Gleanings: A Journal of First-Year Student Writing
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Cover Image: Sunrise at The Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi, Italy
Photograph taken by Britt Haas, January 2, 2020
All of the work included in this journal was written by students who were enrolled in Siena’s First Year Seminar during the 2021 – 2022 academic year. This required course prepares students for the intellectual rigors of college life and beyond by building critical thinking and communication skills as well as by fostering creativity and advocacy. Throughout this two-semester seminar, students are encouraged to reflect upon and discuss the vast amounts of reading and writing that they do both inside and outside the classroom. Siena College is committed to showcasing the intellectual and engaging work being accomplished on its campus, so Gleanings was created as a means of celebrating some of the finest and most provocative first-year student writing completed each year.

While slight editorial changes have been made to these works, they were purposely kept to a minimum. The FYS team deems it important to preserve the authentic voices, the authorial choices, and the integrity of the assignments when compiling this journal.
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In this Heritage Unit Essay, the author effectively uses both primary and secondary sources to support the claim that John Witherspoon had a fundamental influence in shaping the American government.

John Witherspoon: Fundamental but Forgotten
By Thea Maria Akhrass
Dr. Gibson - American Exceptionalism and Its Critics

In the American experiment with self-government, the founders were tasked with the responsibility of creating an internally consistent government that could withstand the test of time. Instrumental to this task were the Enlightenment philosophies centered around reason, liberty, and a social contract that permeated a modern way of thinking into our founding documents. At the root of the philosophical arguments was the question of human being’s state of nature, or what humanity would be like without government, which allowed political theorists to justify the extent of the government’s political authority. The profound influence of the philosophical works of such theorists on our founding fathers manifested in America’s founding documents. The success of the founders, however, is seldom credited to John Witherspoon, a highly influential teacher of so many of the founding fathers. As both a Presbyterian minister and an Enlightenment scholar, Witherspoon represents a balance between religion and reason, a balance critical to the success of our nation’s birth. Witherspoon’s understanding that human beings are naturally corrupt, but can be redeemed, promoted an entirely new style of government: one that reconciles the competing approaches of very limited government seen in Lockean school of thought, and of overconfidence in humans and their general will seen in Rousseauian thought. Recognizing our government’s fused influences from the more prominent philosophies of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau reveals a nuanced foundation of American political thought that should be celebrated and attributed to Witherspoon.

While Locke’s beliefs about popular sovereignty, inalienable rights, and consent from the governed undeniably influenced the founding of our government, those who claim America to be a completely Lockean nation are missing a key component. To Locke, the government existed to secure people’s natural rights of life, liberty, and property given by God and to do little else (“Excerpt from The Second Treatise on Government (1690)”). However, our founders had a more open, complex vision for the government as one that not only secures our property, but also one that trumpets public morality and cultivates virtue. For instance, attorney and writer Peter Wosnik emphasizes that “belief in the value of public spiritedness and virtue appears to have helped the young country defeat the British and establish (a) new government” (“First Principles’ Review”). He thoughtfully points out that George Washington’s virtues and prioritizing the public good were key elements of our success as a new nation, which supports the notion that our founders took a step further from Lockean thought. This can be empirically supported, as the term virtue was found about 6,000 times—more times than...
the word freedom- in a word search of the Revolutionary Era documents conducted by the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author, Thomas E. Ricks (“First Principles’ Review”). Witherspoon partially aligns with a communitarianism view, likely stemming from his Presbyterian background. For instance, editor and publisher Roger Kimball writes, “Witherspoon championed ‘the public,’ not because he was a radical democrat, but because he was a religious conservative concerned with practical public piety” (“The Forgotten Founder”). Witherspoon’s genuine concern for the public good and principles of moral excellence that he defines as virtue is echoed by the founding fathers, especially James Madison, and shows that our nation’s success is rooted deeply in elements that go beyond Lockean liberalism.

Just as the founders’ ideology should not be fully credited to Locke, their deliberations cannot be attributed to complete communitarianism, championed by philosophers like Rousseau. Rousseau had a profoundly optimistic view of human nature, believing that humans are noble when they are born and can achieve the common good by submitting to a sovereign general will (“Excerpt from The Social Contract (1762)”). Unlike Witherspoon, however, Rousseau relies too heavily on human goodness and fails to account for human faults, corruption, or disagreements that can obstruct this general will. Rousseau’s idealistic communitarianism can even open the door to a government’s downfall, as seen in the French Revolution inspired by Rousseau leading to Robespierre’s Reign of Terror. When referring to philosophers like Rousseau, historian Chris Gibson notes that “their passionate, persuasive arguments for collectivist, elitist, antiliberal schemes helped politics to be captured by cults of personality” (“Still Exceptional”). Here, Gibson describes how a Rousseauian government based on promoting the good of society rather than the freedoms of an individual can lead to disastrous outcomes like idolization of a national leader. Witherspoon acknowledges that such issues can arise from Rousseau’s overconfidence in collectivism and thus deduces that “it is folly to expect that a state should be upheld by integrity in all who have a share in managing it” (qtd. in Kimball). This notion to not depend on the integrity of man was directly manifested in the Constitution’s separation of powers so one authority cannot obtain too much power, or for instance, in Madison’s desire to control the effects of factions among men. Hence, Witherspoon proposed a balance by recognizing humans’ corrupt and redeemable nature, thus inspiring the founders to blend the opposing philosophies into a successful government.

Debates about societal models in all disciplines have historically rooted their strongest arguments in human nature. In the same way that one of the most momentous debates regarding education, the Huxley v. Arnold debate, created an ideal model for education based on our innate human desires, the founders’ views of humans’ state of nature are essentially what allowed them to develop the ideal model of government. The American government model derived from human nature can be perfectly summarized by Madison’s political mindset: “Man’s redeemable nature makes self-government possible, but lingering depravity makes checks
and balances a prudent indemnity” (qtd. in Kimball). Madison was heavily influenced by John Witherspoon, who was his instructor during his university years. Kimball goes so far as to claim that Madison “translated the views of Witherspoon and the nature of man into a political statement” (“The Forgotten Founder”). It is thus evident how Witherspoon’s view of human nature manifests itself in Madison’s views on checks and balances and into our government that balances Presbyterian optimism with Scottish Enlightenment rationalism, or in other words, a government that advocates public virtue while still requiring checks because of humanity’s faults. With the substantial role that Madison played as one of America’s founding fathers who helped shape the Constitution, the fourth president, and a writer of The Federalist Papers, he plants Witherspoon’s ideologies of human nature at the very foundation of America.

As the only clergyman who signed the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon provided a refreshing, invaluable perspective to the founding fathers’ philosophies. In fact, many more of his students at Princeton University, aside from Madison, went on to become pivotal leaders in our emerging country, including Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, nine cabinet officers, twenty-one senators, twenty-nine congressmen, and three justices of the Supreme Court, among others (“The Presidents of Princeton University”). Moreover, Witherspoon’s bold embrace of the revolutionary cause served as a significant influence on our founding because he viewed the Revolution as not only something ideal or favorable, but also imperative and urgent for the colonies. Witherspoon himself stated, “In my judgement [sic] the country is not only ripe for the measure, but in danger of becoming rotten for the want of it” (qtd. in Kimball). Witherspoon had full faith in the birth of the American republic, a patriotism which undoubtedly transfused to his students who would go on to lead our country after breaking free from English rule.

Our national character owes itself largely to the facility of Witherspoon to recognize both human vice and virtue, and for the founders to translate this into a successful government founded in balance. Neither the philosophies of Locke nor Rousseau are outwardly erroneous or invalid; rather, Witherspoon brings out the best of and reconciles both in a way that has made the American experiment of self-government thrive. American exceptionalism is bolstered by our ability to reach this balance and continually strive for something new.

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In this well-organized research paper, the author presents an original argument that offers a clear balance between They Say and I Say. She uses a variety of sources to support her claim that while it has not been given much credit, the Riot Grrrl Movement of the 1990s played an important role in the revitalization of the punk rock genre.

Riot Grrrls: Revitalizing Punk by Empowering Women

By Lauren Brochhagen

Dr. Haas - Music: The Soundtrack of Our Lives

The underground subculture of punk rock rejected what members of the scene viewed to be the excesses of rock. In this rejection, they focused their music on political, anti-establishment messages. By going against the norm, punk rock paved the way for the Riot Grrrl feminist movement that began in 1990 and protested the lack of female artists in music, especially within the punk genre itself. Girl bands that were a part of the Riot Grrrl movement were role models for other female artists and fans by making names for themselves within the male-dominated genre of punk. The movement demonstrated that women, too, can use music to challenge popular culture and shine a light on issues such as sexism, homophobia, capitalism, and consumerism. Although the Riot Grrrls are overlooked in the history of punk, their authenticity revitalized the genre, but more importantly, they left a legacy for many other girl groups around the world to speak out against the constrictions placed on women.

The punk genre was not consciously created by punk rockers. It started with individuals who, in the 1970s and 1980s, had issues with the excesses of rock music and culture. Rock culture was well known for its commercialism and self-indulgence in drugs, sex, and unnecessary material goods. To protest this, they wrote songs that focused on racial and economic injustices and rejected certain social norms such as conforming to corporate mass culture. In 1975, a magazine called Punk was introduced, which branded the word and developed what was associated with the small scene then. According to Debbie Harry in her memoir Face It, at the time the magazine Punk first came out, “there [was not] really a particular sound you could define as punk... because at first there were many different styles. But... the universal thread was that we were pointing out the inconsistencies in a hypocritical society and the foibles of human nature.”¹ The mainstream media influenced the public’s perception of punk and because it was not members of the subculture who developed the definition of punk for the public, the subculture was misinterpreted. One such misinterpretation of the subculture was due to the androgynous appearance of its members. The androgynous style adopted by many male members of the scene did not mean that the subculture was accepting of women or included feminist ideas within their lyrics. This is evident in some of the early fanzines, which were handmade fan magazines spread throughout the subculture as a method of communication free from mainstream influence. A 1976

edition of the punk zine *Sniffing Glue* declared that “Punks are not girls.”² The misinterpretation of the punk subculture by mainstream media was disheartening because it conveyed the idea that women would have more of an opportunity in the punk scene to create their own music and focus on gender equity, when in fact the subculture was incredibly sexist.

Punk rock focused on protesting the capitalist system and consumerism, and the Riot Grrrls continued to address these issues because of the significant role both play in the oppression of women. A study done by researcher Sharon Mazzarella found that “Riot Grrrls opposed consumer capitalism because of how it can commodify women. Commodification is the conversion of specific markers such as dress and music into mass-produced products... and within the capitalistic system, women are repeatedly sexualized, objectified, and held to unrealistic, unattainable standards that commodify their existence.”³ The commodification of women resulted from the rampant sexism at the time the movement originated. The Riot Grrrls challenged these issues by including anti-consumerist and anti-capitalist ideals in their protests because of how detrimental capitalist and consumerist cultures are to women. In openly challenging capitalism and consumerism, they empowered girls and women everywhere by showing that they do not have to meet the societal expectations set for them.

