The world was a large place, of course, and many things were bound to happen in it. But affairs of importance to [Grand Junction] could be counted upon to occur in [Grand Junction]. To the east loomed an enormous range of mountains cutting off the world, bursting with undiscovered riches. To the west extended great stretches of barren, parched land, almost uninhabited, but needing only water to become as fertile as the Mississippi Valley. Of this vast country [Grand Junction] was the center. There was enough difficulty in administering it without looking to the outside world for trouble. [Grand Junction] was close to realities, and the affairs of other communities and nations could affect it but little.


I grew up in Grand Junction, Colorado—at the time, a small, insular town on the state's western border, where the Rocky Mountains meet the Colorado Plateau. Reflecting on the assignment we have been given for this panel, I found it difficult to discern how this biographical fact has had much impact on my work as an historian. It was, to be sure, in Colorado that I met my wife of nearly fifty years, learned to fish, developed a solid jump shot, and began to write—all essential ingredients in my life. But can I really draw any persuasive connections between my boyhood home and the history I have taught and written?

It might have been easy. The teacher to whom I was closest in college at Yale was Howard Lamar, a leading historian of the American West. No one had more influence on my decision to enter graduate school in history than he did. I did not take any formal coursework with Lamar,
but I was for four years his research assistant. Observing him work and gaining a rich impression of what his life was like convinced me that it was a life I wanted for myself. Not least, he provided me with the first thrill of publishing my writing between hard covers, by way of nearly a hundred entries (some of them on Colorado subjects) that I produced for the Reader’s Encyclopedia of the American West, which he was editing while I was an undergraduate. My senior essay, which he advised, was on the late-eighteenth century frontier, which I argued was conceived by most American political elites in decidedly un-Turnerian terms. I went to Stanford for my Ph.D., thinking I might well continue as a historian of the West, armed with a couple Colorado topics—William Jackson Palmer, the Cripple Creek strikes—I was interested in exploring. But upon my arrival in the fall of 1972, my designated advisor Don Fehrenbacher (after whom my wife and I named a very sweet stray dog we took in), told me that Western American history was a dead field not worth pursuing. He was dreadfully wrong, of course, but I took his word for it. So drawing on another strong interest I had developed, modern American cultural and intellectual history, I decidedly changed course.

Coloradans—if not clearly Colorado—did have a considerable impact on my career. Robin Winks, my very helpful freshman advisor at Yale who steered me toward a history major, was--his carefully cultivated British affectations to the contrary notwithstanding--a son of Hotchkiss, a small western Colorado community seventy miles southeast of Grand Junction, where I once scored a personal best thirty-six points in a basketball game. The interest I had in American intellectual history owed a great deal to a course on the subject that I took from David Brion Davis, who was born in Denver in 1927, where his father, writer Clyde Brion Davis, worked as a journalist and in the late thirties authored the fine book on the Arkansas River in the
splendid *Rivers of America* series. Another exceptional American historian with a Denver childhood, Daniel Walker Howe, introduced me to cultural history in a terrific American Studies course. And in graduate school, I learned most about American intellectual history in a long-running study group that included Jim Kloppenberg, a Denver boy ten months my junior, and one of my contemporaries who has long continued to be an indispensable source of inspiration and fruitful debate.

But what Colorado might have had to do with my work as a cultural and intellectual historian eluded me (as perhaps it has Jim). Frankly, had I remained in Colorado as a college student in 1968, as did most of my high school friends, I doubt I would have had the career that I have had—that is, *getting out of* Colorado had a greater impact on my work than my childhood there. Nonetheless, I will try at least to venture some speculations about the Grand Junction beginnings of aspects of the perspective and, for lack of a better word, the sensibility one can find at work in my work, distant though it is, on the face of it, from the history of western Colorado at mid-twentieth century.

