series, *The Originals* (2013-). In season three, Elena (Nina Dobrev), the Salvatore Brothers, Stefan and Damon (Paul Wesley and Ian Somerhalder), other young members of the Founding families, and their close friends are given an alternate history lesson about their own town as they unravel the secret of the origin of the "Original" vampires. Elena's personal story shapes the main narrative arc of season three. The season opens as she celebrates her eighteenth birthday and begins her senior year, and ends with her death and rebirth as a vampire. Season three centres on family, on bloodline, and on the personal sacrifice required to protect them.

These themes also dominate the origin story of the *Originals* as eleventh-century Viking settlers. After fleeing plague in Europe, they attempted to live peacefully among the 'natives' until the threat of the area's indigenous population of werewolves drove them to become vampires as a form of self-preservation. This narrative of conflict between Vikings and Native Americans borrows from that of the so-called Vinland narratives, thirteenth-century Norse sagas that describe a failed settlement in a fabled North American paradise. The Vinland sagas seem to have some factual basis, as evidenced by remains at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada (Jakobsson 2012, 502). More significant, however, has been how the sagas were harnessed for use into a broader political mythology. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Vinland legend was used to legitimate white settlement in North America. Recently, Vinland has been used to justify white nationalism and violence carried out in its name, as evidenced by the murders that took place in Portland, Oregon in May 2017 (Perry 2017). Similarly, the medievalisms of white supremacists in Charlottesville in the events of August 2017 also draw upon a vision of a "white Middle Ages" to justify a historiography that supports white nationalism (Ulaby 2017).

The Vikings and U.S. Medievalisms

Anglophones became familiar with the stories of medieval Nordic exploration and settlement in North America in the nineteenth century, through Carl Christian Rafn's 1837 work, *Antiquitates Americanae*, which presented English summaries and background information on two thirteenth-century Icelandic sagas, *Grænlandinga saga*

[The Saga of the Greenlanders] and *Eiríks saga rauða* [The Saga of Erik the Red], which came to be known as the “Vinland sagas” (G. Barnes 2011, 141). Some nineteenth-century Americans read these family sagas of Norse settlement as evidence of a proto-Protestant “discovery” of America prior to that of the “Roman” Columbus (G. Barnes 2011, 144). Numerous artefacts believed to be Viking in origin were celebrated in nineteenth-century New England, which yielded “discoveries” such as the Newport tower, a seventeenth-century Rhode Island structure misidentified as from the eleventh (G. Barnes 2011, 145). While James Russell Lowell, author of the poem “The Voyage to Vinland” (1868), poked fun at contemporary archaeologists’ claims about runic inscriptions in North America, he considered “the Vinland voyages as fundamental to the myth of national foundation” (G. Barnes 2001, 128). Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Skeleton at Arms” (1841) was inspired by discovered remains purported to be Viking, but most likely Native American (G. Barnes 2011, 145). In 1877, a monument to Lief Eiriksson was erected in Boston, where some, notably Thomas Gold Appleton, a relation of Longfellow’s, believed that he had landed. Appleton believed explicitly in the Vinland narrative as a justification of “manifest destiny” (Headley 2003, 42). As Appleton wrote in an 1871 essay arguing for the monument’s erection, “How the vines of Vinland must have stooped to be plucked by the race, brothers to that one which should later sit under their pleasant branches” (ibid, 318). As Andrew Marvell did in his seventeenth-century lyric, “Bermudas,” Appleton imagines “New World” territory offering itself providentially to white settlers with no mention of any other human claims or labour. In all of these representations of the Vikings’ settlement, European settlement is depicted as divinely anointed.