The Riot Grrrl feminist movement would not have been possible without the establishment of the punk subculture’s do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic and anti-conformist views despite the subculture being incredibly sexist at the time. The DIY ethic is the idea that artists with limited means can produce music and share it. This empowered artists within the subculture to create and spread music not influenced by outside sources. It required a strong network of members to communicate information about music, upcoming performances, and anti-establishment ideas to keep mainstream media or record labels from impacting what was shared, which differed from other genres. To do this, members of the punk subculture used fanzines for disseminating information because they could be handmade and passed from one member to another. The anti-conformist views of punksters also primed the scene for a later feminist movement because of how deeply entrenched sexism was within society. Riot Grrrls took these ideas and applied them to their own movement that prioritized protesting sexism and heteronormativity. They used the fanzines that had originally espoused sexism within the subculture to share their stories and where they would perform and meet to empower women. The Riot Grrrls also stayed away from mainstream media, as is seen with their 1993 media blackout. The Riot Grrrl Press Catalogue for September-November 1993 stated, “We need to make ourselves visible

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without using mainstream media as a tool... we need to take back control and find our voices again." The mainstream media repeated what they had initially done to punk by trivializing and misrepresenting what the Riot Grrrls were doing during the 1990s. In an article about Riot Grrrls in Spin magazine, a mainstream model conforming to societal beauty standards was posed as a Riot Grrrl, adorned with derogatory words on her body like the Riot Grrrls often did in order to make a statement. While the magazine article spread the word about them, using a model that conforms to everything the Riot Grrrls were protesting undermined the movement. If the Riot Grrrls had tried to start up the movement in a different genre, they would not have been as successful because of how reliant other genres were on mainstream media and record labels. In punk, the idea that artists should be able to produce what they want without outside influences gave them the means to spread their feminist messages without them being altered or undermined by record labels or mainstream media. One example of this is Bikini Kill’s song “Rebel Girl,” which had a lesbian narrator and emphasized female solidarity with its lyrics, “When she talks, I hear the revolution / In her kiss, I taste the revolution / Rebel Girl, Rebel Girl / Rebel Girl you are the queen of my world.” The song is considered an anthem for the movement, but it would not have been supported by mainstream media due to how the song was written to combat popular heterosexual and patriarchal themes within mainstream music. The original punk subculture with its DIY ethic and non-conformist views paved the way for the Riot Grrrl movement, leaving their legacy for girls to rebel against the constrictions placed on women.

The punk movement originated in the 1970s but began to die out during the 1980s. The Riot Grrrls and their movement revitalized punk by using the DIY ethic and manners of protest associated with punk to focus on disassembling the patriarchy and heteronormativity. Calvin Johnson, the owner of K Records, was amazed by how far the Riot Grrrls’ ideas were able to spread, stating that “there’s been a spontaneous explosion of interest that I compare to punk rock in the 1970s, when people in Toronto and Paris and Olympia and Tucson were all saying at the same time: ‘Oh, yes, this is what I was looking for.’” The Riot Grrrls’ revitalization of punk was important because punk continued providing people with an outlet to spread ideas without the necessity of a record label or mainstream media supporting them. The Riot Grrrl movement was also important for girls because studies like the one done by researcher Lyn Brown show that “girls suffer a plunge in self-esteem as they approach adulthood, with its still-rigid cultural expectations of femininity.” The movement was born to empower women, and it set an example for girls everywhere that they can live their

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6 “Riot Grrrl.”
8 Japenga, “Punk’s Girl Groups.”
lives without worrying about living up to the expectations that are placed on them. Girls were not accepted in the original punk subculture, yet Riot Grrrls fought for their voices and music to be heard and spread. The Riot Grrrl movement revitalized punk and demonstrated to girls that they need only live up to their own expectations and ambitions.

There were numerous ways the Riot Grrrls protested. In addition to the music that Riot Grrrl bands performed, their strong network of members produced and shared fanzines with feminist messages. These fanzines were produced by girls from diverse backgrounds to spread the perspectives of intersectional voices. By including the voices of girls from varying backgrounds, the Riot Grrrls were able to reach and relate their messages to a larger audience. Although the movement is thought to be tied only to punk music, researcher Lindsay Wright found that Riot Grrrls used a variety of outlets including “radio talk-shows, public access television programs, spoken word performances, art, and film to communicate their ideals.” By using methods besides fanzines, the Riot Grrrls were able to spread their ideas even further. There have also been global festivals such as Ladyfest where feminist artists come together to share their stories and ideas about how to create a more open feminist culture. These festivals are still held around the world today. Riot Grrrls used many different methods to spread their ideology to a wider audience and establish a more open feminist culture. In their attempts to spread their messages of female empowerment, the Riot Grrrls revitalized punk and left a legacy for others to speak out against the constrictions placed on women.

Aspects of the punk subculture such as the DIY ethic and anti-conformity still live on today because of how the Riot Grrrls revitalized the genre. The punk subculture had been weakening until the Riot Grrrls used features of punk to empower women, revitalizing punk in the process. A study done in the *Journal of American Studies* found that many former zine producers live post-zine lives as cultural workers and activists on numerous different issues, as well as still live by the core principles of the DIY ethic. Former members of the punk subculture still utilize the ideology despite the time that has passed. By using the punk subculture to empower women, they preserved those ideologies and thereby revitalized punk. In addition to this, there are still established Riot Grrrl groups globally and girl bands today that all attribute their inspiration to the original Riot Grrrls. Ladyfest festivals continue to be held worldwide as meeting places for feminist artists and activists to share their experiences and ideas about creating a more open feminist society. By inspiring other girl bands and creating festivals for people to come together, the Riot Grrrls had a long-term effect on advocating women’s rights. Despite the lack of recognition Riot Grrrls get for their revitalization of the punk genre and their feminist efforts, they had a major impact that still exists today.

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The purpose of the punk subculture was to reject societal norms, and while the original punk movement in the 1970s rejected many of these, they ended up reinforcing the societal expectations of women. The Riot Grrrls rebelled against these societal expectations in the 1990s by utilizing the core aspects of punk to empower their feminist movement, revitalizing punk in the process. Their legacy lives on with many still living by the DIY ethic as well as the continuation of groups and festivals globally with people that still identify themselves as Riot Grrrls or as being inspired by them. Despite all the Riot Grrrls did to protest sexism and uphold the original values of punk, they are still overlooked for their contributions to create a more open feminist culture and empower women to speak out against sexism. By continuing to share the story of the Riot Grrrls and all they managed to accomplish, people will hopefully be further empowered to continue to incite change through music.

Bibliography


Why Drake in a Wheelchair Should Affect Me

By Daniel Camaj

Prof. Collins - Narrative: The Inside Story

In her TED Talk, “I Got 99 Problems... Palsy is Just One,” Maysoon Zayid makes the bold statement that “If a wheelchair user can’t play Beyoncé, then Beyoncé can’t play a wheelchair user” (11:28-11:34). This, at first, seems a bit silly; would Beyoncé ever be in a situation where she would have to portray a character in a wheelchair? One might even be led to think about whether this would truly happen. Although Zayid’s remark is a hypothetical, things like this happen all the time in the entertainment industry. Take Drake, for example: his character in *Degrassi* was paralyzed from the waist down and therefore used a wheelchair. Or Daniel Day-Lewis, who won an Oscar for his portrayal of an artist with cerebral palsy in *My Left Foot*. By handing disabled roles over to able-bodied actors, the casting directors effectively decrease the already limited number of roles that disabled actors can play. Able-bodied individuals, like myself, have the privilege to overlook situations like this. Ultimately, able-bodied people need to acknowledge how the lack of representation, both on-screen and behind it, upholds a system of inequity between people with disabilities and those without. Ignoring this important issue is counterproductive to the fight for disability justice.

While I was growing up, I had the privilege to see people like me on TV. No matter what I watched, I could be certain that I’d be represented by a character of my race, gender, ability or—most commonly—all three. Not only that, but I could also be confident that said representation would be written in a light that generally coincides with my experience. Nancy Mairs, however, discusses how the lack of proper representation for people with her disability frustrates her. In “Disability,” Mairs writes about how multiple sclerosis (MS) is often portrayed in ways that don’t represent her properly. She explains how one of the only instances where she saw her disability on-screen differed so far from her experience that she found it offensive to her community. In a medical drama TV series that had an illness-of-the-week premise, there was a woman who was diagnosed with MS. This diagnosis was a wake up call for her to finally start living her life while she was physically fit to do so. She decided to plan a solo trip to Kenya while she was still able-bodied. Everything seemed set in stone until she fell in love with the doctor who treated her. Instead of taking a leap toward adventure, she dropped it all for a man she had just recently met. Just moments before going to the plane, she instead “fled the taxi into his manly protective embrace” (Mairs 13-14). Mairs uses this example to explain how films and shows often generalize one’s disability as a major, if not only, personality trait of a character, ultimately excluding “the complexities that round out a character and make her whole” (14).
explains that although a disability takes up a significant portion of one's life, it “doesn’t devour one wholly” (Mairs 14). According to Mairs, the industry hasn’t represented her as an actual, well-rounded person. She, instead, is boiled down to a personification of her disability: a caricature consumed by it—a caricature like the woman who sacrificed the adventure of a lifetime for love. This woman was so close to following her dreams yet the writers decided to put her future in the palm of a doctor’s hands. This portrayal, along with many portrayals in the media, makes it seem like a disability completely ruins someone’s life—as if a trip to Kenya was a silly plan that could never come to fruition for someone with a disability. Representation like this ultimately promotes the idea that able-bodied people are better than disabled people.

Although Mairs’ critique of how people with disabilities are portrayed was written in 1987, it still holds true today. On the slim chance that a character with a disability is portrayed on-screen, the person is often just as flat as the one that Mairs discusses. They’re often only shown struggling with their disability as if it consumes their life. People with disabilities still deal with the same everyday issues as an able-bodied person. They have love interests, make mistakes, etc., but few portrayals show this side of those with disabilities. A myriad of instances reinforce these damaging views about the disabled community. In Million Dollar Baby, for example, the main character, Maggie, played by Hilary Swank, is a renowned boxer who becomes paralyzed. Following this realization, the character decides to end her life. This plot point attracted criticism from various disability advocacy groups. One group, the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, even goes so far as to say this movie “advances the offensive and dangerous message that death is preferable to life with a disability” (qtd. in Powell). Even when writers try to use characters such as Maggie as an opportunity to present individual experiences of someone who is disabled, these harmful messages end up worsening the stigma associated with the community, further upholding the system of inequity between the disabled and able-bodied. As a whole, the entertainment industry doesn’t take the time to understand how to authentically represent disabled characters, so writers either fall into these damaging tropes or avoid the characters entirely and able-bodied people are privileged enough to not even notice.

Proper on-screen representation has proven to be a significant part of the problem, but it is certainly not the only part. In her TED Talk, Zayid discusses how she was denied all roles she tried out for in her college theater program. She believed this would change when they did a play starring a woman with cerebral palsy, the disability that she also happened to have. Sadly, to her dismay, she was denied that role as well since she apparently wouldn’t have been able to do the stunts. Zayid remarks, “If I can’t do the stunts, then neither can the character!” (7:04-7:08). This isn’t something that was exclusive to her experience; many of the already limited roles of disabled characters are given to able-bodied actors. Robyn Powell, lawyer and disability rights advocate, writes about this inequality in the film industry in “What Hollywood Gets Wrong About Disabilities.” She states, “Although 56 million people in the U.S., nearly 20 percent of the population, have a disability, it’s
rare to see disabled characters in film and television. According to a recent report, just 2.7 percent of the 100 top-grossing movies of 2016 included characters with disabilities” (Powell). Representation in film is not the only problem in the industry; TV show representations seem to be even worse. In fact, “just 1.8 percent of television characters have disabilities, and a recent study by the Ruderman Family Foundation found that 95 percent of characters with disabilities are played by non-disabled actresses and actors” (Powell). This shows an alarming inequity when it comes to representing people with disabilities in Hollywood. Not only are they given limited representation on screen, but they’re given an even more limited number of roles to play. Acting is a difficult career path to break into, but what many don’t acknowledge is the fact that when one has a disability, it makes it nearly impossible. Just because something is difficult in general doesn’t mean it can’t be even more difficult for some individuals. Many tend to think of their struggles as the worst possible situation without having to look deeper into how their biggest hurdle in life can be drastically bigger for others. Understanding this is the first step in understanding the privileges that you have over others. When we ignore casting decisions like these, we sideline this dilemma as something not to worry about, but just because it doesn’t directly affect us doesn’t mean we shouldn’t speak out about the injustice taking place.