I would like to begin my speculations by way of a detour to the early career of a surrogate, the most famous one-time resident of my home town: Dalton Trumbo. Trumbo is best-known as a Hollywood screenwriter, one of the Hollywood Ten blacklisted in the early fifties during the height of anti-Communist repression in this country. He has, of course, since been redeemed, and is the subject of an excellent documentary film and a fine recent feature film, in which he is well-portrayed by Brian Cranston of *Breaking Bad* fame.
My years as a full-time Coloradan mirrored closely those of Trumbo. I was born in Austin, Minnesota in 1950, and moved with my family to Grand Junction in 1952, where my father had found employment with the Atomic Energy Commission in the midst of the uranium boom that profoundly shaped western Colorado and eastern Utah in the late forties and fifties.\(^1\) Trumbo was born in 1905 in Montrose, sixty miles east of Grand Junction, but his family moved when he too was two to the metropole of the Western Slope, where his father went in search of work. His family lived on Gunnison Avenue, close by my wife's family home on Chipeta Avenue, just down the street from Lincoln Park, where she and I shared our first kiss, and not far from Lincoln Park Elementary, where I began my formal education. Trumbo and I both spent our childhood years in the town,

leaving pretty much for good at eighteen. We both graduated from Grand Junction High School, and we each were editors of the school's fine student newspaper, *The Orange and Black*. The grandson of the owner of the shoe store in which Trumbo's father worked was a member of my graduating class.²

Although Trumbo lived in Grand Junction in the teens and early twenties and I in the fifties and sixties, the town I grew up in was more similar to his or to that of the thirties portrayed in the New Deal Writers Project guide to Colorado (1941) than to that which has developed in the last half century.³ The population of Grand Junction roughly doubled to 20,000 from Trumbo's day to mine (1920-1970), and it was then as now the largest urban area between Denver and Salt Lake. But it has since tripled, and now stands at about 60,000, with the most dramatic growth taking place since 1990. Parts of the small town I grew up in remain recognizable, but they have been overlaid by a vast, sprawling canopy of "Anywhere USA"—new housing developments (including not a few clusters of faux-adobe McMansions), strip malls, national

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chains of retail stores, restaurants, and other service providers, healthcare and financial corporations to serve the needs of the city's burgeoning retired population, a downtown filled with boutiques for the hipoisie, and roads sometimes choking with automobile traffic—that I find appalling. Peach orchards in Palisade are now wineries; the Indian Wash where I hunted for crawdads is long gone.\(^4\)

Grand Junction and Mesa County were politically conservative during my childhood as in Trumbo's, but far from the bastion of the Republican right-wing that they are today.\(^5\) Mesa County usually voted Republican in presidential elections in the fifties and sixties, although throughout my years in Colorado's then Fourth District it was represented in Congress by conservative Demo-

\(^4\) Grand Junction is laid out on a grid with roads a mile apart in a south to north direction from the Gunnison River indicated by letters, and roads a mile apart west to east indicated by numbers corresponding with the distance from the Utah border. The center of town (12\(^{th}\) St. and North) was by this reckoning at 27 Rd and E Rd. When I lived there, G Road, on which friends of mine resided, pretty much defined the northern border, which now stretches to L Road. The area west of First Street (26 Rd) and south of the Colorado River (the Redlands) was relatively unpopulated, but has now filled in adjacent to the Colorado National Monument all the way to Fruita (18 Rd). The city's main shopping area surrounding the Mesa Mall (unbuilt in my time) is now at 24 ½-24 Rd and F (Patterson) Rd. Fruita Monument High School, which did not exist in my day, now enrolls about 1300 students. Central High School, which was anything but central (31 ½ Rd and E ½ Rd) in the sixties, enrolls 1500 students. Grand Junction High School, with 1650 students, is not much larger than it was when I left it, at which time Fruita High School was tiny and Central High School was, I would guess, no more than half its current size.

\(^5\) Vanguard elements of the "new right" were evident in the late sixties. They launched an unsuccessful effort to have my father removed from the District 51 School Board. Grand Junction was the site of one of the more publicized of Donald Trump's campaign rallies in the presidential election of 2016. See Peter Hessler, "Making Peace with Trump's Revolutionaries," New Yorker (20 October 2016). In 2008, Sarah Palin held an election rally there for thousands in a packed Supplezio Field football stadium in Lincoln Park. See Karen Crummy and Nancy Lofholm, "Thousand Line up for Palin in Grand Junction," Denver Post (20 October 2008). Trump won 64% of the vote in Mesa County.
crat Wayne Aspinall from nearby Palisade, who by virtue of his chairmanship of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee was one of the most powerful Congressmen of the era. All this is to say that the "Colorado" that shaped my life was that of a particular and distinctive part of the state—Grand Junction and the Western Slope (I spent very little time east of the Continental Divide)—at a particular and distinctive time in its history, the post-World War II era of "grand expectations" for the American middle class.

