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Queer Girls and Racial Others

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Nikita: Liberal Nostalgia on the Queer Network

In May 2010 the CW, a youth-focused television network jointly owned by Warner Bros. and CBS Corporation, announced a lineup of all-original content for the first time in the network's history.¹ Once the home of reruns, by 2010 the network was marketing a different kind of nostalgia; reimagining the myths of antiquity and the superhero in *Supernatural* and *Smallville*; and reanimating the canon of Aaron Spelling's nineties Los Angeles with reboots of *Melrose Place* (cancelled after the 2009 season) and *90210*. Capping the lineup, was executive producer Craig Silverstein's *Nikita*, a remake of director Luc Besson's 1990 film of the same name. An action-drama starring actress Maggie Q, *Nikita* begins three years after the original film's conclusion and draws heavily from the panned Warner Bros. film *Point of No Return* and the American-Canadian television series, *La Femme Nikita*. Despite the show's gross departures from the original film, the core of the narrative remains the same. A drug addict and delinquent, Nikita is offered a second chance at life as a conscripted government assassin. Where she ultimately vanishes in the original, abandoning both her fiancé and the government incursions on

¹ Nellie Andreeva, "The CW Announces 2010-2011 Schedule: First All-Original Lineup in Network's History," *Deadline Hollywood*, May 20, 2010, <http://deadline.com/2010/05/cw-announces-2010-11-schedule-43040/>. The CW network was founded in 2006 after the merger of the Time Warner owned WB and CBS owned UPN.

her quotidian life, in the CW remake she seeks revenge on the agency that not only held her captive but also murdered her fiancé. Nikita marries her commanding agent and rival in the series finale. All of the CWs remakes diverge widely from their original source material. What distinguishes *Nikita* from the rest of the CWs programming is not its fidelity or lack thereof to the plot of the original film but the show's explicit nationalism and unremitting heteronormativity.

Within television studies, the CW is known as the “queer network.” So too has the network been regularly praised for its LGBT inclusion.² This invites the obvious question: Why did the CW choose to air a program so seemingly antithetical to its other content? A question that might be further extended to the particular divergences that *Nikita* takes from its source material. Although a full analysis of *Nikita*'s translation into an American context is beyond the scope of this paper, Besson's film is both anti-nationalist and gender queer.³ That *Nikita* might have been carried over into network programming with the same queerness but instead takes the heteronormative gender binaries of the American remakes to further extremes is significant.⁴ I am going to suggest that rather than understand *Nikita* as an aberration within the CW's lineup,

² GLADD, “2011 Network Responsibility Index,” 2011, http://www.glaad.org/files/glaad_nri_2011_updated.pdf.

³ Although in different terms, these positions have been considered in a number of essays on Besson's films included in *The films of Luc Besson: Master of Spectacle*, ed. Susan Hayward and Phil Powrie, and to a lesser extent Susan Hayward's *Nikita* and *Luc Besson*.

⁴ Beginning from the initial scene of a drugstore robbery, the Warner Brother's remake *Point of No Return* goes out of its way to reinforce a heteronormative gender binary. As men spray bullets around her *Nikita* mindlessly pulls a handgun from beneath a pack of Huggies brand diapers. See, Laura NG, “‘The Most Powerful Weapon You Have’: Warriors and Gender in *La Femme Nikita*,” in *Athena's Daughters, Television's New Women Warriors*, ed. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 105-115. NG notes that the blond star of the 1997 series *La Femme Nikita* cannot escape her gendered physicality.

the heteronormativity of the diegesis is consistent with the network's recurrent nostalgia. A nostalgia that must be understood within a framework of progressive liberalism both because of *Nikita's* explicit American nationalism and because it is the social liberalism of the CW's programming that has established the network as "queer."⁵

Nostalgia is a necessarily broad and heterogeneous concept. Yet my concern is more limited and I will restrict my analysis of *Nikita* to the "structural nostalgia" of American liberalism. In the 2016 reissue of his seminal book, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of Social Institutions*, the anthropologist Michael Herzfeld defines "structural nostalgia" as a mode that "legitimizes deeds of the moment by investing them with the moral authority of eternal truth and by representing the vagaries of circumstance as realizations of a larger universe of system and balance."⁶ While Herzfeld is more explicit as to the implicit assumptions that frame conservative tropes, this mode of recursive idealism might justifiably be applied to the freedoms and equalities espoused by progressives. Here, the utopia of the American nation-state is defined through racial, sexual, and gender *freedoms* with no material past. It is this "hypothetical pure essence of [American] nationhood" that liberal politics seeks to recover from the moral decay of racism, homophobia, and misogyny.⁷

⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines liberalism as: "Support for or advocacy of individual rights, civil liberties, and reform tending towards individual freedom, democracy, or social equality; a political and social philosophy based on these principles."