For the past couple of decades, there’s been a dramatic increase in both the production and consumption of TV and film; because of this, there’s also been an increase in the demand for representation of minority groups in these shows and movies. While other minority groups have seen a slow—yet apparent—increase in representation, representations of the disabled community remain stagnant. Scott Jordan Harris, author of “Able-Bodied Actors and Disability Drag: Why Disabled Roles Are Only for Disabled Performers,” argues that just as a man in drag shouldn’t play a woman or a white actor in blackface shouldn’t play a black character, then able-bodied actors shouldn’t play disabled characters. He admits that these may seem like outlandish analogies, but nevertheless argues that anyone who holds the disabled community to a lower standard than other minority groups is essentially admitting they think lowly of disabled individuals. Harris finds the lack of self-representation for his community offensive. He, like Zayid, believes that if the role of a disabled character can’t accommodate a disabled actor, then it should be changed. Instead, celebrities are praised for being able to portray these characters in a so-called realistic way. Daniel Day-Lewis’s portrayal of a disabled character won him the biggest status of legitimacy an actor can have: an Oscar. Wouldn’t it be ridiculous if he won an Oscar for the portrayal of someone such as Beyoncé or Drake? Although Harris’s argument may seem polarizing, it ultimately made me think more about privileges I have that I never even knew existed. Not only do I have the privilege to see myself on-screen, but I also can be certain that someone I relate to will be played by someone like me. Theoretically, there’s no reason I wouldn’t be able to play the lead role in a movie about my life. For people with disabilities, however, there could be a role literally made for them—they could fit every box the same way Zayid did—but they still won’t be cast. This shows a huge inequity
that needs to be addressed. The fact that many directors aren’t willing to use the extra effort to cast and accommodate people with disabilities for disabled roles is completely unacceptable. Representation means little without proper behind-the-scenes inclusion of the people who are being represented.

These examples bring to light a larger conversation about the mistreatment of people with disabilities. Mairs makes a fairly bold statement in “Disability” that has to do with what she calls “TAPS” or “temporarily abled persons.” She states that all able-bodied people are TAPS; they’re simply people who are able-bodied for now. She explains how her community “is the only minority you can join involuntarily, without warning, at any time” (15). The disabled community is the only minority group that any person could randomly become part of at some point in their life. Mairs, along with the rest of my research on the subject, truly made me think about how a moment can put a TAP, like myself, into the shoes of those with disabilities. Imagine losing your job, or losing relationships, or even losing a movie role made for you because of a disability that you developed involuntarily. We need to overcome our privilege and speak out for and with those in the disabled community, especially since we might someday be a part of that community. Speaking out about the lack of proper representation and inclusion of disabled people in the media is just the first step in creating a more inclusive nation. Having authentic representation for disabled people could alleviate the system of inequity that the industry is currently upholding. This could not only make disabled people feel more welcomed in both the industry and society as a whole, but it also creates more open minds in the able-bodied viewers of these films and shows. Even though it may seem like an insignificant problem in the eyes of able-bodied people, our help could go a long way in this fight for equality in the media. I don’t have to think about Drake playing a wheelchair user if I don’t want to. I have the privilege to ignore or overlook things like this. But in a theoretical movie of my life, if they sidelined a huge part of my identity just so Drake can play the role, then wouldn’t I have to?

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In this research paper, the writer argues that the narrative presented in Les Misérables validates the evolutionary state of human identity whereby individuals can exchange their past identities for an optimized version of themselves, a concept that readers and audiences can apply as they navigate life’s challenging moments. Well-developed topic sentences keep the reader’s attention continually on that argument.

Les Misérables: The Story that gives Life and Reason to Our Multifaceted Existence
By Jaime Cochran
Prof. Collins – Narrative: The Inside Story

Les Misérables, originally written by Victor Hugo in 1862, is the story of Jean Valjean, a man who lives as a prisoner, town leader, father, soldier, and God-fearer, trying to make sense of the flawed society he is a part of amidst a heated rebellion. Over a century later, Alain Boublil, Claude-Michel Schönberg, and Herbert Kretzmer adapted this novel into an opera, which still more recently found artistic expression through the movie released in 2012. These versions of the story used theatrical elements to open a window into a particular life strategy, one that involves manipulating one’s identity to match the needs of the environment one finds themself in. The authors of the opera used carefully crafted lyrics and musical scores to express Hugo’s message about the complex fluidity of human nature. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on additional characters creates foils to every distinct identity that Valjean assumes. By presenting an imperfect protagonist whose identity evolves with the world around him, Les Misérables validates our own tendency to assume different identities as we encounter challenging situations that require us to give more of ourselves than what we think we have.

By assigning his model protagonist’s first identity as a hardened criminal, Hugo suggests in Les Misérables that true heroes are not born, but created from a desire to make the world a better place. Valjean steals bread to avoid starvation but is caught and thrown in prison. After he tries to escape, his sentence is increased to nineteen years, and when he is finally granted parole, he is a coldhearted individual who has no choice but to accept the criminal identity he has been given. The discrimination Valjean faces after leaving prison only reinforces his belief that his life is meaningless and undesirable. Mary O’Neil, a philologist at Whitman College, adds, in her analysis of Valjean as a role model for humanity, that it is extremely difficult for him to escape this identity. However, it is made much harder by Javert, the law enforcement officer who sees him only as a sinner who must be punished. Javert, she says, “has no notion of a transcendent ideal informing human justice,” and this mentality is emphasized the first time he speaks when he summons Valjean using his inmate number, 24601, and not his real name (O’Neil 337). Although neither the viewer nor Valjean understands it at that moment, there is more in store for Valjean in terms of opportunities to improve. In the same way, our own humblest beginnings can often help create the most meaningful endings, even when the
situation at first seems so bleak and hopeless. With Valjean’s troubled start, *Les Misérables* gives the audience a chance to see the events that transpire before someone becomes who they truly desire to be.

The somewhat questionable means by which Valjean ascends to the position of a town leader show how achieving success can involve breaking societal rules. After being denied housing and employment by everyone in town, a local bishop offers Valjean food and a place to stay. Because Valjean still has a criminal mindset at this point, he steals silver from the bishop, only to have the bishop save him from being taken to prison again. Valjean is thrown off by how someone could possibly show him this much kindness, and in the soliloquy that follows, Valjean reflects on the sin he has committed and how he can become a better person: “I feel my shame inside me like a knife...What spirit [now] comes to move my life? Is there another way to go?” (“Les Misérables” 12). He questions whether his current identity is salvageable, or whether he should become a completely different person. Christopher Franklin is a professor of philosophy at Grove City College who explores the concept of self-determination with reference to *Les Misérables* and concludes that “it was [Valjean’s] contact with goodness...that drew him to the way of love” (2596). Hence, this act of mercy was what Valjean needed to convince him to make significant life changes. The symbolic tearing up of his parole papers afterward is a foreshadowing of the complete transformation of his identity; in the next scene, the audience sees that Valjean has taken up a new name, Monsieur Madelaine. He is now a mayor and factory owner and has abandoned both 24601 and Valjean as identities. In this new role of town leader, Valjean begins building a better version of himself by leading with humility and compassion. The foil to this identity is the factory foreman, who misuses his power over his workers, who refuses to hear both sides of arguments, and who sexualizes and abuses women. In contrast, when Valjean (Monsieur Madelaine) encounters disputes at the factory, he responds with grace and patience. The audience can learn from this identity transformation because *Les Misérables* is showing a possible strategy for self-improvement—abandoning a past identity in exchange for a better one. The story justifies this happening in the audience’s lives as well and reassures us that we should not feel guilty for leaving behind a past version of ourselves if we have authentic intentions for improving in the future.

By spontaneously volunteering to assume the role of father to a young orphan, Valjean adopts a new identity and brings new meaning to his life in allowing someone else to fully depend on him. Cosette is a fatherless child whose recently deceased mother, Fantine, worked in Valjean’s factory. At the end of her mother’s life, Valjean promises to care for Cosette as if she were his own. He sings to Fantine, “Your child will live within my care...and I will raise her to the light...I swear to you, I will be there” (“Les Misérables” 41). His impact on others is clear here; Valjean is able to provide young Cosette with a positive role model and protector. By being responsible for someone else, Valjean is able to learn what it means to have a family and a loving relationship. The antithesis to this version of Valjean is the local landlord, Thenardier, who does not care
for his own daughter and who openly regrets becoming a father at all. This helps to highlight Valjean’s traits as a good father because while Thenardier sees fatherhood as a failed opportunity for personal financial gain, Valjean maintains an altruistic outlook regarding the responsibility. Additionally, although Javert continues to chase the criminal version of Valjean during this time, Valjean, though vigilant, remains a selfless and caring father to Cosette. It was his love for Cosette that helped Valjean find redemption because it is Valjean’s good-natured efforts that take away his criminal label, no matter how persistently his parole officer tries to reassign this identity (Higdon). The validation for human nature that exists in Valjean’s identity as a father is the idea that having someone to love and care for is how we can overcome societal labels that can otherwise tarnish our good nature by fostering unwanted identities. In other words, by taking up a role that makes us significantly influential in someone else’s life, we can shift our focus from just fighting our past identity to making our current selves better.

When Valjean joins the rebellion as a soldier with the rebel forces, he demonstrates his willingness to risk his life for the better world he is trying to create. He quickly proves himself trustworthy and useful in the rebel efforts and even rescues his daughter’s fiancé from the ruins of a barricade. It is only in the second half of the story that the rebellion becomes the focus for the characters, and the audience is able to see how Valjean reacts to something happening that is so much bigger than he. We expect him to be selfless and want the best for the cause, but we also consider his duties as a father and whether or not he is ready to potentially compromise the safety of his daughter if he dies. In analyzing the role of music in describing Valjean’s identities, Joseph McLellan, official music critic for the Washington Post, details how Valjean’s decision to join the rebellion reflects the fluid nature of his identity because he has “the flexibility to change when his established view of reality is unexpectedly shattered” (“A Score for the Ages”). Valjean understands that he must make a sacrifice for this cause, even if it means temporarily relinquishing his other identities. The foil here is made quite obvious in Javert, who pretends to be a rebel, but who is actually a spy for the French government. He is eventually caught, and Valjean is ordered to kill him for his crime. However, emulating the mercy that was once shown to him by the bishop, Valjean allows Javert to escape, leaving Javert feeling both astounded and incredibly guilty. Javert exclaims, “I am the law and the law is not mocked!...I should have perished by his hand!...The world I have known is lost in shadow” (“Les Misérables” 112). There is a foreshadowing here regarding the consequences for the rigidity of Javert’s identity, which are further highlighted by Javert’s persistence in still chasing down Valjean, despite this life-saving act of kindness. This important rebellion being brought to the forefront of the audience’s attention allows the story to examine how Valjean responds to the call to arms. Representing the complexity of human nature, Valjean’s dilemma in how to respond, for us, is whatever bigger cause we are being summoned to join as a result of something threatening what we have already established. Through Valjean’s actions as well as the response from his foil,
the story demonstrates that while it may seem reckless to risk so much for a cause, the instinct for us to want to defend our beliefs at all costs stems from a desire to maintain the life we have worked for or one day hope to achieve.