6 After voting Republican in the twenties, Mesa County went for FDR and Truman from 1932 to 1948. In 1964, the county went for Lyndon Johnson rather than Barry Goldwater. On Aspinall, see Steven C. Schulte, Wayne Aspinall and the Shaping of the American West (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002). During the spring of 2004, I made my most extended visit home since 1968, serving for a quarter as the visiting Wayne Aspinall Chair at Mesa State College. During a meeting of the small board of the Aspinall Foundation that I attended at the time, someone quipped that he believed that every Democrat in Mesa County was gathered in the room.


*Eclipse* is set in Grand Junction in the 1920s and early 1930s. Its central character, John Abbott, is modeled on William Moyer, a pivotal figure in the town's early history. Moyer came to Grand Junction in 1890 and opened a store, the Fair Store. He prospered, and in 1905 he opened a much larger Fair Store at the corner of Fifth and Main Street, stocking it with quality merchandise and diversifying its goods to the point that it became the finest department store in Western Colorado. He built a fine home in what is now the North 7th Street Historic District.

He also founded the town's largest bank, the Grand Valley National Bank (later the First National Bank), and its first theater, the Avalon (the Cooper in my day, but now again the Avalon).
Moyer invested much of his wealth in the well-being of the community. He donated the land for the first Goodwill Industries Building and was instrumental in the building of the YMCA. He financed the college education of many local boys, including Dalton Trumbo. Most notably he funded the building in 1922 of the city's large outdoor swimming pool, the Moyer Natatorium, where I learned to swim. He was moved to do so by the death of a young man who ventured to swim in the dangerous waters of the Colorado River.⁸

⁸ Known in my childhood as the "Old Pool" to distinguish it from an adjacent "New Pool" built later. The statue erected to Moyer in downtown Grand Junction shows him holding a young girl with a swimming inner tube in front of him, while he is grasped from behind by the boy who drowned in the river, water lapping at the feet of the trio.
Moyer's life collapsed in the Great Depression. The extensive credit he had extended after the Crash at his store and the bank to local residents could not be repaid. The assets of the store
were liquidated by the bank, which then succumbed itself in 1933. Some of those who had benefitted from Moyer's generosity turned their backs on him when he needed their help. He died a pauper in 1943.

*Eclipse* caused a stir in Grand Junction when it was published and for years thereafter. Much of the novel is satire, parroting the earlier novels of Sinclair Lewis that skewered the small towns of the Midwest.\(^9\) It features not only a thinly-disguised portrait of Moyer but also far less flattering renditions of other local notables. The town's moralistic women come in for a particular bruising, their pettiness and hypocrisy contrasted unfavorably with the virtues of the owner of the town's most prosperous brothel. Purity crusader Violet Budd (the town's third fattest lady), for example, is described as a woman whose "love of virtue was matched only by her hatred of sin—a term she considered synonymous with pleasure. . . . She was always flapping her enormous breasts in some new cause.\(^10\)

But Trumbo loved Grand Junction and his childhood there. The satire of his novel is mild, the view of the town ambivalent, and the treatment of Abbott/Moyer largely admiring.\(^11\) And eventually, the town forgave Trumbo, erecting a statue in his honor at the entrance to the downtown shopping area at 7th and Main. He sits writing in his bathtub, as he was wont to do in his screenwriting days.\(^12\)

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\(^9\) Trumbo makes this explicit. One of the more unattractive characters views herself as the town's version of Lewis's Carol Kennicott in *Main Street* (1920).


\(^11\) Trumbo would later use "John Abbott" as one of his pseudonyms on screenplays he wrote when he was blacklisted.