⁶ Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions*, (New York, New York: Routledge 2016), 139.

⁷ *Ibid*, 82, 142. It is important to note that while nostalgia seems to refer to a past it is always essentially atemporal, if not inherently futuristic. This is a consequential detail in expanding this argument to fully consider the neoliberal implications of nostalgia within an American context.

Imperative to Herzfeld's formulation is the *generational* stasis of nostalgia, as the "rhetoric of change and decay" will be repeated from one generation to the next. To clarify, within the determined limits of the in-group the preceding generation will inevitably perceive changes in their successor's values as emblematic of social deterioration. The object of this rhetoric is a "*damaged reciprocity*: the virtue that has allegedly decayed always entails some measure of mutuality, a mutuality that has been, perhaps irreversibly, ruptured by the self-interest of modern times."⁸ In simple terms, reciprocities are relationships of exchange governed by moral principals. Reciprocities are not necessarily equal and structural nostalgia often functions to obscure the unevenness of these relationships.⁹ Rhetoric equating same-sex marriage with a degradation of "traditional marriage" would be indicative of this tendency. That "traditional marriage" is an amorphous idealization of heteronormative relations is further indication of nostalgia. But while it is relatively straight forward to consider structural nostalgia as it manifests between conservatives and liberals within the larger nation-state, the operations of structural nostalgia within these subgroups is less immediately clear. In situating the CWs programming in relation to the network, its paratexts, reception, and the national political context, I will be taking Herzfeld's assertion that "media discourse provides a national-level ethnographic mode analogous to village-level gossip" as a methodological imperative.¹⁰

Targeting an "18-34 year old white, middle or upper class female audience" there are not only gender but generational divides between the CW's Baby Boomer executives, Generation X

⁸ Ibid, 140.

⁹ Ibid, 141. My emphasis.

¹⁰ Ibid, 121.

creators, and Millennial viewers.¹¹ One of the CW's lowest ranked shows in terms of viewership *Nikita* never found its audience among the network's young female viewers. Still, with the Nielsen Company tracking 1.54 million viewers for the show in its inaugural season, *Nikita* was only 190,000 viewers shy of the hit show *Supernatural*. A major discrepancy is only apparent when one considers viewership in terms of target demographics, among viewers 18-49 there is a 490,000 jump in *Supernatural*'s audience.¹² Debuting to a packed house at San Diego's Comic-Con, critically praised as the antidote to the CW's "callow and not fully developed" youthful programming, and touted as one of the "Best Action TV Shows on Netflix" as recently as June, 2017, the lack of audience within the CW's target demographics should not be understood to mean that an audience for *Nikita* is not there.¹³ Although viewer statistics for the online streaming service are difficult to obtain, Netflix had 22.93 million subscribers in 2011, the year

¹¹ Kayti Adaire Lausch, "The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand" (Master's Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2013), 3. According to the Nielsen Company the CW is the only network geared towards 18-34 year olds.

¹² Trevor Kimball, "CW Ratings Report Card," *TV Series Finale: Cancelled and Renewed Shows*, June 1, 2012, <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/cw-2011-2012-ratings/>.

¹³ Merrill Barr, "Nikita's Final Season Isn't About Fan Service, It's About Netflix," *Forbes*, November 18, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/merrillbarr/2013/11/18/the-final-season-of-nikita-isnt-about-fan-service-its-about-netflix/>; Phil Dyess-Nugent, "Nikita's final season makes The CW's other shows look all the sorrier," *AV/TV Club*, November 22, 2013, <https://tv.avclub.com/nikita-s-final-season-makes-the-cw-s-other-shows-look-a-1798178776>; "The Best Action TV Shows on Netflix," *Thrillist Entertainment*, June 27, 2017 <https://www.thrillist.com/entertainment/nation/best-action-tv-shows-netflix>.

that *Nikita* was licensed to the streaming service. That number had doubled by the time of *Nikita*'s cancellation on the CW in 2013.¹⁴