In the many references to a higher power over the course of the story, Les Misérables explores and legitimizes the varying ways in which people interact with a God who is constantly at work in their lives. The presence of God connects everything happening in the story because He is portrayed as an omniscient, all-powerful force that influences every decision, action, and consequence: “Les Misérables present[s] the reader with a first cause who has ordered the cosmos into a series of parallel infinities...all interdependent and reflecting the infinity of their creator” (O’Neil 337). As such, Valjean’s identity as a God-fearer is perhaps the most complex version of his character that exists in the story. What is special about this identity is that it manifests in his points of greatest need but is not sacrificed when a new identity is formed. Instead, God continues to use Valjean’s instinctive good nature to do His will and, as a result, Valjean becomes more like God by imitating the charity and forgiveness shown to him (O’Neil 338). Another unique aspect of the God-fearing side of Valjean is created by other characters. Thenardier is a materialist, and though he is seemingly satisfied with the earthly fortune he has gained at the end of the opera, it is Valjean who has gained the true prize of inner peace in his self-understanding and self-acceptance, as well as his relationship with the other characters and with God. Thenardier goes beyond atheism; he is blasphemous and mocks God as he tries to get ahead. He is not worried about displeasing God and steps over others to try to be successful. Valjean, in contrast, exercises selflessness and frequently turns to God when seeking help and forgiveness. The other foil for Valjean’s God-fearing identity is Javert, who, because he misunderstands the justice and mercy that God provides for humanity, is perhaps not as villainous at heart as Thenardier. Nevertheless, Javert uses God as a reason to relentlessly seek out his own version of justice, which causes his inner world to completely collapse when Valjean saves his life. The dissolution of Javert’s character becomes clear when he asks, “Does [Valjean] know that granting me my life today, this man has killed me even so?” (“Les Misérables” 112). After being spared by Valjean and seeing how his static identity cannot keep up with the changing world around him, Javert commits suicide to escape the guilt and shame that entirely consume him. The message of Les Misérables about Valjean’s relationship with God is that even Valjean himself does not fully understand how God works within him until the end of his life. Hence, we must remember that no matter what kind of relationship may manifest between us and a higher power, it is impossible to completely comprehend its effect on us. Furthermore, these implications in the use of religion in Les Misérables imply that we are most impacted by factors that we are not entirely aware of that nevertheless influence the evolution of our identities independently of our personal desires.
The adaptation of the novel *Les Misérables* as an opera and then a movie brings Valjean’s evolving identity to life through an extraordinarily compelling lens. Laura Fattal, supervisor of Performing Arts for Plainville Public Schools in New Jersey, describes the uniqueness of a theatrical approach to literature as “reaching into the ethical center of...everyday life stories told to an audience through the spoken word, movement, color/light, and...music” (115). Although more character development is provided in the novel than in the opera or movie, the theatrical representation of Valjean’s changing identity allows the audience to live through and react to Valjean’s experiences in real time. In order to accomplish this, important decisions were made regarding the choice of musical themes and lyrics. They communicate very specific messages, not only about Valjean himself, but his relationships with other characters. Specifically, the use of musical reprises allows the viewer to be reminded of how Valjean is connected to different characters, as well as how each person handles situations differently. One of the more notable examples of this is the eerily similar soliloquies of Valjean and Javert when they are each confronted with a situation that requires an identity evolution:

Valjean’s First Soliloquy

I am reaching but I fall
And the night is closing in
And I stare into the void –
To the whirlpool of my sin
I’ll escape now from that world
From the world of Jean Valjean
Another story must begin!

(“Les Misérables” 12)

Javert’s Last Soliloquy

I am reaching but I fall
And the stars are black and cold
And I stare into the void –
Of a world that cannot hold
I’ll escape now from that world
From the world of Jean Valjean
There’s nowhere I can turn
There is no way to go on!

(“Les Misérables” 112)

Valjean is vowing in the first act to abandon his prison identity because he sees that it is not serving him well, while Javert is desperately trying to preserve his dysfunctional identity after seeing that he has failed to achieve his version of justice over Valjean. The identical music scores with similarly constructed lines remind the audience of how Javert fails at evolving his identity whereas Valjean succeeds. This is just one of the instances in which an identical musical theme is used to compare Valjean to another character in the theatrical release of the story. These reprises highlight that even though Valjean is flawed, he embraces maintaining a fluid identity and is able to adequately accommodate for a changing world around him. Hence, we should not be so critical of ourselves when we use the same technique to adapt to the situation at hand.

Omnisciently observing Valjean’s ascension to moral greatness prompts our own investigation of what it means to be ourselves. Could we possibly survive if we presented the same version of ourselves against every life trial? *Les Misérables* clearly shows that evolving our identity to serve us better when facing different
challenges is natural. Through Valjean, the story communicates that such transformation is considered personal growth and should not be discouraged just because past identities are changed or even left completely behind. As Valjean amends his criminal identity into a responsible leader who remains devoted to religion, family, and justice, we are reassured that by doing the same, we, too, can achieve the peace at the end of life that is knowing that we did our best.

Works Cited


The author of this essay examines the experiences of and attitudes toward female athletes, depicting the oppressive cultural norms rooted in American Heritage. The analysis includes well-framed quotations to support the thesis that due to sexism in sports, female athletes’ achievements do not get the recognition they deserve.

How the Past Becomes the Present: Gender Inequality Rooted in the Heritage of Sports

By Jordan Collins

Dr. Larkin – Sports: Going Beyond the Games

Heritage is a broad term used to describe how the past has become the present. It involves the traditions that make up our culture and are taught to our youth. The truth is, heritage is not always transparent. It can be messy and ugly and lots of times, it can be difficult to discover how our heritage came to be. People only share what they want to tell. Sports are a notable part of American heritage that have been an outlet for both males and females, but sports were not always offered in equal ways. A prominent part of American heritage has been the discrimination against and stereotypical standards for female athletes, as well as the erasure of women's athletic accomplishments, all of which has created oppressive cultural norms for female athletes in American society today.

Women have suffered from discrimination, unrealistic gender stereotypes, and unequal opportunity in sports throughout the twentieth century. For years, the notion that women are inferior to men has led to a belief that women are not able to succeed in so-called real sports. There are gender-based rules in almost every sport and they all have a common denominator of requiring less from women's teams. In the 1940s, male and female collegiate athletes received vastly different amounts of funding because women's sports did not seem necessary. It has been noted that during the 1940's, “The Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Foundation had declared vigorous competition a threat to female well-being and femininity, thereby limiting women's intercollegiate athletics” (Leblanc and Swanson 13). Women were denied the full experience of athletics simply because people feared they may become different from what women were expected to be. Even when women were allowed to play sports, they were forced to fit the stereotypical image of an extremely feminine woman to please the male gaze. Women's sports were created to be what men would want to see and what they deem to be entertaining. An example of this is the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Founded in the 1940s, this league combined the women's baseball abilities, which were deemed to be masculine, with their feminine attractiveness. Chewing gum mogul William Wrigley was prominent in the sports world. He purchased the Chicago Cubs in 1920 and his son, Phillip Wrigley, later assembled the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. William Wrigley stated that he was in fact, “repelled by the pants-wearing, tough-talking female softballers” (qtd. in Cahn 148). Therefore, in the creation of this league, femininity was enforced by making the players wear specific makeup, maintain long hair, wear
skirts as uniforms, and uphold strict standards of polite and quiet behavior (Cahn 140-141). These requirements were unreasonable for athletes when they played a physical sport, and represent how women were forced to fit a stereotypical role in society. This created immense pressure, especially for young girls who watched and admired them, to fit a mold that, for some, felt unattainable. Gender-based standards used in the All-American Girls Baseball League ultimately prevented female athletes from experiencing liberation through sports. The heritage of our past traditions influence the present. The discrimination of female athletes must end so this doesn’t continue to be a problem in the future.

In addition to being discriminated against and held to unrealistic gender stereotypes, there is also a tradition in American culture for female athletes’ accomplishments to be ignored. This is what happened to Babe Didrikson. Didrikson was arguably the most exceptionally multi-talented athlete of the twentieth century; however, it is uncommon today for young people to be familiar with her. Didrikson won multiple Olympic gold medals and broke many world records in several sports. Regardless of her incredible athletic ability, Didrikson didn’t receive the recognition she deserved and this lack of recognition continues today, more than 60 years after her death. Her erasure from American cultural heritages is likely due to her tomboy persona. She was described by the public as “boyish,” “disturbingly masculine,” and a member of a “third sex” (qtd. in Cayleff 29). Due to Didrikson’s “boyish” appearance, which was unusual for a woman in the 1930s, articles about her often included references to her looks alongside her athletic abilities. As Ruth Rosen, a historian specializing in gender and society, explains, this has become so common that “one expects an author to dismiss a woman with the easy familiarity of a superior or to discuss a woman’s appearance rather than their accomplishments” (Rosen 542). Didrikson was not written about the same way as men because she did not fit the stereotype for women at the time. Today, when children hear the nickname “Babe,” they tend to think of Babe Ruth because they likely have not learned about an exceptional athlete with the same nickname but opposite sex. The legacy of ignoring female athletes’ accomplishments continues. The persistent mentioning of successful male sports figures in history and the undermining of female athletes’ influences the way young people perceive and understand the past as well as the present.

Heritage isn’t solely about the past because the traditions passed down affect women in the present. Today, the wage gap between men and women in professional sports reflects the cultural heritage of inequality. Research shows that “male athletes in basketball, golf, soccer, baseball, and tennis make anywhere from 15% to 100% more than female athletes” (“Male vs. Female Sports Salary”). Regardless of the physical abilities of the female athletes, they are compensated at a reduced rate and this relates directly to how society views their sports. Women’s sports are still seen as inferior to men’s sports because there is perceived to be a lower entertainment value when it comes to women’s sports. In 2015, the minimum wage salary for NBA players was $525,000 compared to $38,000 in the WNBA (Zerunyan 237). In addition to lower salaries,
there are fewer branding opportunities for individual female players. Compensation is a significant way to show the value that something holds in society, and the wage gap proves that the inequitable treatment of female athletes has been a part of America’s sports heritage.

The heritage related to women’s sports cannot be understood simply by reading history books or talking to a historian. That history can be biased because people choose what to focus on and when it comes to sports, it’s usually not women. Female athletes were mistreated in sports throughout history and many had their accomplishments overlooked. Because heritage is made up of moments in history that influence the present, this unfair and unjust treatment in sports has influenced the way female athletes are treated today. If the tradition of mistreating and ignoring female athletes continues to be passed down, the issue of gender inequality in sports will continue. This is the American heritage for women in sports: the struggles, anger, inequality, and never being enough no matter your physical ability.

Works Cited
Is Re-Entry Really That Easy?

Ways the U.S. Has Sabotaged Successful Reentry for the Formerly Incarcerated

By Mikayla Cooke

Prof. Rody-Wright – Incarceration

For most Americans, the concept of incarceration is unimaginable. Those who have not experienced the mental, physical, and emotional toll of prison find such a life difficult to comprehend. Individuals who are fortunate enough to be released from prison find that their struggles do not simply end once they leave their cell. American society has created ways for the formerly incarcerated to feel like outcasts from the rest of the population. Not only do formerly incarcerated individuals have to manage the social and emotional stressors of reentering society upon being released from prison, but they are also faced with challenges related to housing, healthcare, voting, and employment—each of which are woven into the social, economic, and legal systems of American society. Legal barriers and social stigma further add to the difficulties regarding the reentry process as individuals attempt to begin a new life, and should be addressed by those capable of creating change so that formerly incarcerated individuals have the opportunity to successfully reintegrate into society.

Some believe that when people are released from prison, they are assisted in finding a place to live through the help of their community, family, or friends. This may be true for those individuals lucky enough to have loved ones to help them get back on their feet upon release from prison; however, many formerly incarcerated individuals are left to fend for themselves when finding housing, which precipitates homelessness. Locating a bed is a critical part of the reentry process. After all, a bed means a room, home, apartment, or even residential reentry center for those who have been displaced from their original homes, families, and livelihoods during their extended time in prison. According to research conducted by Benissa Salem and others, “individuals who had been incarcerated within the last 12 months were less likely to be housed during their subsequent year over the two-year follow up period” in comparison to non-incarcerated people. A significant reason for this is due to the rights of private housing authorities. As most housing opportunities are controlled by landlords or other private owners, such individuals have the legal right to turn

12 Salem, “Transitioning into the Community,” 611.
away tenants with criminal records based on their personal, often misguided, judgment. Anderson Curtis, a Smart Justice Field Organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, and formerly incarcerated person, writes that “Public and private landlords, educational institutions, insurance companies, most state licensure boards, and other gatekeepers to society generally have the right to discriminate against prospective tenants, students, and policyholders because of our criminal record,” and this results in numerous laws which ultimately permit discrimination against those with a criminal record by these private entities. In fact, the right to discriminate against the formerly incarcerated by private entities accounts for more than 600 inhibiting laws in the state of Connecticut alone. This number is small when one considers the number of laws that place barriers before the formerly incarcerated people throughout the entire country. Individuals with a criminal record are often left without a home or even a place to sleep as a result of being denied housing by landlords or other housing authorities, since these laws make housing discrimination permissible. Ultimately, social biases involving mistrust of those with a criminal record and legalized housing denials by private owners or landlords lead to an increasing number of formerly incarcerated people encountering housing challenges upon release from prison.

