Challenge of Clobal Whiteness

THOMAS K. NAKAYAMA, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY





ON OCTOBER 8, 1994, the Administrative Committee of the National Communication Association established the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture. The Arnold Lecture is given in plenary session each year at the annual convention of the Association and features the most accomplished researchers in the field. The topic of the lecture changes annually so as to capture the wide range of research being conducted in the field and to demonstrate the relevance of that work to society at large.

The purpose of the Arnold Lecture is to inspire not by words but by intellectual deeds. Its goal is to make the members of the Association better informed by having one of its best professionals think aloud in their presence. Over the years, the Arnold Lecture will serve as a scholarly stimulus for new ideas and new ways of approaching those ideas. The inaugural Lecture was given on November 17, 1995.

The Arnold Lecturer is chosen each year by the First Vice President. When choosing the Arnold Lecturer, the First Vice President is charged to select a long-standing member of NCA, a scholar of undisputed merit who has already been recognized as such, a person whose recent research is as vital and suggestive as their earlier work, and a researcher whose work meets or exceeds the scholarly standards of the academy generally.

The Lecture has been named for Carroll C. Arnold, the late Professor Emeritus of Pennsylvania State University. Trained under Professor A. Craig Baird at the University of Iowa, Arnold was the coauthor (with John Wilson) of Public Speaking as a Liberal Art, author of Criticism of Oral Rhetoric (among other works), and co-editor of The Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory. Although primarily trained as a humanist, Arnold was nonetheless one of the most active participants in the New Orleans Conference of 1968 which helped put social scientific research in communication on solid footing. Thereafter, Arnold edited Communication Monographs because of a fascination with empirical questions. As one of the three founders of the journal Philosophy and Rhetoric, Arnold also helped move the field toward increased dialogue with the humanities in general. For these reasons and more, Arnold was dubbed "The Teacher of the Field" upon retirement from Penn State in 1977. Dr. Arnold died in January of 1997.

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Global Whiteness

I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO DAVID McMAHAN for inviting me to give the esteemed Carroll C. Arnold lecture. This is a tremendous honor. Today I want to speak about the challenges of global whiteness. Twenty-five years ago, I published my first piece on whiteness in an NCA journal, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. At that time, one of the dominant ways of understanding whiteness was its invisibleness. Yet I've struggled over whiteness throughout my life. It wasn't so invisible. It was very salient. Like many people of my generation, I started first grade in a segregated elementary school and graduated from a racially integrated high school after 12th grade. Indeed, there was only one high school in the county by then.

In the years in between, I saw whiteness change and the dynamic character of it. When the amusement park, Six Flags Over Georgia, opened in 1967, there was an excitement about it at school. I think that my family went to the park in 1968, but before we went, my parents called the park—an expensive long-distance call back then—to find out if it was open to everyone or if it was open only to whites. Unlike some previous amusement parks in the area, Six Flags Over Georgia was open to everyone from the beginning, from its opening. I am telling this story to highlight how much whiteness has changed over the years. The many strategies that we learned to navigate whiteness in the dying years of Jim Crow don't have much use today.

Over the years, I have watched the dynamic character of whiteness and the many ways it has changed over the years, while retaining parts of its traditional interests. But whiteness develops new strategies to negotiate its position of power and privilege.

In July 2020, an Asian American family was celebrating a birthday at a restaurant in Monterey, California, when a white male at a different table began yelling at them: "F— you Asians," "Go back to whatever f—— Asian country you're from," and "You don't belong here." He followed up with: "Trump's gonna f— you," as he stood up to leave, followed by "You f—— need to leave! You f—— Asian piece of s—!" when a server intervened and told him to leave ("My Behavior In The Video Is Appalling," 2020).

In the context of anti-Asian attacks across the United States, this incident is just one of many such attacks. President Trump's naming COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" or "kung flu" led *The Washington Post* to conclude that "such racialized language has prompted many Americans to blame Chinese Americans for covid-19" (Moynihan & Porumbescu, 2020). In fact, this rhetoric has led to anti-Asian attacks more generally, as any need to make distinctions among Asian American ethnic groups has never been a high priority in the cultural logic of whiteness.