Ottolie Adeline Liljencrantz’s 1906 *Randvar the Songsmith*, which features a villainous werewolf, was the first to create a complete fictional account of the Vinland story, using racialized depictions of superior Scandinavians and animalized, vicious “Skraelings,” the word used in the medieval sagas to describe the Native Americans encountered by Norse voyagers (Liljencrantz 1906; G. Barnes 2011, 148). Such representations were soon transferred to the screen, led by the first U.S. film depiction of Leif Eiriksson in *The Viking* (1928), directed by R. William Neill, which includes footage of the Newport Tower (Harty 2011, 109). Likewise, in Minnesota, the legend of the Kensington Runestone, a stone with runic inscriptions that experts have determined is a forgery, records in runes a story of Northern Europeans under attack by Native Americans. First emerging in 1898, the legend continues to generate controversy to this day (Krueger 2015). One can thus discern traces of these nineteenth-century medievalisms in the current renewal of a “fascination with the North” in U.S. popular culture. From Disney’s *Frozen* (2013) to the Free Folk of Westeros in HBO’s *Game of Thrones* (2011-) as well as the television drama, *Vikings* (2013) Nordic fantasy has experienced a resurgence on the screen in recent years (see Truitt). Vikings also appear prominently in video games such as *Skyrim*. Victoria Cooper argues that popular culture fantasies such as that presented in *Skyrim* are “mobilised to maintain ideas of white, Western supremacy as pre-written by ‘history,’ particularly by far-right groups” (2016, 166).

Scholars, journalists, and activists have turned increasing attention to right-wing extremists as they have become more prominent and attempted to be more acceptable to the political mainstream following the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency. In addition to public marches and demonstrations, these white supremacist groups have drawn on medievalisms to create what they see as symbolism more acceptable to mainstream politics than symbols such as the swastika. The “Othala rune” was appropriated by the National Socialist regime in Germany, who distorted its original meaning to have it signify *Blut und Boden* [Blood and Soil] (M. Barnes 2015, 194). The National Socialists of America adopted the Othala rune as a substitute for the swastika in November 2016 as a way to bring the party into the “mainstream” (Tiefenthäler and Reneau 2017). Other groups, like the racist neo-pagan “Wolves of Vinland” adorn buildings and clothing with runic script in ways that recall its use by National Socialists (Woodruff 2015; Gardell 2014, 383; Perry, 2017; Mountfort 2015).¹

The white nationalist appropriations of the cultures of medieval northern Europe, what Karl Steel aptly dubs “bad heritage”, echo nineteenth-century uses of the Vinland legend. At the centre of these narratives is a portrayal of medieval white settlers as persecuted and wronged. Writing of the recent Danish film *Valhalla Rising* (2009), Steel argues, “we are made to hear that white America had always belonged, that it has always been embattled, and that its expansion into North America was nothing but the return of what had, in a historical sense, already been here” (2018, 79). This understanding of the Vinland Vikings as “original” settlers who were dispossessed of their land legitimates white nationalism, which is a narrative that echoes with the “Original” vampire myth.

Public statements by *The Vampire Diaries* creator Julie Plec, as well as the casting of actors of colour in important roles, such as Kat Graham as Bonnie Bennett or Charles Michael Davis as Marcel Gerard, might lead one to think that *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals* would have nothing to do with revanchist medievalisms that legitimate white nationalism.² The shows’ plotlines and ‘mythology’, nevertheless, tell a much different story and, however unintentionally, end up supporting the narrative of Viking victimhood and its accompanying affirmation of white nationalist claims to North American territory. Before examining how the story of the Originals in *The Vampire Diaries* provides a reinforcement of the claims of domination of land by white settlers, this article will briefly address how medievalism and vampire narrative

¹ Thanks to Katie Walkiewicz for advice on the sources included here. For examples of the ways in which the “Wolves of Vinland” have made use of these images, see their Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BYWs6KXhWKv/?hl=en&tagged=wolvesofvinland>

² See for example, Julie Plec (@julieplec), series of tweets beginning “Dear @realDonaldTrump, thank you. In just eight months you have taught me a valuable lesson. It is not a lesson taught by my parents (1/5)” on August 12, 2017 at 4:21 PM: <https://twitter.com/julieplec/status/896511881178775552>

intersect, and how Viking-inspired medievalisms have found a place in contemporary Southern Gothic.

Vampire Medievalisms

Medievalism has played a role in vampire fiction since its beginnings. Visions of the Middle Ages inflect Raupach's Märchen-like "Laßt die Todten Ruhem" ("Wake Not the Dead" 1823), haunt the castle ruins in von Wachsmann's "Der Fremde," ("The Mysterious Stranger, 1847) and course through the ancient lineage of the Karstein family in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). These latter two tales influenced Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which innovates vampire medievalisms by structuring the novel around a tension between the medieval and the modern. Stacey Abbott asserts that rather than simply establishing a structural opposition between medieval and modern, Stoker instead "emphasizes the ambiguous distinction between the two" (Abbott 2007, 16). *Dracula*, who comes from an ancient time, attempts to use modern means to conquer; yet the Crew of Light use a combination of modern methods and medieval beliefs, as represented through the role of Christian faith in the novel, to defeat him.