In addition to the difficulties related to finding housing, individuals released from prison often struggle with their own physical or mental health, which may or may not have been addressed during their time in prison. In her opinion piece for The New York Times, Michelle Cottle writes that individuals who are recently released from prison have shown higher rates of death and hospitalization compared to the general population. In consideration of the incarcerated population’s already disproportionately high rates of mental health issues often combined with substance abuse disorders, returning to the community upon release can pose more issues if one’s healthcare services, such as Medicaid, have been terminated or suspended during incarceration, which is often the case. It is difficult to quickly reestablish those services for a newly released person. Cottle stresses that this suspension or termination of healthcare services can extend the time it may take to receive crucial medication or services needed by many of the individuals who are released from prison. As a result of this lack of medical and mental health support, Cottle writes that “the formerly incarcerated in Washington State were around 129 times more likely to die of an overdose in the first two weeks after their release as other state residents.” More often than not, a lack of medical treatment often

13 Salem, “Transitioning into the Community,” 610.
17 Cottle, “This Bill Could Save the Lives of Formerly Incarcerated People.”
18 Cottle, “This Bill Could Save the Lives of Formerly Incarcerated People.”
precedes overdoses, homelessness, reincarceration, or trouble with the law, which ultimately results in negative outcomes for the formerly incarcerated. For any person who has medical issues involving mental or physical health, their needs require proper assistance and care, not a lack of services resulting from their incarceration.

Not only do formerly incarcerated individuals have to navigate their health and healthcare on their own, but they also have to tackle a barrier that falls into a political category—voting. Brentin Mock writes, “Over half of states won’t allow people who’ve been convicted of felonies to vote after leaving prison while they’re on parole or probation,” and he discusses other, more significant restrictions on formerly incarcerated people’s suffrage. Such restrictions inhibit approximately six million people across the United States from voting, and a third of this population are African Americans. This extended lack of voting rights for the formerly incarcerated population throughout the majority of the country results in even less attention being paid to the needs of this large group of people. Considering that America has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, the thoughts and opinions of these individuals must be recognized and considered in legislation and politics, as those who have experienced prison can provide insight in helping solve the nation’s incarceration crisis. However, a lack of access to voting rights silences the voices of the formerly incarcerated population when these voices are the most crucial in providing insight into this subject.

Despite evidence supporting the difficulties that the formerly incarcerated experience regarding reentry related to adequate housing, mental health support, and the right to vote, many may believe a lack of a successful reentry is self-inflicted. For example, some may think that those who were incarcerated struggle to find employment because they do not try or care to find jobs after prison. However, this notion is entirely untrue, as it does not represent the hard-working and motivated majority of formerly incarcerated individuals for whom employment is crucial to a successful reentry and the avoidance of recidivism. These individuals are met with both biases from employers and legal barriers due to their criminal records. Such barriers impact these individuals’ abilities to find a sustainable job. An article by Ifeoma Ajunwa and Angela Onwuachi-Willig states, “Both discrimination by private employers and governmental restrictions in the form of statutes that prohibit professional licensing serve to exclude the formerly incarcerated from much of the labor market.” There is very little demand from employers to hire people with a criminal background, as a consequence of negative social stigma and biases regarding the formerly incarcerated population. In their book, *Life After Life*

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20 Mock, “‘Ban the Box’ Not Enough for Former Inmates to Rejoin Society.”

Imprisonment, Liem Marieke and Robert J. Sampson highlight the “felon label,” which is commonly seen when individuals with a criminal background seek employment.\(^{22}\) This label, used by employers in order to legitimize not hiring certain potential employees, has become only more pervasive with the availability of criminal background checks.\(^{23}\) Additionally, it is very difficult for a person to get an interview for a job, as once it is listed in an application or background check that a person has a criminal background, they are frequently denied access to interviews by employers. Marieke and Sampson also discuss the existence of countless laws against hiring and licensing formerly incarcerated people, eliminating up to 800 different occupations across the United States.\(^{24}\) This results in a narrow range of job opportunities for returning citizens, and can, understandably, propel those reentering to recidivate, as they often have means of providing for themselves in the free world.

American society does not respect or show compassion towards the formerly incarcerated population. With commitment from American citizens, issues stemming from a lack of respect and compassion for others under the umbrella of appreciating diversity will begin to resolve. Marieke and Sampson discuss the perpetuation of marginalized groups such as the formerly incarcerated in American society.\(^{25}\) They write, “Together, these new laws and policies lead ex-inmates to be trapped in what the civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander has termed ‘a closed circuit of perpetual marginality.’ In her book, she argues that these restrictions amount to a form of ‘civic death,’ sending the unequivocal message that ‘they’ (the formerly incarcerated) are no longer part of ‘us.’”\(^{26}\) With the separation that results from legal barriers and social stigma for those with criminal records in American society, once a person is labeled a felon the “badge of inferiority relegates ex-inmates to a permanent second-class status.”\(^{27}\) Every person deserves a second chance at life, so the formerly incarcerated must be accepted as human beings who are capable of making positive change in their lives and in the world. They must not be disregarded, as this will continue to perpetuate their struggles to reenter society and remain out of prison.

A successful reentry from incarceration is not a luxury, nor should it be a statistic for those who are lucky enough to meet financial, psychological, or relational success upon release from prison. Therefore, the legal barriers and biases that impact opportunities related to housing, healthcare, voting, and employment for the formerly incarcerated should be greatly reduced, if they are permitted to exist at all. Lawmakers, private owners of businesses and housing services, and other individuals who are capable of enforcing such legislation


\(^{24}\) Marieke and Sampson, *Life After Imprisonment*, 129.


\(^{26}\) Marieke and Sampson, *Life After Imprisonment*, 128.

\(^{27}\) Marieke and Sampson, *Life After Imprisonment*, 128.
must consider the sometimes insurmountable difficulties these legal barriers pose for individuals who are simply trying to begin a new life. Repealing laws that negatively impact the opportunities available to the formerly incarcerated, as well as their ability to achieve a smooth transition into society, will make the reentry experience easier. It will also result in higher success rates for this important group of individuals who deserve a second chance.

Bibliography


In this essay about the required summer reading text, the writer considers how Colson Whitehead, the author of *The Nickel Boys*, portrays two protagonists who initially seem like polar opposites as complementary to each other. Through clear and well-developed character analysis, he argues that understanding the way the protagonists impact one another has real world applications.

*The Nickel Boys: The Inner Duality of Man*

By Zane Gabriel

Dr. Gibson - American Exceptionalism and its Critics

The exceptional ability of individuals to impact people and the world around them is significantly underutilized as many people cannot see the potential they hold within themselves. The lack of substantial and meaningful social impact is a result of an unforgiving environment filled with oppression and bent on breaking the spirit of those who cannot stand up for themselves. Colson Whitehead, the author of *The Nickel Boys*, touches the emotions of the reader by showing how external pressure from society can wear down the underprivileged and prevent their narratives from being considered. However, Whitehead also shows how it only takes the effort and belief of just one person to bring about change in others. The two protagonists Elwood Curtis and Jack Turner have an intriguing dynamic highlighted by their distinct views on life and the world as they perceive it. Elwood has a positive view of the future where he believes everyone will live equally, while Turner chooses to view life through a more negative lens, seeing only the suffering he has experienced and believing it is the only emotion he will continue to experience. The interaction between these two fictional boys and the values they each express represents the constant real predicament that individuals face in our society to push for a more hopeful future, or to settle for the underwhelming present. *The Nickel Boys* teaches the reader to face this predicament with strength and determination in order to strive for a hopeful future.

Elwood’s strong will and determination cause him to push forward and work hard for the idealistic future he dreams of living in. Unlike many others, Elwood is not afraid to speak out and push for justice, even if doing so puts him in harm’s way. Elwood’s integrity is an unbreakable piece of his character and when a few boys Elwood knows steal from Elwood’s employer, he takes it upon himself to confront them. He also accepts the retaliation he receives when later “that night they jumped him...[Even so] Elwood was the kind to intervene and cool things down” (Whitehead 26). He keeps a level head and knows that nothing will come from retaliating against his assaulters. Elwood’s unrelenting passion to pursue what is right gives him the potential to leave an impact on those who hear and witness his story. Turner is one of those people. Turner witnesses Elwood’s highs and lows and is able to relate to Elwood’s character and ideals first-hand. Through these interactions, Turner’s character and ideals begin to transform into those similar to Elwood. This transformation of character becomes apparent as the reader witnesses his handling of a letter condemning the illegal acts that occurred at Nickel Academy. Turner goes beyond the norm for his character and tells
Elwood, “That letter you got in your pocket... I’ll get it to them” (qtd. in Whitehead 182). The new resolve shown by Turner is a direct result of his interaction with Elwood. Elwood’s ability to impact the character of Turner can be felt by the reader. I personally felt drawn to empathize with Elwood trying to stand up for others suffering in the same way; however, recognizing this feeling is only half of what is required to make a true impact on the world around me. While Elwood’s vision of an optimistic future appeals to the empathetic emotions of the audience, it is still necessary to recognize that an ideal reality may be unobtainable when considering the opposition society unintentionally provides.

Turner’s beliefs, while seemingly pessimistic, embody a more practical and attainable reality in our society. While Elwood’s enthusiasm for change drives him to see past what is holding him back, Turner understands that social power is needed to provide long-lasting change. The difficulty surrounding this is that social power is something that the underprivileged generally lack. To keep his own ideas from aligning with Elwood, Turner continuously denies the idea that a brighter future could be waiting for him. While discussing life at Nickel Academy, Turner says, “The key to in here is the same as surviving out there---you got to see how people act, and then you got to figure out how to get around them like an obstacle course. If you want to walk out of here” (qtd. in Whitehead 82). This drab outlook is not only used to protect Turner himself; Turner is also trying to protect his friend. Turner hopes that by exposing Elwood to the truth, Elwood will set aside his dreams and remove himself from the political atmosphere he finds so interesting, far away from the dangerous backlash that frequently follows speaking out or going against those in power. By protecting those he cares about, Turner believes he is doing all he can, but as his character develops, he transforms his pessimistic outlook he spent so long adhering to in order to align with Elwood’s perspective. Turner’s transformation results in his character striving for a more hopeful future and allows the reader to experience their inner duality through the interaction of the main characters.

The reader can see a change in Turner’s beliefs as he begins to become more like Elwood and how Elwood grows to more fully understand the perspectives of those around him. When the two boys first meet, Elwood learns about Turner’s difficult life and the struggles he had been through that have caused him to be wary of trusting others. During the early stages of their friendship, Turner says he would not plan on running away with someone else since they would just be a liability; however, as the bond between the boys grows, this changes. When the two boys plan their escape together, the reader can see how Turner’s views have evolved and how Elwood has inspired his character to transform from the standoffish person he once was into more of an optimist. With the inclusion of a surprising plot-twist, it finally becomes clear to the reader just how much of himself Elwood had imprinted on Turner. The boy who had such a negative outlook took up the name and life of his dead friend, carrying the torch that Elwood had initially lit.
in him years before. This development from hopeless individualist to a married man with a successful business shows the impact one person can have on another. Elwood’s persistence eventually breaks through Turner’s stubborn views and shapes him into a more optimistic individual.

Two boys who come from a world of oppression and opposition are a reflection of our inner duality as well as a reflection of our society through the contrast of their personalities and ideals. Readers can truly feel and empathize with their experiences, losses, and victories. The clash of their opposing beliefs is something that everyone experiences in their lifetime as each reader struggles to find the balance between the two characters’ outlooks themselves. Elwood’s optimistic character conflicts with Turner’s realistic character, but the relationship between the boys demonstrates that optimism complements realism by providing hope to push for a better future. *The Nickel Boys* is a story that urges the reader to push against following the norm and, instead, to actively embody Elwood in hoping for a better, more optimistic future.

Work Cited
This research paper addresses the feminization of poverty, providing both statistical and anecdotal evidence to trace the long history of policies that have created a situation where intergenerational poverty continues and women are oppressed. Information from the sources is nicely balanced with the voice of the author, which is boldly conveyed.