This anti-Asian turn is not unique to the United States. Earlier, the hashtag #jesuispasunvirus began trending on French twitter and #ichbinkeinvirus on German twitter. Similar hashtags trended in other European languages as well in response to anti-Asian reactions to COVID-19 in 2020.

I wanted to use this example because it highlights some of the issues at hand when we consider "the Challenge of Global Whiteness." As I explored more about the global place of whiteness, the more it led back to a global orientation to whiteness.

It is important to note that the perpetrator in the case I share above was Michael Lofthouse, the CEO of Solid8, which is described as "a cloud computing firm based in San Francisco" (Elfrink). Lofthouse, it should be noted, is originally from the United Kingdom and moved to the United States about ten years ago. Notably, he has a claim on American land that Asian Americans do not. How can he tell this Asian American family to go back to whatever country they are from, when there is no reflection on his own trajectory and need to go back to whichever European country he is from? Whiteness has an international claim that others do not. He is rightfully here as a white person in a way that the Asian American family is not.

In the larger scheme of things, Lofthouse's aggressive verbal assault is a minor point in the entire history of the world. I am using this minor incident because it opens up a starting place for one of the many global challenges of whiteness. Simply rolling my eyes at Lofthouse does nothing to disrupt this cultural logic. The claims that "others" need to go home, to go back to wherever they are from, are deeply embedded rhetorical weapons that are always available to disenfranchise whomever falls outside the ever-changing umbrella of whiteness.

Whiteness studies have been enormously influenced by work on the racial experience in and history of the United States. The experience and cultural logic of whiteness do not necessarily emerge from the United States. As whiteness studies have grown, there has increasingly been work on whiteness in other nations, e.g., Australia, Canada, South Africa. Each has its own history and trajectory within different legal, historical and social institutions. While specific national contexts do shape and influence the ways that whiteness functions, there are also transnational forces that shape the ways that race and whiteness are deployed. Whiteness does not operate in isolation.

Today, I want to argue for a much more international view of whiteness, but with a focus on the influence of United States imperialism on whiteness. Much of the work on whiteness in the United States has focused on a narrow definition of the United States, rather than situating whiteness as a part of a much larger racial project that began before the United States was established. As a world power, the United States exercises tremendous economic, military, and political power. Historically, this means that the conception of the United States needs to be much broader and comprehensive.

Yet, I also want to suggest that whiteness has always been a global project.

Ben Franklin is an important touchstone for early conceptions of "Americans" and, despite not ever being a president, his influence in the past and present is reflected in his image on the \$100 bill. Some consider him to be the most important and influential founding father, especially because of his work on the Declaration of Independence.

Benjamin Franklin was very concerned with the "peopling" of America and the construction of a prototypical "American."

In 1750, Britain passed the Iron Act, which encouraged the production of raw iron in North America but limited the production of iron products (such as tools, steel products, etc.) to protect the manufacturing businesses in Great Britain. Its effect was to severely hinder the development of manufacturing infrastructure in the American colonies. In response, Ben Franklin wrote, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" in 1751. He was very concerned about the struggle between Britain and France over the future of North America. In fact, the full title of his pamphlet reflected this concern: "Observations on the Late and Present Conduct of the French, With Regard to Their Encroachments Upon the British Colonies in North America. ... To which is added, wrote by another hand, Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c." This rather unwieldly title reveals the motivation behind the pamphlet. Franklin was concerned about whether North America would become British or French and thought the development of the industrial sector in the British colonies could help in that struggle. But Britain passed the Iron Act, which disabled that development.

In 1751, Ben Franklin responded to the Iron Act in pamphlet form, which was a major communication medium at the time. This pamphlet was widely distributed in Britain as well as the American colonies. It was reprinted in magazines in England and Scotland. Tom Paine's "Common Sense" is one of the more familiar examples of pamphleteering. Franklin, in his pamphlet, made a much larger argument about the development of an America that could be a powerful force in the world. Early on, he saw the potential of building a significant white colony that would be a global force in the future. He envisioned a powerful America as a tremendous force in advancing whiteness, which he saw as Anglo-Saxons.