The liberalism of the CW is well accounted for, not only in the political affiliations of the network's parent companies (Time Warner and CBS executives Les Moonves and Barry Meyers both publicly fundraised for Barack Obama) but more profoundly in the network's inaugural branding.¹⁵ Although immediately derided, the CW's 2006 "Free to be together" campaign featured a slew of billboards and advertisements with awkward images of the network's stars accompanied by the slogan "Free to be..."¹⁶ This evocation of freedom within the terms of difference and togetherness expresses an implicitly liberal position, one reinforced by the network's decision to launch with its most diverse (in terms of gender, race, and sexuality) cast. Inaugurating with *America's Next Top Model* (an established carryover from the UPN network), a press photo from the CW party features host Tyra Banks holding a green tee shirt with "Free to

¹⁴ "Number of Netflix streaming subscribers worldwide from 3rd quarter 2011 to 3rd quarter 2017 (in millions)," *Statista: The Statistics Portal*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly-number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/>. Action Adventure and Thrillers are more likely to be binge watched on Netflix, unfocused viewing and viewer interpretation of show thematics might be worth study.

¹⁵ Noel Sheppard, *MRC NewsBusters: Exposing and Combating Liberal Media Bias*, "CBS President Says at Obama Fundraiser 'Partisanship Is Very Much a Part of Journalism Now,'" June 7, 2012, <https://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/nb/noel-sheppard/2012/06/07/cbs-president-says-obama-fundraiser-partisanship-very-much-part>; Tina Daunt, "Inside Warner Bros. CEO Barry Meyer's Fundraiser With Moguls and Michelle Obama," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 12, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/michelle-obama-barry-meyer-mitt-romney-361160>.

¹⁶ Kate Sullivan, "The CW's New Billboards: Free to be Mocked," *Entertainment Weekly*, August 10, 2006, http://ew.com/article/2006/08/10/the_cws_new_bil/.

be together” printed across the chest.¹⁷ One of the only CW shows to star multiple African-American leads, two of whom are queer, it is difficult to disassociate the campaign from diversity as a central tenet of liberal politics.¹⁸ More so than its racial diversity *Top Model* has been highly praised throughout its 23 season run for featuring cast members who are queer both in their gender and sexuality.

Since William (Bill) Clinton was elected in 1993, the terms of queer rights within public policy have changed. Although liberalism is obviously broader than political affiliation, given the two party system of the United States, the political alliances of the CW, and the nationalism of *Nikita*'s diegesis the terms of liberalism as represented by U.S. policy and specifically the Democratic party's agendas are a useful lens through which to consider the generational revisions of liberal politics.¹⁹ When Barack Obama was elected in 2009 he inherited two key acts of legislation in relation to queer rights, both signed into law by Clinton in 1996: The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT).²⁰ A study published in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1997 reports that at the time of Clinton's candidacy only 27-31% of

¹⁷ Bonnie Goodman, “Free to be Together and Launch!,” *Spoiler Junkie: Spoilers for Hot TV and Entertainment News*, September 20, 2006, <https://spoilerjunkie.wordpress.com/2006/09/20/the-cw-free-to-be-together-and-launch/>.

¹⁸ “Diversity in the Media,” CSPAN, Filmed [August 14, 2003] CSPAN video, 1:07:11, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?177800-1/diversity-media>. CBS's Les Moonves discusses diversity in the media.

¹⁹ “Party Affiliation Among Voters: 1992-2016,” *Pew Research Center: U.S. Politics and Policy*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/2016/09/13/2-party-affiliation-among-voters-1992-2016/>.

²⁰ Joan Marshall Wesley, Ercilla Dometz Hendrix, and Jasmine N. Williams, “Moving Forward: Advancing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights under the Obama Administration through Progressive Politics,” *Race, Gender & Class*, Vol. 18, No. 3/4 (2011), 150-168.

Americans thought that same-sex marriage should be recognized by law.²¹ When asked whether they favored Clinton's plan to allow gays and lesbians to serve in the U.S. military only 36-43% responded yes.²² By 2006, 60% of Americans supported gays and lesbians serving openly in the military.²³ But support for same-sex marriage did not see the same overwhelming shift and progressive attitudes on the subject began to show a stark generational divide. Hovering around Clinton-era numbers, support for same-sex marriage among the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers (those born from 1928 to 1964) was sparse at the time of Obama's 2009 election. In contrast, support among Millennials exceeded official partisan affiliations at 51%.²⁴ This generational divide has only continued to increase in years since.