The Silenced Majority: Women in Poverty
By Asavari Satish Gowda
Dr. Haas - Women: Their Voices, Their Values, Their Vision

Type “inner city poverty” or “inner city crime” into Google and many somber images of hidden America will appear. When examined closely, it is clear that there is a commonality among the images the media portrays of poverty in inner city America: it is very male. When the news covers life in inner city districts or Hollywood presents a stereotypical ghetto neighborhood, the public is often shown dirty streets run by violent gangs consisting of young men who left school and are continuing the cycle of generational poverty. The faces that do not make it to the screen are the women and girls who are raised in these communities as they are not the dominant group committing crimes or running underground drug markets, nor do they fit the media’s narrative of dangerous inner cities. Little is known about their experiences living in poverty and navigating inner city life. This is not to say that men do not face poverty or that those men in poverty do not deserve for their faces to be shown, but rather to question what the lives of females living in poverty look like and why their stories are often ignored. Disregarding the experiences of these women allows the public to turn a blind eye to the potential of inner cities. This permits the issues these women face to persist, thus keeping women and single mother households in poverty and, consequently, perpetuating generational poverty that is limiting the economic potential of America.

It is important to first establish that the lack of depiction of women in poverty is not reflective of a low poverty rate among women in general. In fact, the opposite is true: women have historically faced significantly higher rates of poverty than men. Poverty itself is a gendered experience. In her thorough review of poverty and homelessness in U.S. cities, anthropologist Ida Susser states:

Poor boys find themselves recruited into the illegal and frequently fatally attractive world of the drug trade because it is the only viable occupation for providing income for an extremely needy household. That is, early on, boys in poor households are expected to try to live up to the male role of provider. Poor girls are more likely to be kept home to do domestic tasks and are channeled into schooling.28

The early expectation to support their families financially often leads to adolescent boys getting involved in the drug trade and dropping out of school at a much higher rate than girls. Getting into the drug trade is a direct pipeline into crime and incarceration. Due to the fact that most men in poverty do not have children under their care nor many other domestic duties, they are also less likely to receive public services such as housing subsidies but do have a greater chance of receiving employment training compared to women. In the end, men in poverty are more likely to disappear through incarceration or death. Girls are taught to take on more of a caregiver role focusing on domestic duties such as caring for the children and elderly. They stay in school longer, but a common fate many teenage girls in poverty come to is pregnancy, thus leading to a high rate of single motherhood. In low-income neighborhoods, teen pregnancy is a norm for young women and even seen as a means of gaining validity. In her memoir, Wendy Randall described seeing girls in her high school get pregnant for the first and even second time when they were just high school seniors; they were kids themselves. Randall saw their predicament as a trap forcing them to remain in the projects she so desperately wanted to leave. These girls are being shown that having children is one of the few stable life options available to them. All in all, there are cultural norms for what one’s future will look like based on their gender. The young men are geared towards gaining money and women are raised to see themselves in a life of domestic work. By not exposing young women to the opportunities life has to offer and supporting them to receive a higher education, family planning advice, and career training, they are continuing to be led towards single motherhood. The potential of these women is thus being severely constrained.

The rate of single motherhood in America has seen an upward trend over the past several decades. When this rise is examined, it is apparent that there was a significant increase in single motherhood around 1970, particularly within the African American community. This trend coincides with certain political decisions that were made with regards to regulating crime in inner city districts. These communities, with their high black populations and concentration of poverty, were seen as places where the growing civil rights movement could potentially turn criminal. As a response to what were, in fact, peaceful demonstrations, in 1965, then-president Lyndon B. Johnson approved the Law Enforcement Assistance Act passed by Congress, beginning the toughest war on crime in American history. Legislators believed that there was a criminal element to the demonstrations, and they would only grow violent if left unchecked. Essentially, they were passing a crime bill to control crime that had not even occurred yet. The crime bill was based more on race than it was on actual crime. Around the same time began America’s War on Drugs. The War on Drugs was a joint state and federal

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effort that criminalized addiction in poverty-dense communities - the inner cities - instead of treating it as a public health crisis. Many punitive possession laws were passed, among which one of the most prominent is former New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller’s mandatory minimum fifteen-year prison sentence for anyone caught possessing illegal substances. This led to the formation of underground drug markets regulated by gun violence and crime. The Law Enforcement Assistance Act and War on Drugs collectively resulted in the mass incarceration of inner-city residents to more than quadruple over the following decades. This is significant for a couple of reasons. First, there is a societal notion that the high concentration of poverty and crime in inner cities is due entirely to the actions of people who live in those communities. This ideology is not only a convenient way for the general public to avoid addressing the issues these communities face, but it also perpetuates race-based stereotypes since inner cities very often consist of many people of color. Second, one of the direct results of the mass incarceration of males in inner cities is the rise of single motherhood in these districts to the point where the majority of children living in poverty today live in single mother households. These communities were essentially set up to fail by racially motivated policies enforced by governing bodies consisting of legislators who did not, and still do not, represent the people they are regulating.

Defective policies are also keeping women, particularly single mothers, in poverty. Women have historically experienced significantly higher poverty rates than men and there are several major reasons why this is so, beginning with the gender wage gap. In America, for every one dollar that a white man makes, women make about 82 cents, and this number varies based on ethnicity, with Latina women making the lowest - 54 cents for every one dollar a white man makes. Women in general are segregated into lower paying jobs. In fact, women have historically represented about two-thirds of the workers earning the federal minimum wage ($7.25 per hour) and nearly 70% of tipped workers, for whom the federal minimum wage is $2.13 per hour. In 2018, two of the top occupations held by women, child care worker and maid/housekeeper, had a median weekly wage at or below the 2018 weekly poverty threshold of $490. Women essentially dominate the blue collar workforce of America. The wage gap and the lack of women in higher paying jobs in general compounds over the years and leads to women having less savings than men over their lifetime. This gender wealth gap is a significant contributor to limiting the socioeconomic advancement of single mothers who need to use their limited savings to support their families. This is not to

32 Thompson, “Inner-City Violence in the Age of Mass Incarceration.”
33 Thompson, “Inner-City Violence in the Age of Mass Incarceration.”
36 “The Basic Facts About Women in Poverty.”
37 “The Basic Facts About Women in Poverty.”
say that the blue collar work force is not important or that women should not be a significant part of it. Rather, women should not be segregated into lower paying jobs nor earning less than their male counterparts for the same higher wage jobs solely due to their gender.

Supportive work-family policies and public assistance programs, or rather the lack of them, are also contributing to the feminization of poverty. In terms of public assistance programs, there are many shortcomings that do not make them nearly as effective as they set out to be. For example, unemployment insurance has stringent eligibility requirements that excludes many women who work part-time or leave work to care for family; there are barriers to Medicaid for low-income women, particularly the insufficient duration of pregnancy only Medicaid coverage; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children only serves about half the women eligible. There are endless examples of how public assistance programs that are supposedly benefitting women in poverty are falling short and can be improved. Effective change can be made by first tackling the lack of supportive work-family policies, which makes it extremely difficult for a woman to be able to balance caring for her family and working enough to pay the bills. This is particularly evident through inadequate funding for childcare, no national paid family or medical leave program, and no federal earned paid sick leave law. Just this past year, in 2021, the cost of infant care was on average 40% more than the state median income of single mothers and for school age children, the cost was 32% more. The US is an outlier among developed nations for providing zero days of paid maternity leave. For reference, Denmark provides eighteen months of paid maternity leave and Sweden provides 480 days. Without these critical work-family policies, women, who perform the majority of unpaid care work for children, elderly, and disabled family members, have fewer economic opportunities and are often forced to reduce their paid work hours or leave the workforce entirely. They are then left to rely on public assistance programs that are woefully inadequate. Women in poverty are expected to hold jobs to support their family in a society that will not support them.

Women definitely face poverty, but they are not the face of poverty. Even though women experience poverty at a higher rate than men and most children living in poverty-stricken districts, particularly inner cities, are raised by single mothers, the general public often views inner city life from a very male-centric point of view. This has to do with how the media frames poverty and life in America’s inner cities. Instead of

38 “The Basic Facts About Women in Poverty.”
39 “Single Mother Statistics.”
41 “Single Mother Statistics.”
acknowledging clear structural and systemic issues that have set these communities up to fail, the media frames those living below the poverty line as lazy and incompetent failures who cheat the welfare system and benefit from government aid that they do not deserve. On the news, viewers are shown images of homelessness in major cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York City and the unhoused people in those images are seen as subhuman, dirty, and the downfall of what could be a beautiful city. Most of these individuals are male as men in poverty are less likely to receive housing subsidies due to their lack of dependents.\textsuperscript{42} This depiction makes it seem as though the problems these individuals are facing are brought upon entirely by themselves and the individuals they are surrounded by and, as a result, are not things the general public should desire to see a solution to; rather, they are thus able to ignore it completely. Women, particularly single mothers, are not the primary demographic running the drug trade or committing crimes and getting incarcerated. As a result, they are not being shown on the nightly news or photographed for articles about the dangers of inner-city life nor are they very visible in Hollywood’s stereotypical set of a ghetto area run by male gangs. Women are not a part of the inner city narrative the media focuses on. Women living in poverty are behind the scenes. They are raised to see themselves as caregivers and pregnancy as one of the few paths in life available to them. Single mothers are working multiple jobs with low wages to support their families, but without the necessary supportive work family policies, they are hindered from having any socioeconomic mobility. This forces them to raise their kids in poverty and remain dependent on inadequate public assistance programs. All the while, their stories are rarely told nor heard by the general public causing their struggles to persist to no avail.

Telling the stories of the women who are the foundation of inner cities would change the public perception of what life in inner city neighborhoods is like. Instead of just being dirty streets filled with drugs and run by violent male gangs, these neighborhoods would be seen in a more humane light. Of course the high crime rates should still be dealt with appropriately, but the public should have the opportunity to look at a different side of the city—the side with hardworking women who are supporting their families despite the socioeconomic barriers that surround them. This exposure would change the narrative of inner cities just being lost causes to hubs of untapped potential. Consequently, the public would be better able to learn about the issues these women and their families face and how these communities can be supported and therefore improved instead of ignored and allowed to further deteriorate.

The persistence of women in poverty is directly contributing to generational poverty. Children growing up in single mother households, regardless of race, have significantly lower rates of graduation and significantly higher rates of incarceration when compared to those growing up in two parent households.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{43} “Single Mother Statistics.”
Like any social justice issue, this appears daunting and complicated, which makes it easy to turn a blind eye. Teva Sienicki, a nonprofit founder who works with individuals experiencing poverty, understands that tackling poverty can be overwhelming, but the solution to such a large problem actually starts very small. In her TED Talk, she describes the work she and her group are doing to empower the residents of a few inner city blocks of Denver, Colorado. By assisting the children with their education and the parents, particularly mothers, with employment and family support, they have seen great improvement to the quality of life within these “Blocks of Hope.” The children are doing better in school and staying in school while the mothers are able to earn more for their families and even advocate for city reform in terms of safety and education. Empowering communities and supporting the women who are the foundation of those communities is a substantial investment in this nation. Women dominate the blue-collar labor force and they are raising the next generation. These women do not need pity or handouts; they need basic policy changes and childcare support that can help them improve the financial security of themselves and their families.

On a broader scale, the lack of coverage of women in poverty in America is very representative of the lack of coverage of women’s rights issues around the world. Whether it is female genital mutilation (FGM) in Somaliland, prostitution in India, sex trafficking minors in Cambodia, or eliminating girls’ education in Afghanistan, the violation of girls’ and women’s rights around the world experience an extreme lack of coverage by the media and this plays a significant role in allowing these problems to persist. The United States is seen by the global community as a developed nation and one of - if not the - most powerful countries in the world. If America were to improve its coverage of the lives of women living in poverty and the struggles they experience, this would serve as an example to the rest of the world to do the same. A problem cannot be solved if no one knows how bad it is, or worse, that it even exists.

Women’s rights issues are prevalent all around the world. Some are more severe than others, but all are a violation of basic human equality. Many of these issues are prevalent right here in America in the neighborhoods hidden by the towering skyscrapers of this nation’s largest cities. Continuing to ignore the feminization of poverty will only widen the socioeconomic rift between the lower and middle class. Women must be supported, not silenced. Encouraging the socioeconomic advancement of women in poverty, starting with policy change and proper media coverage of their stories, will directly contribute to the economic advancement of America and the downfall of intergenerational poverty. America’s greatest investment in its future begins with women.

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In this research paper, the author presents an original argument connecting her topic (service dogs) to the course theme (heroes/heroism). The analysis seamlessly incorporates templates from They Say/I Say.