Benjamin Franklin was very concerned with the "peopling" of America and the construction of a prototypical "American." He argued against the impact of Germans on Pennsylvania: "Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion" (1751).

One important theme in this global view of whiteness is assimilation into whiteness. First, Franklin is concerned that "they" "will never adopt our Language or Customs" and second that they will not change their complexion to match that of whites. The two themes—assimilation and racialization—return again and again throughout the history of immigration. Some groups were blocked from immigration because of a sense that some people were "unassimilatable" and could not become white. It's important to note here that Franklin did not characterize most Europeans as truly white.

Franklin also laments the lack of white people on the earth, not specifically the British colonies in North America. I want to emphasize the global view that Franklin had about the paucity of white people on the planet. The project of nation-building was intimately tied to the racial project of expanding the white population in the nation and, ultimately, in the world. He had an eye on the global place of the emerging nation in the world. His focus was on population growth. His estimates on population growth were not off the mark, even if his reasons for that growth were. For example, he opposed slavery, as it reduced the fertility of whites: "The Whites who have Slaves, not labouring, are enfeebled, and therefore not so generally prolific."

The 1790 Census counted just under 4 million people in the new nation, the United States of America. This was the first census undertaken. The 1890 Census counted almost 62 million people; by 2010, the census counted almost 309 million. The 1900 census counted a little over 76 million people, of whom 66.9 million (or about 88 percent) were classified as white. The latest census estimates (notably, at this time, the 2020 Census results are not yet reported), that over 76 percent of the U.S. population identifies as "white only."

The first census of Great Britain was in 1801 and showed a population of 10.5 million. So, the United States was about one-third the population of Great Britain. The 1901 census reported a population of 30.5 million, or less than half that of the United States. Today, the estimated population of the United Kingdom is 66.7 million, or about one-fifth of the United States. Ben Franklin's vision of a powerful white force, the United States, has come to fruition:

"This Million doubling, suppose but once in 25 Years, will in another Century be more than the People of England, and the greatest Number of Englishmen will be on this Side the Water. What an Accession of Power to the British Empire by Sea as well as Land! What Increase of Trade and Navigation! What Numbers of Ships and Seamen! We have been here but little more than 100 Years, and yet the Force of our Privateers in the late War, united, was greater, both in Men and Guns, than that of the whole British Navy in Queen Elizabeth's Time" (1751).

What Ben Franklin had grasped early on was the potential to build a formidable white population. In part, it was premised on his reasoning that "Hence the Prince that acquires new Territory, if he finds it vacant, or removes the Natives to give his own People Room" as one of the keys to nation-building. Along with lawmakers, manufacturers, fishers, and farmers "may be properly called *Fathers* of their Nation, as they are the Cause of the Generation of Multitudes."

Franklin gives little or no justification for the removal of "the Natives," other than to make room for the person who "acquires new Territory." Yet, he foreshadowed the forced removal of entire Native American nations to "Indian Territory" (aka Oklahoma) or reservations throughout the West.

Franklin's project, of course, looks quite problematic in hindsight, but it laid the path for a global whiteness.

In Franklin's era, his concern would have also extended to questions of language. Communication was something that he took seriously. In his era, he felt most threatened by the German language, as it wasn't pre-determined that English would become the *lingua franca*.

Language has played a central role in global whiteness. Although Latin was the *lingua franca* of Europe, it never attained the international status of English. Chinese is and was spoken as a native language by more people than European languages, but it did not become an international language. French was able to make a much bigger impact on the international level. While spoken in the courts of Catherine the Great of Russia and Frederick the Great of Prussia, French never gained the same global status and widespread use as English has today.

Part of the project of eliminating other ways of communicating has been the suppression of non-English languages. We know that slaves were not to be taught to read or write as a path to disempowerment. We know that slave laws forbade teaching slaves how to read and write. Well-known are the federal "Indian schools," where Native children were forbidden from speaking their native languages in favor of English. Similarly, California's segregated schools, such as the "oriental schools," forbade the use of Chinese or Japanese languages. The continuity of these languages was seen as without value and potentially threatening to the white social order. So, in following Franklin's concern about German, the educational system followed Franklin by being concerned about immigrants not speaking English. It's almost as if speaking another language somehow diminishes the ability to speak English. It also threatens the tight connection between whiteness and language and communication.