\(^12\) The current available edition of *Eclipse* is published by the Mesa County Library Foundation, to whom Trumbo's children donated the copyright. Sales of the book benefit the Library.
The tone of *Eclipse* is as much elegiac as it is satiric. And it is an elegy not only for John Abbott and William Moyer but for the class they represented, the civic-minded petty proprietor. Abbott articulates this class analysis near the end of the novel:

He belonged to a class, and his class was vanishing. Its business men had resorted to bankruptcy. Its professional men had devoured their assets. Its salaried men were without salary. Its landowners had been disposed. A few of its members would survive; but for all practical purposes, it had disappeared (228).
Eclipse is a portrait of the American petite-bourgeoisie in crisis and defeat. Shale City is a town comprised mostly of more or less successful petty proprietors, the capital of half a state comprised mostly of petty proprietors. In John Abbott, Trumbo, nicely encapsulated the culture of this class, its effort, as historian Catherine Stock has put it, to balance "fundamentally contradictory, but equally heartfelt, impulses: loyalty to individuality and community, to profit and cooperation, to progress and tradition." He captured not only the trauma inflicted upon this class by outside forces in the Great Depression but its self-inflicted wounds, above all its susceptibility to an often ambivalent desire to be haute-bourgeois, its attraction to the siren call of a capitalist modernity that would destroy the balances of petty-bourgeois culture and doom community, cooperation, and tradition to individuality, profit, and so-called progress.\footnote{Catherine McNicol Stock, Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 10. Stock's account of the building of the skyscraper North Dakota state capitol building (185-205) brilliantly captures the ambivalent petty-bourgeois engagement with capitalist modernity. Trumbo nicely conveys the perennial hope of Grand Junction boosters (still going strong in some quarters) to make it really big via a hugely profitable investment in the extraction of petroleum from the vast deposits of oil shale in the region.}

This, finally, brings me to the point of this detour into the 1930s. As I said, Grand Junction was much the same place in 1955 and even 1965 as it was in 1935. I recognize its characters in my parents and in their friends and acquaintances.\footnote{A good example of a Grand Junction citizen in my day much like Trumbo's John Abbott was my parents' good friend Dale Hollingsworth (1922-2006). Hollingsworth moved to Grand Junction with his wife and family (six children) in 1957 and lived initially nearby us in Mesa Gardens, a housing development on the eastern edge of town designed for the upwardly mobile. He was manager of the Chamber of Commerce from 1957 to 1969 and then again from 1972 until 1984 (serving in-between as vice president of one of the two major banks in town). Like Abbott, Hollingsworth combined business acumen with extensive civic service. Among his many contributions to the public life of the town, he played a major role in the reconstruction of the downtown shopping area ("Operation Foresight") that earned the city designation as an "All American City" in 1963. He was instrumental in bringing the National Junior College Baseball championship tournament to town and keeping it there. (One of the annual highlights of my boyhood.) And he was on the organizing committee for the creation of the Museum of Western Colorado, and the co-founder of Crime Stoppers of Mesa County. Like Abbott and Trumbo, he is memorialized with a sculpture on Main Street, alongside two other leaders of Operation Foresight, city manager Joe Lacy and hardware store busi-}
with a relatively flat class structure, hierarchies--such as they were--were largely intra-class. I had to leave Grand Junction in order to confront sharp class divisions in American society.\textsuperscript{15}
Few Grand Junction residents in Trumbo's time or mine were alert to the petty-bourgeois radical tradition in American history. And by the mid-1930s, Trumbo, a onetime Communist, was a man of the conventional left. I am not. My inquiries into American social and political thought have led me to a greater appreciation than Trumbo and others who have followed the lead of Karl Marx have had of the riches of the petty-bourgeois radical tradition. I know well to whom to attribute this affinity of mine: among others, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Henry George, John Dewey, Christopher Lasch, and John Rawls. But perhaps, just perhaps, my lingering affection for post-World War II Grand Junction has something to do with my attraction to the ideals of what Rawls termed "property-owning democracy," and my hope that they are not quite dead.