Underappreciated Service Dogs
By Karlee A. Gullis
Prof. D’Souza - Heroes

People constantly rely on other life forms. Whether we are using plants to provide us with oxygen or trees to build houses, there is a strong dependency between people and everything around them. Specifically when considering the relationship between humans and animals, the dependent being isn’t as clear-cut as many would think. Dogs have offered their abilities in various activities such as hunting and entertainment. These animals have evolved along with the human population, which ultimately has led to the creation of a symbiotic bond between them. People invite dogs into their homes hoping for a sense of comfort and companionship while providing them with everything they require for survival. In return, dogs become attuned to their owners’ lifestyles, however rigorous they may be, and offer their many virtues. Today, canines may be very popular as household pets, but they offer more to society through their work as service dogs. Service dogs are constantly utilized to better the quality of life for those who may not always be able to take care of themselves. These dogs deserve greater respect and appreciation from everyone regardless if they have a disability requiring the dogs’ help due to their hard work and impact. They offer their services in such a wide variety of ways, but their qualities are rarely recognized as heroic by people as they do not always acknowledge the different types of service dogs as well as the effect of their assistance on those in need.

One of the unique qualities that service dogs possess that make them heroic is their ability to see more than some eyes are capable of. Those in the visually impaired community often struggle to perform various, seemingly simple, daily activities. A simple trip to the store becomes a considerable challenge. Guide dogs are very competent in areas where their visually impaired partner may be struggling. There are many factors that go into a substantial, functioning relationship between the visually impaired and their canine companion. They must both display qualities of teamwork and attunement. According to Adam Miklosi, guide dogs demonstrate “impressive cooperation skills: self-control, awareness of another’s goals and the ability to take turns” (“Pets” 44). They have attributes that are not only beneficial, but crucial for the partnership to function. An imperative aspect of the canine’s job, Miklosi argues, is to act with intelligent disobedience in appropriate situations which may involve receiving a dangerous command (The Dog 145). If the owner initiates a command to cross a street when cars are approaching, the guide dog will have to inform them that it is unsafe. People often recognize guide dogs as important figures in helping the visually impaired, but they fail to admire every skill that goes into this role and therefore take these guide dogs for granted. These canine
assistants go through extensive training and must pass many tests to ensure they are capable of assisting their partners to the best of their ability. Guide dogs are crucial in providing their services to the visually impaired community to better their quality of life and sense of independence. It can be difficult for someone to be reliant on another person, as they may feel like a burden, thus guide dogs provide a crucial service.

Service dogs of all kinds mean something more to those who may have trouble accomplishing activities on their own; they are a friend. Service dogs, Miklosi says, “provide round-the-clock practical help but also fill important social roles, of which friendship is the most important” (“Pets” 44). The feelings of loneliness and helplessness can be overwhelming and service dogs are very effective in eliminating them. However, some people have difficulty maintaining this companionate relationship. People with autism often face challenges pertaining to social situations, leaving them constantly uncomfortable and on edge. Dogs offer a judgment-free environment while offering the love and encouragement everyone needs. Miklosi refers to dogs as “social catalysts” and rightfully so (The Dog 154). There have been many studies concerning the effects of introducing service dogs to children with autism and the results are astonishing. According to Olga Solomon, a researcher who studies the effects of service dogs on children with autism, the children feel more comfortable in social situations and improve in functionality while the family experiences relief and comfort (Solomon 148-149). Although most families would never say so directly, it is well-known that autism poses a challenge for everyone. The at-home life for a family can be difficult enough; spending time in public areas can be unimaginable. Service dogs for children with autism exhibit a transformative power for everyone as these special canines can create an emotional connection with the child and strengthen the bond between the family and the child (Solomon 143). According to Miklosi, the child can feel safe when venturing into unfamiliar environments while the service dog prevents behavioral outbursts and provides security (The Dog 146). Children with autism form a deep, caring connection with their animals that improves their lives in many aspects while making them more comfortable engaging with the world. Service dogs that assist people with autism are very admirable for the effects they have on these individuals and should be more widely appreciated for what they, as autism-assistance dogs, are enabling to be contributed to society. Their efforts are considerably heroic due to their ability to have an effect on individuals affected by autism as humans often struggle to get through to these individuals and create this strong, beneficial relationship that eliminates various negative feelings such as hopelessness and loneliness.

There are a lot of factors that can inhibit someone’s ability to live their life. One very important but not widely-accepted issue has to do with the effects of mental illness. For a long time, people were not familiar with or aware of the drastic effects that depression, stress, and anxiety can have on people. These can be very overwhelming and people may not have proper coping methods, causing them to seek help from a professional. When visiting a therapist, oftentimes there are trained therapy dogs present because of their
relaxing effects. Melinda Stanley-Hermanns and Julie Miller explain that the use of therapy dogs “decreased stress levels, increased feelings of self-worth” as well as reduced anxiety for these patients (73). Therapy dogs impact and improve various aspects of people’s mental health. These people can feel better about themselves while returning to their lives with significantly lowered anxiety and stress levels. Many people struggle with their mental health on a daily basis and therapy dogs have proven to be incredibly effective in helping them recover and live a life filled with positivity. The ability of therapy dogs to drastically ease the pain caused by mental illness is remarkably heroic as sometimes the standard treatment may not always prove beneficial for the individual leading their many virtues and abilities to not be utilized.

It can be challenging to participate in a normal life after experiencing a traumatic event. Many veterans come back from traumatic experiences and struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Veterans often experience anxiety and depression while struggling with everyday activities due to agitation and flashbacks. There are standard treatment options such as medications and talk therapies, but these are not always successful. Research studies show that veterans diagnosed with PTSD who were given a service dog adjust better when they return from deployment than those who were not given such a companion (Nieforth and O’Haire). Service dogs can help veterans successfully navigate even the most seemingly innocuous situations. For example, while a veteran and their canine assistant visit a grocery store, the service dog can alert their owner of an oncoming panic attack causing the owner to “focus on petting the dog to re-center on the present” (Nieforth and O’Haire). These returning soldiers, Miklosi points out, can be a danger to themselves or anyone nearby due to their strength and lack of control due to the disorder (The Dog 147). Canines assisting those suffering from PTSD intercept and inhibit their potentially dangerous actions, creating a safer environment for everyone. This makes it easier for veterans to interact and reestablish the relationships they previously had with family and friends. Service dogs for veterans with PTSD ensure a better transition back to everyday life physically, mentally, and socially. These service dogs offer affected veterans a smooth transition and a strong support system when they re-enter society.

Although these service dogs are providing extensive amounts of medical and emotional support, there is a drawback, particularly when it comes to the cost of training these dogs. Training can cost “upwards of $25,000” including the cost of “the puppy, medical bills, training and the fees” (“How Much Does It Cost to Train a Service Dog”). Service dogs can be financially hard to afford for those who are already struggling with the medical bills their disability requires. Although price is a valid concern, the sum of benefits therapy dogs provide for people with a disability outweighs the price tag. In most cases, there are organizations that take donations to provide a service dog for people who desperately need one, but cannot afford it. Giving Compass is an organization that partners with multiple organizations, K9s for Warriors being the most well-known, that receives donations to train and provide a service dog for veterans in need (“How Much Does It Cost to Train a
Service Dog”). These organizations recognize how beneficial these canines are so they spread awareness and make these animals more available to people in need.

Service dogs are very beneficial for those who may not be able to help themselves. Despite this, people do not give them enough credit for the work they do and the positive effects they have on not only their owners, but all the people around them. They are used in so many ways, including guiding the visually impaired, assisting people with autism, helping those affected by mental illnesses, and providing support to veterans with PTSD. These service dogs exponentially improve the quality of life for people that constantly face challenges. They bring positivity, love, and friendship to those who need it most while also providing them with care and safety. Service dogs should be more appreciated and respected for their selfless and heroic efforts in creating a better life for those with disabilities and all they come into contact with.

Works Cited


The historical significance of the intersection between human rights and the Olympic Games is examined in this research paper. The analysis clearly explains source material in a well-organized manner.

Excluding Human Rights Violators from the Olympic Games

By Jimmy Hamilton

Dr. Larkin - Sports: Going Beyond the Games

The Olympic Games bring together many countries in athletic competitions every two years; however, the Games have major impacts beyond the world of sports in the larger realm of international politics. In addition to the sporting events held during the Olympics, many countries and regimes see the Games as a stage for political posturing, international threats, and ideological messaging, which can have a lasting impact on global politics. That is why countries that are found to be or are suspected of committing human rights violations should not be allowed to participate in the Olympic Games. Human rights are directly addressed in the Olympic Charter, which guides the functioning of the modern-day Olympics. Despite this, we have seen in the past how certain countries that have committed appalling human rights abuses have used the Olympics as a tool to dispel and rebuke international scorn and continue to commit these atrocities. Such cases include Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime in Berlin in 1936, China in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and Russia in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. In order to prevent these human rights violations from continuing, the international community and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) need to take a hardline stance and bar these countries from participating in such an impactful global event in the future, just as they should have in the past.

The 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, also dubbed the Nazi Olympics, was extensively used by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party to project an image of a strong, independent Germany to the world. In the years prior to 1936, the Nazi Party, led by Hitler, rose to prominence in Germany and shortly thereafter committed a multitude of human rights abuses. After gaining power in 1933, Hitler subsequently made strategic moves to solidify his power, including murdering and/or arresting leaders of opposing political parties (“Nazi Germany”). In the three years between 1933 and 1936, Hitler and the Nazis also propagated violence against races they considered inferior, specifically the Jewish population in Germany whom Hitler scapegoated for the country’s economic and internal strife (“Nazi Germany”). In September 1935, the Nazi-controlled government instituted the Nuremburg Laws that defined Jews as second-class citizens and opened the floodgates to more anti-Semitic laws that segregated and discriminated against Jews in most areas of life such as schools, cinemas, resorts, and even certain sidewalks in German cities (“Nazi Germany”). In the early 1900s, people viewed sports as an entirely separate entity from politics and the two rarely coincided, a far cry from today where
politics inevitably mingles with sports. For these reasons many at the time saw the human rights abuses happening in Germany as completely separate from the 1936 Games, although in reality that was not the case. Some did attempt to stage a boycott of the Berlin Games, but were largely unsuccessful due to lack of support from higher officials, notably American Olympic Committee Chairman Avery Brundage (Frommer). Brundage was given a tour of Germany prior to the Olympics, in an attempt by Hitler to ward off an American boycott. As a result of this tour, Brundage deemed that Jewish athletes were being treated fairly so the Games should go on (Frommer). The human rights violations perpetrated against the Jewish population were, in fact, egregious, and Germany saw the 1936 Olympics as a perfect opportunity to overshadow the human rights abuses being committed. According to Tom Ecker, in “Olympic Pride: Nationalism at the Berlin and Beijing Games,” Hitler regarded the 1936 Olympics as “a chance for the world to see Germany at its best, and a chance for the German people to take pride in their country’s revival” (47). The Olympics was viewed by Hitler as the perfect venue to project an image of a strong, patriotic Germany, a drastic transformation from its decrepit, decimated state after World War I. In addition to unifying the German people, Hitler used this image of strength and independence to cast doubt in the minds of the international community that any human rights were being violated. Ecker further states that the Berlin Olympics was so well executed that “foreign visitors had no idea that there were any problems in Germany” (47). Germany’s manipulation of the 1936 Olympics to overshadow human rights abuses was effective. In the years after the Berlin Games, Germany’s persecution of so-called inferior races continued unchecked by the international community, eventually leading to the World War II and the Holocaust.