Through coded language on "civilization" and "thought," English becomes a critical tool of whiteness. English becomes the pathway to thinking in a particular way... it is all about assimilation and whiteness.

Yet, the separation of people who speak the same language is not easy. People want to be with others who speak their language. As one historian notes, "Slave owners made a point of separating African slaves who spoke the same language" (Immerwahr, p. 319). Immerwahr concludes that the result "was total linguistic annihilation." The decline of African languages in the United States was reflected in the purposeful decline of Native American languages, as "Indian schools" insisted on "civilizing" the students, which meant, in part, speaking English. At the same time, the British Empire was expanding across large parts of Africa, South Asia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and more.

The history of the education of Native peoples in America is much more complicated than we have space for here, but a few things are worth noting. Missionaries were early on interested in teaching the Native people. While there were early educational efforts in teaching English, the push for English grew dramatically after the Civil War. At this time, President Grant appointed the "Indian Peace Commissioners," whose charge was to bring an end to the "Indian wars" taking place on the frontier. In their 1871 report, they argued that:

Now, by educating the children of these tribes in the English language these differences would have disappeared, and civilization would have followed at once....

Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment, and thought; customs and habits are molded and assimilated in the same way, and thus in process of time the differences producing trouble would have been gradually obliterated. ...

In the difference of language to-day lies two-thirds of our trouble. ... Schools should be established, which children should be required to attend; their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted.

Through coded language on "civilization" and "thought," English becomes a critical tool of whiteness. English becomes the pathway to thinking in a particular way, but it gets cloaked by Commissioner Atkins, who tries to represent English as transracial, when it is all about assimilation and whiteness.

In 1887, the Commission of Indian Affairs, J. D. C. Atkins banned the use of Native languages in Indian schools. In his report to Congress, Commissioner Atkins reported that:

It is believed that if any Indian vernacular is allowed to be taught by the missionaries in schools on Indian reservations, it will prejudice the youthful pupil as well as his untutored and uncivilized or semi-civilized parent against the English language, and, to some extent at least, against Government schools in which the English language exclusively has always been taught. To teach Indian schoolchildren their native tongue is practically to exclude English, and to prevent them from acquiring it. This language [English], which is good enough for a white man and a black man, ought to be good enough for the red man. It is also believed that teaching an Indian youth in his own barbarous dialect is a positive detriment to him. The first step to be taken toward civilization, toward teaching the Indians the mischief and folly of continuing in their barbarous practices, it to teach them the English language (Atkins, 1887).

He promotes English as a race-neutral communication tool, but also as "civilizing" and an alternative to "barbarous dialects"—or the Native languages. But successful resistance to the imposition of English would not come from non-European languages in the judicial system.

Interestingly, the challenge to the many laws enforcing the use of English in schools arose not from the American Indian schools, but from schools in the Midwest where German was being taught. In 1920, the Hamilton County attorney in Nebraska walked into the Zion Lutheran School and found the teacher, Robert Meyer, teaching reading German to a ten-year-old student (Raymond Parpart). He charged Meyer with violating the Siman Act, a Nebraska law that forbade teaching any foreign languages through the eighth grade (Pusey, 2017). Meyer was found guilty through the court system and the Nebraska Supreme Court. His lawyer appealed to the United States Supreme Court. Meyer v. Nebraska was heard by the Supreme Court in 1923. By the time this case reached the Supreme Court, Nebraska had passed an even stricter law and the Supreme Court took this case, along with two cases from Iowa and Ohio. In a 7-2 decision, Justice James C. McReynolds wrote the majority opinion:

"Mere knowledge of the German language cannot reasonably be regarded as harmful. Heretofore it has been commonly looked upon as helpful and desirable.... "The protection of the Constitution extends to all—to those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue. Perhaps it would be highly advantageous if all had ready understanding of our ordinary speech, but this cannot be coerced by methods which conflict with the Constitution—a desirable end cannot be promoted by prohibited means." (Pusey, 2017)