With the exception of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' little-known 1885 short story "Manor," set in the Faroe Islands, Western nineteenth-century vampiric medievalisms primarily look east rather than north. While as we will see below, *Dracula* does claim Nordic ancestors, his home in the Carpathian Mountains and descriptions of his physiognomy tie him to Eastern Europe. He does, however, claim Viking Berserkers among his ancestors. The Viking vampires of *The Vampire Diaries* and Eric Northman (Alexander Skarsgård) of HBO's *True Blood* (2008-14) are not complete anomalies in vampire narrative tradition, nor, as we will see, within these series' Southern Gothic settings.

However, the *Originals* and Eric Northman, instead of relying primarily upon the brutal image of the marauding Berserker, also draw upon a nineteenth-century medievalist vision of chivalry connected to the mythology of the Old South. This mythology influenced Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, clearly a source both for *The Vampire Diaries* and Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* upon which *True Blood* is based. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese exhaustively outline in *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholder's Worldview*, Southern slave holders created their own 'mythology' of themselves as a noble class by drawings upon medievalisms such as those of Sir Walter Scott, and of this Southern master class, they write:

They knew that the medieval world was not – never could be – theirs. But they determined to preserve its most admirable features as they fought to build a bulwark against the morally corrosive features of the modernity that was breaking upon them (2005, 328).

This tension between the medieval and modern in the Southern slaveholder worldview is the same dynamic that Abbott has shown to be animating *Dracula*, the most influential of vampire narratives (2007, 16). For as Mary Hallab argues, vampires, “[a]s living dead...stand for both the loss of all that is past and its paradoxical aliveness in the present” (2009, 43). For vampires in Southern Gothic narratives, the struggle between past and present will always be enmeshed in questions of race. In *True Blood*, for example, for Eric Northman’s romantic rival, vampire Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer), the connection to Southern history is direct. Bill was a Confederate soldier and from a family that had owned slaves. While Eric’s Viking origins place him outside of antebellum history, his sometimes solicitous and patronizing care for Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) has more in common with “the Chivalry” described by Fox-Genovese and Genovese than with Viking narrative. Both of Sookie’s suitors display characteristics of the “gentleman” and it is this chivalric component that gives them an allure despite their violent sides. So too, *The Vampire Diaries’* Original vampire Elijah’s obsession with keeping his word broadcasts a type of chivalry that resonates more closely with medievalism than with actual medieval texts (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2005, 307).

Building upon work by Amador, Cherry, and Bridgeman, Katherine Austin explores what kind of cultural work the “sympathetic Southern vampire” might be doing and argues for the emergence of the Southern Gothic vampire as a means to “address varied constructions of regional, collective guilt” (2015, 18; 43). She notes, however, that they can “perform important cultural work in acknowledging past wrongs, [but] they fail to demonstrate the need to take certain action in order to atone for those wrongs” (2015, 44). Because *The Vampire Diaries* fails to address the history of slavery and its continued impact through institutionalized racism, the show does very little “cultural work in acknowledging past wrongs”. On the contrary, by injecting the Vinland myth into the *The Vampire Diaries* world the shows’ creators, inadvertently perhaps, create a vampire mythology that justifies and legitimates white nationalism. This narrative of legitimation is aided by *The Vampire Diaries’*s eclectic and haphazard engagement with the historical record. A key character, witch Bonnie Bennett (Kat Graham), has ancestry reaching back to the infamous Salem Witch trials and key moments in her family’s story date to the Civil War. Her ancestor, witch Emily Bennett (Bianca Lawson), is depicted as the “hand maiden” of the vampire Katherine (Nina Dobrev), despite the fact that an African-American woman living at the time in Virginia was far more likely to have been a slave (Jeanna 2015). The Civil War is also when Katherine turns the Salvatore brothers, Stefan and Damon, into vampires.