Given the CW's Millennial audience, it is easy to see why the network's programming featured "the highest percentage of LGBT-inclusive hours out of the five broadcast networks" the year of *Nikita*'s premier. Yet what GLAAD's affirmative criteria reveal, but has thus far been under-researched, is that (however counter-intuitive) the "queer network" is only *tacitly* queer.²⁵ Indeed, as programming from the CWs predecessors was replaced by the network's own original

²¹ Alan S. Yang, "Trends: Attitudes Toward Homosexuality," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), 477-507: 501.

²² *Ibid*, 504.

²³ "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the 2010 Elections," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, September 17, 2010, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/17/dont-ask-dont-tell-in-the-2010-elections/>; Amy B. Becker and Dietram A. Scheufele, "New Voters, New Outlook? Predispositions, Social Networks, and the Changing Politics of Gay Civil Rights," *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (June 2011), 325. That number has remained somewhat constant.

²⁴ "Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, June 26, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>.

²⁵ GLADD, "2011 Network Responsibility Index," 10.

content the diversity of *Top Model* became increasingly anomalous.²⁶ Rather than feature explicitly queer characters and plots, shows on the CW tend to be diegetically heteronormative with queerness expressed through minor characters and formal insinuations. To consider these tacit representations in the terms of political liberalism that I have just laid out, acceptance of homosexuality has been consistently higher than official support for same-sex marriage.²⁷ The tacit queerness of the CW's programming functions less as advocacy than permissiveness. It is permissiveness to a purpose, a contemporary variant of the adage "sex sells."

Seven months after the final episode of *Nikita* aired on the CW, the network promoted another disastrous marketing campaign. Rather than the ridicule directed at 2006's "Free to be together" promotion from the entertainment press, this time the network faced a backlash from fans. Soliciting fans to "#AskSupernatural" on Twitter, the CW was forced to shut down the hashtag after a flood of tweets focused on *Supernatural*'s "queer baiting."²⁸ Defined by the wiki Fanlore, "queer baiting" is 'the perceived attempt by canon creators (typically of television shows) to woo queer fans and/or slash fans,²⁹ [slash refers to a fan work depicting queer romantic or sexual relationships between characters] but with no intention of actually showing a

²⁶ Lausch, "The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand," 32. The network eventually jettisoned all of the carryover programming from UPN, ending the network's high ratio of programming featuring black casts.

²⁷ This can be seen across multiple generations of studies.

²⁸ For a discussion of queer uptake and *Supernatural* see, Taylor Boulware, "Fascination/Frustration: Slash Fandom, Genre, and Queer Uptake," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Washington, 2017).

²⁹ "Slash," *Fanlore*, <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Slash> (accessed October 19, 2017). Fanlore is an open source wiki begun in December 2010, the online equivalent of an oral history project, it is run by the Organization for Transformative Works a nonprofit devoted to preserving the history of fan cultures.

[queer] relationship being consummated on screen.”³⁰ Often distinguished from “slash wink” or “ship tease,” (shipping being “the act [within fandom] of supporting or wishing for a particular romantic relationship”) queer baiting is not simply the integration of implicitly queer attraction into heteronormative plotlines but further includes homophobic jokes, statements, or actions within the show’s diegesis.³¹ Not only that but show runners, actors, and producers have begun to hint at or overtly reference queer relationships within interviews and on panels at public forums like Comic-Con.

Although the etymology is difficult to trace, the term “queer baiting” seems to have first appeared within fandom in the midst of the 2010-2011 television season; a year in which queer representation would reach “a record high” according to GLADD’s forecasting report.³² Quickly taken up as marketing data by the Nelson Company, analysis of the programs commended by GLADD indicates that an average of 28% of viewing hours were LGBT inclusive across demographics that year. Still, there is a conspicuous elevation of viewing hours among Millennials.³³ GLADD’s assessment of “queer impressions” has been criticized by queer bloggers for its affirmation of negligible and often nebulous queer representations.³⁴ Founded in

³⁰ “Queer baiting,” *Fanlore*, https://fanlore.org/wiki/Queer_Baiting#cite_note-1 (accessed October 19, 2017).

³¹ “Shipping,” *Fanlore*, <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Shipping> (accessed October 19, 2017).

³² GLADD, “2011 Where are We on TV,” 2011, http://www.glaad.org/files/where_are_we_on_tv_2011.pdf.

³³ “The New Mainstream 28% of TV Watching Spend on LGBT-Inclusive Shows,” *The Nielsen Company: Newswire*, October 27, 2011, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2011/the-new-mainstream-28-of-tv-watching-spent-on-lgbt-inclusive-shows.html>.