Of course, the German language, unlike the many Native languages that are spoken across North America, would not be seen as threatening whiteness in the same way. Also worth noting is that 1922 and 1923 saw two Supreme Court cases decided that reinforced a particular cultural logic about whiteness. In 1922, *Ozawa v. United States* ruled that Japanese people are not scientifically classified as "Caucasians" and so they are not white and therefore they are ineligible for U.S. citizenship. In 1923, the Supreme Court ruled in *Thind v. United States* that people from India are classified as "Caucasian" but in the common sense rule, they are not seen as white and therefore are ineligible for U.S. citizenship. The seeming acceptance of German and other languages hides the retrenchment of whiteness through scientific racialization coupled with "common sense" racialization.

Although it may seem like a slight detour, let's jump to the establishment of the U.S. internment camps in the 1940s. The largest internment camp, Poston, and the "model" camp, Gila River, were built on American Indian reservations. Poston, which was really three camps, Poston I, Poston II and Poston III, was placed on the Colorado River Indian Tribes Reservation in western Arizona. It is a reservation comprised of four tribes: Chemenuevi, Hopi, Mohave, and Navajo. The "Rivers" camp was placed on the Gila River Indian Reservation between Phoenix and Casa Grande, Arizona.

Here I want to point to a particular cultural logic of whiteness at work. The CRIT reservation is comprised of four tribes, not by their own historical settlement, but by the removal of Hopi and Navajo to the original lands of the Chemehuevi and Mohave peoples. The placement of Japanese Americans on this reservation adds to the reservation's history of relocation. The Gila River internment camp was considered the "model" camp for a number of reasons. When First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt asked to visit the camps, she was taken to Gila River. She seems to have understood whiteness and pondered the consequences of her husband's Executive Order 9066, ordering the internment of Japanese Americans. Eleanor Roosevelt declared: "[T]he sooner we get the young [native-born] Japanese out of the camps the better. Otherwise if we don't look out we will create another Indian problem" (qtd. in Robinson, n.d.). The potential for Japanese Americans to become yet another "tribe" points to some interesting cultural logic about racial and ethnic categorizations.

Eleanor Roosevelt portends the racial categorization of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders into a single group, two very different groups who share a brownish skin color, but little else. Pacific Islanders,

e.g., Hawaiians, share concerns over indigenous land rights issues, native languages, and more with other Native peoples. In contract, Asian Americans share immigration, citizenship rights, and more with other immigrant groups. The merging of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders reflects whiteness in a way that disrupts the reality of lived experience, history, and culture.

But back to English. English, the language, has no equivalent to *l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*, an organization dedicated to the development and spread of the French language around the world. Evidently, English doesn't need such an organization to promote the English language around the globe. Nor does English need an equivalent of the *Academie Francaise* [French Academy], a prescriptive institution that determines rules about the use of the French language. Widely known as the "immortal forty" in France, but the "language police" outside of France, the French Academy determines the "correct usage" of French. The Academy determines the grammar and vocabulary of "correct" French. It guards against the intrusion of other languages into French, not only English, but English is one of the most powerful influences. For example, when "cloud computing" came into existence, the Academy had to determine the correct French equivalent: "informatique en nuage." Or when COVID-19 entered the French language, the Academy had to determine that COVID-19 is a feminine word, not a masculine word. La COVID-19. While many people do use the masculine form, e.g., le COVID-19, it is not considered "correct" by the Academy.

Without a language academy, English has been quite successful at becoming an international language. The British Empire played a tremendous role in the spread of English, as European colonialism similarly played a significant role in the spread of Dutch, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Unlike those languages, however, the English language had the United States to take up the mantle of Anglophonie from the British and reinforce its importance in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The United States has been a major force in the development of technology in the 20th and, so far, in the 21st century. The United States has been an important aspect of the dissemination of technology in English. It has been a major force in the spread of English. English has become a far more international language than Latin, Esperanto or French could ever become. The 20th century saw the rise of the United States on the world stage. The 1946 Foreign Service Act reflected the new American commitment to involvement around the globe. As Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz has pointed out, this act established the Foreign Service Institute, a huge player in the development and history of Intercultural Communication.