In the novels by L.J. Smith on which the series is based, the Salvatores were born in Renaissance Italy and eventually came to live in Virginia. In the television series, they, along with the Lockwoods and the family of the present-day young woman they fall in love with, Elena Gilbert, are among the “Founding Families” of Mystic Falls. The town’s struggles against vampires become intertwined with or even replace those of the Civil War. A fictional battle at Willow Creek was the opportunity for the town’s Founding Families to trap and immolate vampires in a church, as

fictional events supersede actual ones. The specificities and controversies of regional history are so far obscured, in fact, that the name of the high school that the main characters attend has been altered from Robert E. Lee High School to Mystic Falls High.

The Season of “*The Originals*”

The Vinland story of Viking settlement is introduced in “Smells like Teen Spirit,” episode six of the third season of *The Vampire Diaries*, through a scene in a Mystic Falls High School history classroom. The episode brings the series’ main characters back to the first class of their senior year. Their teacher, Alaric Saltzman (Matthew Davis), writes the words “AP American History” on the chalkboard as the central characters, Elena, her friend, Caroline Forbes (Candice King), and her boyfriend, Stefan, take their seats. Tension bristles among them because Stefan has returned to a violent vampire lifestyle. Stefan has been forced to team up with the “Original” vampire/werewolf hybrid, Niklaus Mikaelson (Joseph Morgan), because of a pact made in order to save Stefan’s brother, Damon. The teen drama dynamic is complicated by the unexpected arrival in the classroom of Klaus’s sister, Rebekah (Claire Holt), who strides in just after Alaric has begun class:

Alaric: Welcome back, seniors. Let's turn our brains back on, starting with this country's original founders...the Native Americans.

Rebekah: What about the Vikings?

Alaric: There's no evidence that Viking explorers actually settled in the United States. Who are you?

Rebekah: My name's Rebekah. I'm new. And history's my favourite subject.

Alaric asserts the primacy of Native Americans as “founders” and Rebekah challenges this assertion explicitly. Alaric shuts down Rebekah’s line of questioning about Viking settlement by asserting lack of evidence, but later findings will vindicate her claim. History is Rebekah’s “favourite subject” because she has experienced nearly a millennium of it. She and her siblings will come to serve for viewers as ‘living proof’ of the Vinland legend, which is further authenticated in later episodes through Alaric’s discovery of ancient runes hidden in caves beneath the town. In creating the new vampire ‘mythology’ of “*The Originals*,” the creators of *The Vampire Diaries* link the vampire legend to a “historiographical fantasy” of early white settlement in North America – what Karl Steel has called “bad heritage” (Steel 2018; Feuer 2017 and Tiefenthäler and Reneau 2017).

The archaeological evidence to support Rebekah’s claim of primacy appears in the next episode, “Ghost World” (Episode 7). In an underground cave, Alaric discovers “native” pictograms that tell the Originals’ story. He also finds runic carvings of the Original siblings’ names on the cave walls. In a flashback, Rebekah and Niklaus are shown making these carvings. The caves were one of the places the family used to shelter during full moons, when the “natives” turned into werewolves. The

clan's mother, the "Original witch" Esther Mikaelson (Alice Evans), turned the siblings into vampires after these werewolves killed her youngest child, Henrik (Devon Allowitz). We never learn what motivated the Originals to carve their names in the cave, but the impact of their action is clear: these runes mark the Originals' early presence and claim the place as their own. In episodes seven and eight, after translating the runes, Alaric and his students work together to decipher the cave's pictograms as Elena also coaxes details of the origin story from Rebekah. The Mikaelsons, depicted in flashbacks as living in a village full of other tall blondes dressed in medieval-looking garb, are not simply the Original vampires, but the Original settlers ("The Original Vampires" 2012).

The drawings and carvings "authenticate" the Originals' genesis and their claims to a presence in Mystic Falls that pre-dates that of the "Founding Families" from which many of the main characters, including Elena and the Salvatore brothers, belong. Rebekah, who has come across as aggressive, predatory, and cruel reveals a vulnerable human past. She and her brothers are victims, in this case of intimate loss combined with excessive parental grief and caution. For Julie Plec, who developed *The Vampire Diaries* with Kevin Williamson, and who is listed as sole creator for *The Originals*, the Original family "really is just your average everyday dysfunctional family, so much like all of ours" ("The Original Vampires" 2012). Season three's eighth episode, when much of the Originals' backstory is revealed, is titled "Ordinary People". In a clear allusion to the 1980 film of the same title about the breakdown of an 'ordinary' family, it is made evident in the episode that the one thing these powerful immortals fear, above all else, is their father. Hence, in response to all of the external and internal threats facing their family, it is Klaus, Elijah, and Rebekah who pledge loyalty to one another "always and forever."