Egalitarian property-owning democracy of the sort I favor is decidedly decentralist. It idealizes a front porch or front stoop republic. Hence it is marked by a deep suspicion of, and often sharp hostility to centralized power, whether it is corporate, state, or state capitalist. Like any sentient person alive for the last sixty years, I come by my suspicions of the American state—and in particular its national security apparatus—honestly, and I have voiced my hostility at which my high school excelled and which depended on Mexican-Americans to dominate the lower weight classes—for which they were lionized (or, to be more exact, "tigerized"). Religious differences were muted as well. Most of the town was mainline Protestant in those days. We did have a prominent Assembly of God Pentecostal church that I attended a few times with my best friend in elementary school—my only experience of "speaking in tongues." The town had two Catholic parishes, and parochial education was available through junior high, but I would be hard pressed to say which of my friends and acquaintances were Catholic—it did not matter much by high school. Mormons were a significant part of the community—about a quarter of the population by some estimates. My wife was Mormon (since excommunicated). Their beautiful stake house had the best gymnasium in town, perhaps accounting in part for the development of the finest high-school basketball player of my day, Steve Kelly, a BYU graduate drafted by the Detroit Pistons—now a Grand Junction oral surgeon.

Although the town did elect a Socialist mayor, Thomas Todd, in 1909. As Nick Salvatore demonstrates in his great biography of Eugene Debs, Debsian socialism of this period grew out petty-producer traditions.

For many examples of the contentious lot with which I identify (contentiously) check out The Front Porch Republic web site: http://www.frontporchrepublic.com/. My own thinking along these lines is most evident in "Creative Democracy--The Task Before Us," Amerikastudien (forthcoming).
in my writing, especially over the last twenty years.\textsuperscript{18} Grand Junction played a significant part in their development.

In 1970 I was in my apartment in New Haven watching \textit{60 Minutes} on television when unexpectedly a familiar face appeared on the screen. It was Gary Holdeman, a young man who had graduated from Grand Junction High School the year before I did. He was reporting that he was dying of leukemia and that he believed his disease was attributable to radiation emitted by the uranium tailings that had been used in the foundation of his home in Grand Junction. He died of the disease in 1978 at the age of 29.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1970 news broke that in the 1950s and 1960s, an estimated 300,000 tons of uranium mill tailings from an AEC contractor, the Climax Uranium Company, were used in construction as a sand substitute or for backfill material at various sites throughout the Grand Junction and Mesa County area. These tailings—the refuse from the milling of uranium ore—retain 85\% of the ore's original radioactivity and emit radiation even if buried under concrete and wood. Uranium mill tailings were used on private residences, schools (including Grand Junction High School), churches, and commercial locations (streets and sidewalks). In Grand Junction, more than six thousand structures—including several schools—had tailings deposits in the building materials or in the landfill under them. Streets and sidewalks were also laid with them, and investigators found that many buildings in the town were emitting dangerously high levels of radiation. Remediation of this pollution is difficult and very expensive, and only a fraction of the identified


\textsuperscript{19} See "Coloradans Find Their Lives Are Built on Deadly Sand," \textit{Chicago Tribune} (4 April 1979), which includes an interview with Holdeman's mother. This article erroneously identifies Holdeman as a 1958 graduate of Central High School.
sites in Grand Junction were addressed. Studies of the health effects of the pollution produced contradictory and inconclusive results, and a substantial proportion of the local population was less concerned about the environmental impact of the tailings than about the adverse effect of the news on property values.²⁰