In 2020, the Oxford English Dictionary added 29 Nigerian English words. This is significant in that the Anglophone world is recognizing the ways that English is spoken in Nigeria and it is open to the many varieties of English (Ugwuanyi, 2020). The openness of English to change and new ways of speaking English is a powerful and potentially useful tool for resisting whiteness. This is a global project, and the rhetoric of global whiteness is grounded in this history. We are all engaging in the whiteness of English, but the openness of English to other ways of speaking English can plant the seeds to challenge the global dominance of whiteness.

As I argued earlier with Robert Krizek, we must consider the ways that whiteness is a strategic rhetoric. It emanates from a position of power. It is powerful. Claims to being rightfully on a particular piece of land by whites (whether legally citizens or not) is a strategic claim of belonging. It's settler colonialism that defies historicity. It defies what "ownership" means..... what happens to the concept of indigenousness? Do the indigenous people have no claim? By redefining what it means to be "American" to white, what happens to the indigenous peoples? And everyone else? Does the inclusion of other ways of using English, such as Nigerian English, point to a new way of thinking about whiteness and its global reach? Or is this just another incorporation of whiteness around the globe?

Here I want to flip the script on global whiteness. It is not just about U.S. expansion and the power of the United States globally. It is also about how the rest of the world calls upon the United States to help advance the project of whiteness. As the largest and most powerful white country, other people view a potential power of whiteness. Whether the United States takes this path or another path remains to be seen.

The challenge of global whiteness is that its logic extends well beyond the borders and history of the United States, but it is also fueled and in play in these global relationships that bind us together.

On Yom Kippur, in October 2019, "Stephan B." initiated an attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany that killed two people outside the synagogue. In a livestreamed video on Twitch, he began his video with "Hi, my name is Anon" and continued with "I think the Holocaust never happened. Feminism is the cause of the decline of the West, which acts as a scapegoat for mass immigration. And the root of all these problems is the Jew. Would you like to be friends?" (Gonzalez, 2019) Later, the gunman was identified as Stephan Balliet, a German citizen.

His call for more attacks did incite others: "The attack inspired copycat terrorists around the world, including in the UK, Norway and the American cities of El Paso [TX] and Poway [CA]—where a synagogue was attacked" (Dearden, 2019).

In February 2020, Tobias R., another German citizen, posted a YouTube video prior to opening fire into two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, killing nine people. The video was addressed to "all Americans" and, like Stephan B.'s statement, was done in English (Heutlin, 2020).

I point to these recent examples of white violence to underscore the international character of whiteness today. In the wake of the death of George Floyd in the United States, Black Lives Matter protests erupted across Europe, including "Rome, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Madrid, Lisbon and cities across Britain" (Birnbaum, 2020). Protests also took place in Australia, Brazil, Japan, and South Africa. Despite concerns that President Trump led to the loss of American influence around the world, the United States remains an important and central place for whiteness. It remains a critical site for whiteness, and the call for "all Americans" can be seen as a call for "white Americans," which helps resecure the dominance of whiteness and white supremacy.

Let me briefly say that the internet, social media, and the online environment today play an important role in whiteness, especially on the global stage. There is much work to be done, but I have just begun the work in this area.

Whiteness, of course, is more than white violence and white nationalism. It's also a normalization of everyday life. It is Trumpism and the imagined return to a time when "America was great." It wants to become Americanism. Is it who we are? There's a lot at stake in the coming years. Is America about racial division and categorizations and suppression of some languages, as it was in the past? Or is it is about moving beyond these racial divisions and accepting a multicultural, multiracial, polyglot society in a diverse world? Our task is not to predict the future, but to understand the history and cultural logic at work that might shape our future. The challenge of global whiteness is that its logic extends well beyond the borders and history of the United States, but it is also fueled and in play in these global relationships that bind us together. Challenging and changing whiteness will necessitate taking a serious look at the global relationships that fuel whiteness.



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