The Originals' status as victims of a dysfunctional family is used to explain the havoc that they wreck on others. Their family's desire for safety first justifies their presence as settlers and then as vampires. They seek immortality in order to protect themselves against the perceived threat of the native werewolves. In the tradition of the Vinland myth, the Mikaelsons are depicted as European settlers forced to defend themselves against 'savage natives'. These racial dynamics echo the conflict between the Vikings and the "Skraelings" retold in nineteenth-century imaginings of the Vinland sagas such as the story of the Kensington Runestone. The portrayal of natives as primitive werewolves, which Natalie Wilson (2010) has examined in the *Twilight* saga, is taken even further in *The Vampire Diaries*, for the native werewolves are not major characters; their story is referenced primarily through the cave pictograms and given meaning only as it relates to the Originals.

This origin story makes the "Originals" not only the first vampires, but also the oldest surviving family in a town where tradition and heritage dominate civic life. By framing the town's early history within the story of its new first family, *The Vampire Diaries* deploys tropes depicting Native Americans that have long been pervasive in U.S. mythologies of settler colonialism. These include "ghosting," an erasure of Native

American figures that nevertheless leaves them to haunt American Gothic narratives, as well as the figure of the “last descendant,” a representation that dates back to early literary apologists such as James Fenimore Cooper. Vampire hunter Rayna Cruz embodies the last descendant figure in season seven of *The Vampire Diaries* (Lush 300; 294).

Klaus is always referred to as a Mikaelson and indeed his appetite for cruelty and revenge makes him the emblematic Mikaelson “Original.” As a “hybrid” vampire/werewolf, however, the product of an illicit union between Esther Mikaelson and the werewolf Ansel (Lloyd Owen), Klaus has the potential to complicate the racialized implications of the Vinland allusion. Klaus’s biological father, while only mentioned in season three of *The Vampire Diaries* (“Klaus” 2.19 and “Ordinary People” 3.8) makes an appearance in season two of *The Originals* (“Wheel Inside the Wheel” 2.6 and “Chasing the Devil’s Tail,” 2.7). Various clues in these appearances link Ansel to a stereotypical representation of Native Americans; for example, he is referred to as a “chief” and carries a bow and arrows, and yet by giving Ansel a Northern European name and casting a white English actor to play him, *The Vampire Diaries* eliminates any potential for complicating the racial make-up of the Mikaelson bloodline.

If Native American characters are invisible and silent in *The Vampire Diaries* and then subsequently whitewashed through the character of Ansel in *The Originals*, African-American characters seem to exist mainly to assist the white characters, even when these African-American characters possess great supernatural power. Esther has a mentor in the witch Ayana (Maria Howell), a descendant of Qetsiyah, an ancient witch of Mediterranean origins, who created the first immortality spell millennia ago. Ayana is played by an African-American actress and her clothing and the cowrie shells in her hair distinguish her from the medieval European-style clothing worn by the Mikaelsons and others in their settlement. How Ayana came to know Esther is unclear, but it was she who told Esther about the Mystic Falls area, where her own bloodline endures through the Bennett witches. As with Ansel, Ayana not only lacks an origin story, but also, despite her link to the Bennetts, a family name. These shared characteristics – the lack of an origin story and of a family name directly contribute to the problematic representation of these characters as both primal and primitive.

The Vampire Diaries’ treatment of African-American characters such as Ayana and her descendant Bonnie Bennett has been the subject of much discussion among critics and fans. As Janani Subramanian and Jorie Lagerwey have argued:

the mere presence of Bonnie and her black witch ancestors, as well as the presence of black actresses among a predominantly white cast, suggest a completely different, racialized disruption of the ways American identity is constructed and envisioned (2016, 194).