³⁴ Ed Kennedy, “GLADD’s 2010 Network Responsibility Index: Delving Deeper Into The CW,” *Logo: NewNowNext*, July 26, 2010, <http://www.newnownext.com/glaads-2010-network-responsibility-index-delving-deeper-into-the-cw/07/2010/>.

1985, it might be asked whether GLADD suffers from its own nostalgia. While tacit acknowledgement of same-sex relationships in media culture once sufficed as progressive politics, is GLADD's agenda now at odds with Millennial desires for representation? Although further research is necessary, it seems likely that queer representations have been guided by the marketing data that develops out of GLADD's reports. This complicates the narrative of queer baiting which might be explained as the uptake of an affirmative position that is liberal only in the terms of a preceding generation.

Nikita never attracted the same ire from its fan base. Indeed, despite the promotion of its "catfights" and the frequent uptake of same-sex rivalries within (femme)slash fiction the show inspired very little queer fan fiction online.³⁵ To some degree this might be explained by the "female authorship" of most fan fiction (most slash is written by "straight-identified women").³⁶ *Nikita* appears to have been marketed to a male viewership the CW has historically lacked. Already an established action star by the time that she was cast, Maggie Q would have been known by the fans of the Jackie Chan and Bruce Willis films in which she had already appeared. Hyper-focused on the bright red monokini worn by Q in the opening scenes of the pilot, the

³⁵ While it would be incoherent to compare the volume of fan fiction between the two shows, 121,000 stories are devoted to *Supernatural* on *fanfiction.net* while *Nikita* boasts only 1,100, the ratio of stories devoted to queer romantic pairings is telling. Searching only for the two most likely pairs on *Supernatural*, the tacit attractions between the characters Sam and Gabriel and also Dean and Castiel, slash fiction accounts for 2.3% of *fanfiction.net*'s stories. Applying the same filters to *Nikita*, pairings between Nikita and Alex and also Alex and Jaden, account for only 00.18% of the fan fiction devoted to the show. There are no romantic pairings between any of the male leads on *Nikita*.

³⁶ Louisa Ellen Stein, "This Dratted Thing Fannish Storytelling Through New Media," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, (London, England: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 245-260: 259.

show's teaser release panel at the 2010 San Diego Comic-Con functioned like the "honey trap" that is a frequent plot device of the show.³⁷ Where female ships might have been developed around moments of same-sex aggression, these "catfights" tend to lack physical contact or culminate in male interventions. Rather than implicit fantasies of female lovers, these are the threesome fantasies of heterosexual males.³⁸ Not only this but the diegesis is overtly homophobic in its alliance of the show's only homosexual character with a nationalist revenge fantasy against muslim "terrorists" bent on destroying the white christian American heteronormative family.³⁹

While *Nikita* might appear illiberal in relation to the network's queerness, it would be facile to uncouple it from the tenets of liberal politics. Indeed, female critics and fans have gone so far as to call the show feminist. Within these terms, it could be argued that the show's heteronormative conclusion acts as a counter to conservative indictments of feminism's desire to "dismantle the family."⁴⁰ More often than not though *Nikita* was criticized for its hyper-sexed

³⁷ Jevon Phillips, "COMIC-CON 2010: 'Nikita' debuts and Maggie Q says 'Dudes are gonna love it!,'" *The Los Angeles Times: Hero Complex: Pop Culture Unmasked*, July 25, 2010, <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/tv/comiccon-2010-nikita-debut-and-maggie-q-says-dudes-are-gonna-love-it/>.

³⁸ Sam Schechner, "TV Upfronts 2010: CW Courts Male Viewers with 'Nikita,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2010, <https://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2010/05/20/tv-upfronts-2010-cw-hopes-to-attract-male-viewers-with-nikita/>.

³⁹ Jim Barnes, "Covenant," *Nikita*, Season 1, Episode 17, directed by Eagle Egilsson (2011: CW), television.

