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*La Maravilla* is a book that represents the contemporary reality of what it means to live in America. Alfredo Veja Jr.'s story is a microcosm of those living on the fringes of society and specifically those who are not or no longer deemed "white." Veja critiques whiteness in both subtle and blatant ways but he makes it clear that it goes beyond skin color and the pursuit of whiteness is one that requires you to strip away everything that makes you unique. Whiteness is a part of the American Dream but within that dream lies a nightmare, even for those who are doing everything to pretend that it isn't.

The town of Buckeye is the southwestern equivalent of how those who live on the east coast view the inner cities. It's a town that contains the most marginalized groups in society ranging from indigenous peoples, Mexicans, Blacks, European and Chinese immigrants, white outcasts (a.k.a rednecks), sex workers, gays, lesbians, and a group of transgender women. Despite this story being set in the 1950s, these are pretty much the same groups of people that are marginalized in the modern era minus the European immigrants --- depending on their ethnic background. Whiteness is a decentralized concept that manifests itself in the least suspecting places even amongst those who aren't even white. Despite the town being small and everybody being familiar, the residents still use slurs about each other and other minority groups despite

being minorities themselves. As the story progresses it becomes clear that the problems plaguing Buckeye do not exist in a vacuum and despite being cast out of white American society, the racial epithets used in descriptions of other residents is a reflection of internalized white supremacy that people of color who live on colonized land such as America simply cannot avoid. When you are reminded every day that despite being born and raised in America, you will never be a true American you begin to develop a habit of punching down on those lower in the caste than you are. At the same time, the only way to get past that habit is to be willing to fully accept that you will never be considered white and to embrace that fact rather than aspire to it at the cost of your humanity. This acceptance is one redeeming quality that many residents of Buckeye have during the process of cultural exchanges, sharing of food and resources, and showing solidarity to other residents in times of need to prevent the police from coming and creating trouble for everyone in town. They are not like everybody else in a time where whiteness and the American Dream demanded both uniformity and rugged individualism rather than solidarity. However, in Buckeye, you have a community whose lives are connected as part of the continuing history of colonization, slavery, immigration, and the purposefully hidden victims of American capitalism.

The Arkie/Okie residents of Buckeye represented the perfect example of the ridiculous and inherently oppressive standards of whiteness and the American Dream. An individual example would be Vernetta, the moment she was discovered having an interracial relationship with a black man her life descended into more of a hell than it already was. She had to leave her hometown after the lynching of her partner and was disowned by her father who explicitly reminded her that she belonged to him and no other man unless he allows it to top off the years of shunning and abuse. By the logic of whiteness, it was completely acceptable for a father to

abuse his daughter, his wife and lynch an innocent man as long as that man was black. Vernetta's story is that of the inextricable link between racism and misogyny that is one of the more basic tenets of decentralized white supremacy. Whiteness allows a man such as Wakely to be given the benefit of the doubt because what he did was seen as more "human" than what Vernetta did with Joseph Bonifacio (J.B.); the white woman is the property that has no autonomy and must be saved while the black man is less than human and must be dealt with accordingly. If whiteness considers that to be rational and humane, then that alone is enough to question this proverbial "humanity" that whiteness seeks to impose and force upon anybody that does not fit in its mold. In one chapter, Veá even states that "Mexican or black or Indian kids whose first experience of the white race was the migratory Arkies could never thereafter harbor a categorical hatred of white people." (Véa 66) In other words, if certain groups of white people could not achieve the American dream then the aspirations of whiteness for a poor person of color were always doomed from the start. But with that comes the freedom of not being bound by the isolated and abusive logic of your oppressor.

Veá's critiques and examples of the moral and social depravity of whiteness are something that stood out the most in the book. Any discussion of the American dream without mentioning the concept of whiteness and its unique link to racialized capitalism in the US will provide an analysis that is either poor or simply another example of whiteness being the standard for all people and not the exception. Veá used prose to convey the decentralized nature of whiteness and the lasting effects of the caste created by colonization that aligns with more radical theories and thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and James Baldwin. This work allows for those who are used to seeing the typical white, Western rugged individualist story to experience a story that

is truly a bottom-up narrative about a diverse community living in an era where the most reactionary Americans today would attribute it to being a time where America was “great.”

Whiteness is American and being American means being white which can be given to somebody just as easily as it can be taken away, as Manuel stated to Beto, “You do not become American... America becomes you...”. (Véa 36)

## Works Cited

Véa Jr., Alfredo. *La Maravilla*. Plume, 1993.