While Ayana’s refusal to aid Esther in her quest for an immortality spell shows this

ancestral Bennett as a powerful and independent figure, I would argue that Bonnie's place in the narrative is not disruptive, but far closer to the "Black Best Friend archetype" discussed by U. Melissa Anyiwo (2016) in her analysis of the character of Tara (Rutina Wesley) in *True Blood*. Bonnie's needs, desires, and safety are continually (and willingly) sacrificed to aid the interests of her friends (Jeanna 2015; Carter 2017). *The Vampire Diaries* fans noted problems with the depiction of Bonnie and the show's treatment of African-American history, even engaging in online debates with Julie Plec and cast members (Warner 2015, 114-20). As Claudia Gray puts it, "Going back to the Confederacy and pretending it was a place where race didn't matter isn't just fantasy—it's farce" (2010, 43). The show's refusal to confront the historical legacy of racism despite depicting a family of generations of African-American witches, however, ends up reinforcing this legacy.

The insertion of the Vinland myth into *The Vampire Diaries* world extends these dynamics of subordination beyond the characters' personal stories into the realm of the "mythological". Because of the emphasis on the primacy and importance of founding families in *The Vampire Diaries* and the whitewashing of Native American and African American characters, the myth of the Original vampires and their Vinland origins overshadows the stories of families like the Bennetts and subsumes the history of the area's indigenous inhabitants, the group Alaric had initially proclaimed as "this country's original founders" ("Smells like Teen Spirit" 3.6). The early Native American presence, figured as savage werewolf, is provided only to explain the history of the Originals, and the only evidence of 'Natives' telling their own stories, the cave pictograms, depict the story of the indigenous werewolves only as it intersects with the Originals' story. Likewise, the Bennett connection to the famous Salem witches is mentioned, but never further explored. *The Vampire Diaries'* focus on the Founding Families and the Originals ultimately creates a vampire mythology that justifies claims of domination of land by white settlers, just as Ken Gelder has shown occurs in *True Blood* through the depiction of the character Bill Compton as a former Confederate soldier (Gelder 2016, 412). In *The Originals*, this myth will expand into Klaus's extravagant and repeated claim that the Originals "built" the city of New Orleans, a revisionism that elides and diminishes the historic contributions of peoples of colour in a city known for its complex and diverse history (Piatti-Farnell 2017).

The vampires we deserve...

Annette Kolodny concluded her 2012 book on the Viking narrative in the United States by asserting that the sagas of "Norse discovery" no longer play a role in immigration debates because "the nation is now unequivocally multiethnic, multicultural, and interracial" (330). Since the 2016 Presidential elections, however, comparisons between current and historical debates on immigration and issues of race and culture abound in the United States (Tharoor 2018). The political currents that buoyed the Vinland myth's popularity seem to be rising. If then, "every age embraces the vampire it needs, and gets the vampire it deserves" what can we learn by considering the Originals and their origin story (Auerbach 1995)? To answer this question, we need to

not only acknowledge how *The Vampire Diaries'* fantastical historical revisionism whitewashes U.S. history, but also to understand how *The Vampire Diaries* revises important elements of the vampire tradition that reach back at least to Stoker's *Dracula*.

J. Halberstam famously reads *Dracula* as a "technology of monstrosity," that produces "the human" through the discourse of the monstrous. Halberstam's approach reveals how racial discourses inflect *Dracula*, allowing the vampire to be both an "overdetermined" monster that is "open to numerous interpretations" and also to embody a "particular ethnicity" in his "flesh and blood" form (1995, 91-2). Halberstam's reading centres on the anti-Semitic elements in Stoker's portrayal of *Dracula* and the fears and anxieties they represent. But while the novel ascribes elements of Jewish ethnicity to *Dracula*, especially through his physiognomy, *Dracula* himself claims to descend from a "whirlpool of European races" that includes "the Ugric tribe ... from Iceland" imbued with the "fighting spirit which Thor and Wodin gave them, which their Berserkers displayed to such fell intent on the seaboard of Europe, ay, and of Asia and Africa too, till the peoples thought the werewolves themselves had come" (Stoker [1897]1997, 33-4). *Dracula's* Berserker ancestry and his landing at Whitby also help to portray his designs on England as an invasion (Arata 1990; Senf 2016). Mina notes in her journal that Whitby Abbey was "sacked by the Danes," and Whitby's abbey comes to represent the "scars of invasion," even if the still-extant ruins Stoker references are not exclusively the remains of the Danish attack (Stoker [1897] 1997, 63, note 2). Through these details, the novel's chilling depiction of a monstrous Other striking at the heart of a British empire becomes an echo of earlier invasions. *Dracula's* "technology of monstrosity" draws power from the fear of invasion and conquest. An imperial centre seems threatened by reversion to an earlier time, when it was merely a vulnerable insel.