⁴⁰ Nikita Coulombe, "Why Feminism Wants to Dismantle the Family (long)," *Medium*, January 15, 2017, <https://medium.com/@NikitaCoulombe/why-feminism-wants-to-dismantle-the-family-long-4695d45bcf88>.

lead and recourse to rape as an origin story.⁴¹ While this criticism is acknowledged by contributing author Caroline Preece on the entertainment blog *Den of Geek*, she laments the loss of a show that she calls “darlingly feminist.” Comments posted by the blog’s core audience of 18-49 year olds largely agree.⁴² The feminist impressions of Preece’s argument recall the vague criteria employed by GLADD; sexual slavery and rape affect women therefore it is feminist to merely mention them. While it might be tempting to dismiss Millennial bloggers as less accredited than GLADD’s analysts, the international audience of *Den of Geek* and recent research suggesting that female blogs function as a form of “feminist activism” should be taken seriously.⁴³ How to delineate feminism (or indeed gender) among Millennials is less clear than the generations avowed support for same-sex marriage but even without a clear counter position the feminism of the CW’s programming still functions within the terms of structural nostalgia.

The mobilization of nostalgia by the CW network has already been extensively argued by Kayti Adaire Lausch in her 2013 master’s thesis *The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand*. For Lausch, it is nostalgia for the postfeminist “girl power” of the 1990s that defines the CW brand. Citing the feminist media theorist Angela McRobbie, Lausch notes that “postfeminism works to make feminism generational, making it more difficult for young women

⁴¹ There are comparatively few of these critiques circulating online when compared to the backlash over *Supernatural*’s queer baiting. While concerns over queer baiting began within the fan community that constitutes *Supernatural*’s viewers, it is unlikely that critics who consider the show anti-feminist would be constitutive of *Nikita*’s audience.

⁴² Caroline Preece, “Why *Nikita* will be missed,” *Den of Geek*, January 15, 2014, <http://www.denofgeek.com/tv/nikita/28866/why-nikita-will-be-missed>.

⁴³ Jessalynn Keller, “Making Activism Accessible: Exploring Girls’ Blogs as Sites of Contemporary Feminist Activism,” in *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*, ed. Claudia Mitchell and Carrie Rentschler (New York, New York: Berghahn Books 2016): 261-278.

to identify with a movement that American culture constructs as passé.”⁴⁴ Written within the context of the United Kingdom, McRobbie’s 2007 *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* notes a hostility to feminism within Tony Blair’s 1996 New Labour agenda. A progressive centrism that was not wholly distinct from Clinton’s New Democrats.⁴⁵ Taking “the gains of feminism for granted and asserting that feminism is no longer necessary,” postfeminism establishes hyper-sexualized and heteronormative femininity as not only a choice but an empowerment.⁴⁶ Lausch’s discussion of *Nikita* is limited, yet she notes that “*Nikita* is certainly a woman of the postfeminist media culture of the 2010s.”⁴⁷ Within the CWs liberal nostalgia, *Nikita* is right on brand.

As the 2016 U.S. presidential election drew to a close, the conservative backlash against Obama-era liberalism became a constant refrain in the press. A common theme in the analysis of apparent reversions in social liberalism, theories of reactionary backlash can be found in many of the studies to which I have referred. Indeed, postfeminism has often been theorized as a backlash against feminism.⁴⁸ Angela McRobbie contests this theorization and instead emphasizes the neoliberalism of postfeminism’s tenets. While I have not dealt with backlash directly, my attempt to recuperate *Nikita* within the liberalism of the CW has been in dissent to the stark binary

⁴⁴ Lausch, “The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand,” 18.

⁴⁵ Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, (Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications Ltd., 2009).

⁴⁶ Lausch, “The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand,” 18.

⁴⁷ Lausch, “The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand,” 66.

⁴⁸ For a rigorous historicization of postfeminism see, Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez, “The Myth of Postfeminism,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (Dec., 2003), 878-902.

between conservatism and liberalism. My reasons have been several fold and suggest areas of expansion to my preliminary analysis. Although I have had to limit my discussion of race, the racial de-diversification of the CW's programming seems to have been a concession to a separatist liberalism that mirrors that of Democratic policy. Political agendas can support a queer, or female, or black constituency but are rarely intersectional in their handling of diversity. So too has the progressiveness of liberal politics been unevenly defined throughout U.S. history. Already upon Obama's election, Millennial voters had come to represent the great progressive hope of the Democratic party.⁴⁹ By the election of 2016 they were being blamed for deep generational divisions within the party. What I am trying to suggest in my analysis of the CW is that these divisions were already there, not only that but they are reified within American media culture.

⁴⁹ Cathy J. Cohen, "Millennials & the Myth of the Post-Racial Society: Black Youth, Intra-generational Divisions & the Continuing Racial Divide in American Politics," *Daedalus*, Vol. 140, No. 2, Race, Inequality & Culture, volume 2 (Spring 2011), 197-205: 198.

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