Western Colorado and Eastern Utah generally were the most important uranium mining and mill-
had established secret mining and milling operations, including a major mill in Grand Junction, in the last two years of the war, and these operations continued openly afterwards. One of the major mining operations, under the auspices of contractor Union Carbide, was in Uravan sixty miles south of Grand Junction. Two good friends in high school, children of doctors, moved to Grand Junction from Uravan in the mid-sixties, a relocation that was probably wise. Uravan was so polluted that eventually the town had to be wiped out entirely, though former residents still gather at the ghost site every summer for a picnic memorializing their time there.\footnote{The name Uravan derives from the two ores mined there, uranium and vanadium. On Uravan see Michael Amundson, \textit{Yellow Cake Towns: Uranium Mining Communities in the American West} (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004); and Peter Hessler, “The Uranium Widows,” \textit{New Yorker} (13 September 2010). The picnic referred to by many as the ”Union Carbide Picnic” (Union Carbide is now a subsidiary of Dow Chemical). The picnic is co-sponsored by the Rimrock Historical Society and the Cold War Patriots, former nuclear and uranium workers who regard their dangerous labors as honorable service to the national defense. ”Yellow Cake” is served for dessert. One of my friends, April Madison Walker, reports that her father, Dr. Gilbert Madison, still attends the picnics.}
Now this intersection of my home town and the Western Slope with the Cold War was keenly important to me, not only because, like Gary Holdeman, I had grown up in an irradiated community but because my father was, at the time the story broke, the acting manager of the AEC's office in Grand Junction, and the front man for the agency's efforts to calm the nerves of local resi
dents and cover its ass. I could not help recalling the coffee cans filled with tailings that Dad had brought home to Mom to spread on her marigolds—to marvelous effect. Even though I loved my father dearly and regarded him as the fall guy for more distant and powerful interests, oedipal tensions rose, and my loyalties to the American warfare state, already eroded in the face of the Vietnam War, crumbled further.  

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22 [Try to find letter I wrote to the Sentinel] My father was also an observer at the underground nuclear explosion in 1969 in Rulison, Colorado, not far from Grand Junction, aiming to free large reservoirs of natural gas. It succeed in liberating the gas but it was too polluted by radioactivity for domestic use. Dad retired early from the AEC in 1979. Grand Junction provided my wife Shamra’s second encounter with nuclear state capitalism. She moved to town at the age of twelve, having spent her early life in the northern Denver suburb of Westminster. This town was in the path of the most contaminated plutonium winds blowing southeast from the Rocky Flats facility, which manufactured the “triggers” for nuclear weapons. See Kristen Iversen, *Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats* (New York: Random House, 2012). Iversen resided in Arvada, just west of Westminster. In the summer of 1969, Shamra and I resided nearby with our baby boy in her grandmother’s house on Federal Boulevard in North Denver, shortly after one of the most disastrous accidents at Rocky Flats distributed a particularly strong dose of windblown plutonium across the area. This then was her third exposure to nuclear danger and my second. It should be said that as a young boy I would proudly tell people that “My Dad makes atomic bombs.”
The enormous national security state that enrolled my father was fashioned, extended, and reinforced by Presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama. Growing up in Colorado I began to learn firsthand and distinctively that this state threatened not only liberty but life—at home as well as abroad.

More generally, I believe, my Grand Junction childhood provided me with a tropism toward the small-scale and an aversion to what William James termed the curse of "bigness." As he witnessed from afar American troops torturing and slaughtering Filipino nationalists resisting imperial occupation, James wrote a friend that

>I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms. . . . The bigger the unit you deal with the hollower, the more brutal, the mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost, against all big successes and big results, and in favor of the eternal forces of truth, which always work on the individual and immediately unsuccessful way, underdogs always, til history comes after they are long dead and puts them on top.\(^\text{23}\)

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\(^{23}\) William James to Sarah Wyman Whitman, 7 June 1899, *The Correspondence of William James*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992-2004), 8:546. James visited Grand Junction in August 1895, fourteen years after the Utes who held the land were banished to Utah and the town was founded. He wrote to his wife from there, reporting that he had spent the day traveling westward from Salida to Grand Junction and "going through first class scenery all day." The following day he wrote from Glenwood Springs that "at the wo-begone town of grand-junction yesterday, I was in a 'saloon' that was really first rate for handsomeness, and in a store that was ditto. Round about them the plank sidewalks and the sun baked clay of the alluvion. First rate fruit raised there by irrigation." James, *Correspondence*, 8:69, 70.
I am much less sure than James of this last point. But I share the rest of James's convictions—
decentralizing, place-conscious, petty-bourgeois, egalitarian, radically democratic convictions.
They echo over the course of American history, and they echo in my work. I am most grateful
for the challenge this panel presented to me, for now I wonder, as I had not before, if my Grand
Junction childhood has had something important to do with my affinity for this turn of mind and
heart.

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