The Vampire Diaries' Original vampires, however, instead of being repulsive invaders from Eastern Europe, are compellingly attractive creatures from Scandinavia, first motivated not by lust for conquest, but by a desire to save their family. Further, while they seem at first to be outsiders, they are actually founders. *The Vampire Diaries'* transformation of vampires from destructive invaders into city builders is in keeping with recent trends noted by scholars such as Victoria Nelson and Catherine Spooner. The development of the sympathetic vampire began with figures like Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows* and came to the fore with Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Recently, Nelson has shown, the vampire has ascended from the sympathetic to the godlike, "upgrading" from the "'undead' to 'immortals'" (2012, 125). Spooner notes that in series such as the *Twilight* saga, *True Blood*, or the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* from which *True Blood* derives, vampires are now more representative of order than threat, for they aspire to assimilate: to "be one of us" (ibid, 85), a development traced back to the Byronic vampire, a tradition of which the Salvatores and Mikaelsons are clearly a part.

But who is the “us” that these vampires aspire to be? Halberstam notes of *Dracula* that the vampire “has no voice, he is read and written by all the other characters in the novel” (1995, 91). In *The Vampire Diaries*, by contrast, the vampires never shut up. Indeed, in *The Vampire Diaries*, not only the vampire hunters but also the vampires themselves keep diaries. The Original vampires do not “transform fragments of otherness into one body” (ibid, 92). Instead, their history as founders and settlers serves to write over and write out the histories and voices of Native American and African American characters. As the Mikaelsons are shown to be the original “founding family” of Mystic Falls (and New Orleans), their Nordic origins and ties to Vinland generate a mythology of white settlement that supplants the actual historical record. *The Vampire Diaries* weaves the vampire into the fabric of U.S. history in a way that nativizes and justifies vampire dominance and portrays the vampire Vikings more as noblemen than as Berserkers, a polish that echoes the ideological shapings of the Southern mythology examined by the Fox-Genovese and Genovese. *The Vampire Diaries’* representation of the “Originals” and their origins justifies white settler colonialism both through its sympathetic story of family survival and through an assertion of priority, thereby whitewashing the complexities of U.S. history.

Although we can trace the lineage of *The Vampire Diaries’* technology of monstrosity back to Stoker’s *Dracula*, other vampire narratives have responded to the *Dracula* legacy in oppositional ways. Works such as Jewelle Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* (1991), Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling*, Jewell Parker Rhodes’ *Yellow Moon* (2008) and the film *Ganja and Hess* (1973) present a range of vampire mythologies that acknowledge, complicate, and challenge racial hierarchies and racialized fears. In these works, the vampires’ voices provide powerful counter-narratives to dominant historical narratives. These works, however, are currently far less well-known than *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*, which have been viewed by millions, and appear to have such mass appeal in part because of how they engage with history. Through costume and flashback, *The Vampire Diaries* provides pleasure through spectacle (Jowett 2017). At the same time, however, *The Vampire Diaries* sanitizes the past and discounts the actual history of the location where it is set. Much of the show was filmed in Covington, Georgia, about 35 miles outside of Atlanta, a location sometimes called the “Hollywood of the South” (Mallory and Robinson 2017, 50). As Covington, Georgia, stands in for Mystic Falls, Virginia, its own history is completely obscured. Covington Square, for example, the filming location for key moments in season three, was the site of a 1970 Civil Rights March that drew thousands. The Creek Nation had inhabited the area now known as Newton County, but were forced to cede over twenty million acres of land at the Treaty of Fort Jackson (Green 1985, 43). Therefore, the physical transformation of Covington into Mystic Falls further tangles and obscures the history and political issues that the series evokes but never confronts. In avoiding the “old slave days” and whitewashing the past by portraying Vikings as “original founders”, *The Vampire Diaries* connects perfectly to a present in which battles over how to remember U.S. history are bitter and increasingly violent.

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