Like Nazi Germany, China saw the 2008 Olympics in Beijing as a chance to strengthen its authoritarian regime and, in turn, continue violating the human rights of its people. In the lead up to the 2008 Olympics, Amnesty International, an organization addressing human rights concerns around the globe, released a report outlining the continued human rights abuses in China. Its report concluded that China was committing appalling human rights violations, such as using the death penalty for non-violent crimes, detaining individuals without trial, imprisoning activists and dissidents, and censuring anti-government sentiment in its media (“China”). Despite these abuses, which had been occurring conspicuously for years, Beijing was still chosen to host the Olympics in 2008 with the hope of many IOC delegates that the Games would “accelerate openness in China and facilitate improvement in its record on human rights” (Longman). Despite these good intentions, China utilized the 2008 Olympics to build a false sense of global unity and community, which in turn would lead to other countries overlooking or being more hesitant to intervene in its abuse of human rights. To coincide with the 2008 Olympics, China produced pro-government propaganda and mobilization efforts “on a scale unseen in China since the beginning of the post-Mao Zedong Reform Era” (DeLisle 17). China even went as far as to theme the 2008 Olympics around this sense of global unity, making the slogan of the Games that
year “One World, One Dream” (Brownell 308). It’s ironic for a country such as China, which had been under the global microscope and faced international scorn on more than one occasion, to theme its Olympics around global unity and cooperation. Experts believe that China did this to offer “a powerful fantasy of unity that strengthened a feeling of shared membership in a single community” (Brownell 309). This “fantasy” of a united international cooperative would bring China even farther into the fold of the international community, which was evidenced when China received an “unprecedented level of support” by “the governments and corporations of the world,” just as it had planned (Brownell 309). By using the 2008 Beijing Olympics to cozy up to the international community, China was able to alleviate global pressure regarding its persistent human rights abuses. We have seen first-hand the effects of this alleviation. In recent years, China has been accused of committing a genocide against the Uyghur Muslim population, which was a topic of great concern when Beijing was yet again chosen to host the Olympic Games in 2022. China used the 2008 Olympics to sidle up to the international community with the hope that it might turn a blind eye to China’s record of human rights violations. This overlooking of heinous human rights violations is what allows China to continue violating human rights to drastic effect.

Just six years after the global community turned a blind eye to the human rights abuses in China, Russia used the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi to rebuke scorn for its discriminatory practices. The 2014 Games occurred right after the Russian government passed legislation that blatantly discriminated against same-sex couples and members of the LGBTQ+ community. These laws impacted these people’s lives by scorning the entire community, limiting access to mental and physical healthcare, and creating an atmosphere of increasing homophobic sentiment. The passing of these laws led to an outcry from members of the international community that saw them as clear breaches of human rights. Despite the intense scorn from around the world, the Russian government, along with the IOC, brushed off these direct violations of human rights and their possible effects on the Olympics by saying, “the legislation will not affect those attending or taking part in the Games” (Van Rheenen 131). This response by the Russian government with the support of the IOC was a direct attempt to ignore human rights abuses and their inevitable intersection with the Olympic Games. By rebuking scorn for these discriminatory laws, the IOC, in particular, was doing nothing short of endorsing these prejudicial practices and setting a precedent that when it comes to human rights abuses, the International Olympic Committee will turn a blind eye. The Olympic Charter says explicitly “that discrimination in any form is incompatible with the Olympic Movement,” yet the IOC’s appeasement of Russia during the 2014 Sochi Games is blatantly hypocritical of this statement (Van Rheenen 131). Russia manipulated the IOC to alleviate international scorn and set a precedent that the IOC will not take a hardline position when it comes to the violations of human rights around the globe, which allows future human rights abuses that overlap with the Olympic Games to go unchecked.
An argument can be made that the Olympics has the potential to positively change human rights abuses in countries where the Games take place. One common case that is pointed out by supporters of this argument is the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics. The main proponent of this argument is John Oberdorfer, a journalist and historian who has studied the 1988 Seoul games and contemporary Korean history in-depth. In a roundtable discussion before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China focused on the Beijing Olympics and human rights, Oberdorfer testified about the Olympics’ effects on South Korea in 1988. He argued two major points: that the Seoul Olympics ended isolation, allowing South Korea to form new relations with other countries and that the Olympics acted as a catalyst for domestic change within South Korea (US Cong.-Exec. Comm.). The case of South Korea in 1988 is a unique one, but in the face of facts, Oberdorfer’s argument falls flat. For one, in today’s world, no country, besides a few notable exceptions like North Korea and recently Russia, are currently as isolated as South Korea was in 1988. The international relations of the world today have changed drastically since 1988 and the world is more connected than ever before thanks to the development of technology, the internet, and increasing international cooperation. Secondly, the domestic events in South Korea and the eventual democratization of the country did not happen because of the Olympics; the two events merely happened to coincide. In 1979, the assassination of Park Chung Hee, the authoritarian leader, by a fellow South Korean government official led to power being shifted to the control of a group of military generals (US Cong.-Exec. Comm). In the years before the 1988 Olympics, South Korea saw a period of great domestic turbulence as protests broke out against the general in charge, Chun Doo-Hwan, demanding a direct, democratic election of a new President (US Cong.-Exec. Comm). These many protests were successful and in 1987, one year before the Seoul Olympics, South Korea held its first democratic election (US Cong.-Exec. Comm). These internal developments were the major catalysts that led to the democratization of South Korea and the collapse of the authoritarian regime there, not the Olympics. Instead, as evidence outlines, there has been a historical pattern of the Olympics negatively impacting human rights. South Korea was a one-of-a-kind case that does not represent the overarching effects of the Olympic Games on human rights.

Countries violating the human rights of its citizens should not be allowed to take part in the Olympics in order to prevent the manipulation of the Games to allow abuses to persist. Although sporting events and athletes are often believed to be separate from the world of politics, it is impossible to ignore the reality that the two will inevitably coincide, so while individual athletes may be innocent, they are also part of a larger political scene. The Olympic Games play an immeasurable role in the realm of international relations and world politics that should not be underestimated. The Olympic Charter, which outlines the principles that guide the modern-day Olympics, explicitly states that discrimination of any kind based on sex, race, gender, etc. is not and will not be tolerated. It goes on to say that belonging to the Olympic Movement requires
“compliance” with these principles (“Olympic Charter”). Countries that have committed human rights abuses have historically been able to manipulate the Olympic Games in one way or another in order to avoid international rebuke and to continue their human rights violations, such as Berlin 1936, Beijing 2008, and Sochi 2014. The 1988 Seoul case was an isolated example with unique circumstances and results that do not reflect the reality of the effects the Olympics has on human rights violations. Allowing countries like those listed above to continue to be included in the Olympic Movement not only goes against the ideals of the Olympic Charter, but it allows for human rights abuses to carry on and even worsen, eventually leading to devastating results such as genocides and world conflicts.

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In a cohesive analysis that pulls together varied sources, this essay argues that social connections create environments that tie individuals to a sense of community. In doing so, individuals who suffer violent or unjust norms stemming from cultural and societal expectations and traditions can experience healing from trauma.

Value Is In the Eye of the Beholder

By Skyler Han

Dr. Liptak – Trauma Narratives

For far too long, gender stereotypes have created an ongoing buildup of unrealistic expectations that have led certain individuals to feel disconnected from any sense of community. As discussed through the striking depictions of women’s oppression in Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*, Stephanie Land’s rags to riches experience in “I Left Poverty After Writing ‘Maid.’ But It Never Left Me,” and scientifically-supported effects of distress described in Bessel A. van der Kolk’s *The Body Keeps the Score*, it is evident that society’s expectations of women fulfilling traditional roles in the home and practicing submissiveness has led to an unhealthy buildup of trauma that requires validation through community healing, proper therapy, and sensitivity. At the same time, as individuals persist despite unfair gender expectations, they can become motivated to catalyze massive social reform movements, gaining the momentum to make efforts which can change the trajectory of gender norms for the better.

For centuries, women were raised in environments where their sole responsibilities were to fulfill roles within the home for their husbands and children, and to accept that domestic and sexual exploitation were routine in establishing a power-tiered dynamic. When describing the influence of these expectations of women, Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* quotes author Susan Brownmiller who says, “man’s discovery that genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times” (qtd. in Herman 21). Brownmiller’s sarcastic yet valid remarks not only expose the critical function of rape and intimidation, but also reference the longevity of the physically and emotionally damaged female population by dating back to the prehistoric era. As women slowly began to seek medical service for their mental health needs, they were often faced with hostility, denied treatments, and labeled as hysterical. In return, the standards that classified a female’s traumatic symptoms as hysterical caused a cycle of constant rejection and disconnection with men, especially with their husbands in their own home. Not only did this pattern remove women from any sense of validating community, but it ultimately led to a spiral in their behaviors alternating between submissiveness and lack of self worth, resulting in their inability to gain confidence to seek the therapy they required. Although these realities seem incredibly difficult to comprehend, expectations for women to be silent amid unethical treatment were considered the norm.

Expansive amounts of neurological based research has proven that one’s ability to heal from tragedy is
correlated with the appearance of resurfaced memories which activate certain neurological systems in the brain. van der Kolk’s *The Body Keeps the Score* follows Marsha, a young mother, on a recovery journey after a devastating car accident, which tragically took the life of her unborn child and youngest daughter. To understand Marsha’s unstable state, van der Kolk, renown psychiatrist, author, and researcher, frames personalized therapies which help explain Marsha’s waves of emotional flare ups, random spurts of anxiety, and various symptoms which interfere with her day-to-day life. Through their therapy sessions, van der Kolk concludes that “the insidious effects of constantly elevated stress hormones include memory and attention problems, irritability, sleep disorders, and contribute to long term health issues” (van der Kolk 46). In understanding how Marsha’s memory sends her body into a full-fledged range of biochemical imbalances, as well as inflicting damaging effects on her brain’s ability to process normally, it is clear that the antiquated identification of women as hysterical is entirely false. Marsha, like many other trauma survivors, suffers from varying emotionally draining complexities, which stretch far beyond a simple, derogatory label. By analyzing Marsha’s trauma, readers more thoroughly understand how women undertake countless burdens from a neurological standpoint, which were factors often disregarded by the standards that simply labeled victims of trauma as hysterical. In working with professionals such as van der Kolk, Marsha ultimately finds comfort and community with those who are able to recognize her vulnerable state and acknowledge her body’s hypersensitivity to memory triggering stimuli and grief. In Marsha’s case, by allowing an open sense of communication and two way validation in easing the pains of her troubled past, she is finally able to begin her journey toward healing.

Although Marsha was able to depend on experts to allow her to reconcile her deeply-rooted tragedy, many individuals lack the monetary support and financial stability that bring about the awareness of communal support systems, which leaves them to grapple with the stress of trauma on their own. In the article, “I Left Poverty After Writing ‘Maid.’ But It Never Left Me,” Stephanie Land, a single mother of two, describes the story of her transition out of poverty into financial independence after publishing her memoir, *Maid*. While she unintentionally skyrockets to fame, Land gets attacked by people’s gender-based stereotypes that ultimately undermine her ability to be both a bestselling author and supportive mother of two. Land shares how strangers were so quick to judge her by questioning, “Why didn’t you get an abortion?” and telling her she “should have given them up for adoption” (Land). Clearly, even amid fame and success, socially-accepted biases surrounding the role of a proper mother create a divide that damages Land’s ability to connect with the community of her audience of her memoir properly. The complicated gender roles that limit Land in her ability to be both an outspoken influencer and capable mother cause critics to unfairly blame her for raising infants on the borderline of poverty rather than praising her for overcoming adversity despite her hardship. Through Land’s perspective, it is apparent that even monetary support and status cannot guarantee
 communal healing and remediation from society’s many insufficiencies regarding child support funding and low-income struggles. By sharing the struggles of having overcome these gender based stereotypes, Land is able to use her years of repression and pain to address her trauma in hopes of spurring worldwide change through the communal audience of her memoir.

As seen thus far with the oppressed women in Herman’s analysis, Marsha from van der Kolk’s study, and Stephanie Land’s article, outdated gender norms create varying levels of challenges before healing resulting from traumatic events can take place. Indeed, some may begin to doubt whether an optimistic trajectory may ever take course during the journey of a woman’s recovery from trauma. Although there is validity in Herman’s argument that “the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish [trauma] from consciousness” (1), it is quite possible that these atrocious events can actually serve as motivating factors for large-scale societal reform movements. Throughout the mid 1970s, investigations confirming the reality of women’s experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault began to be brought to light. Women were quick to share their experiences with one another, which led to the organization of “grass-root agencies offering practical, legal, and emotional support to rape victims” (Herman 22). This explosive rise of research and support provided the opportunity for women to become leaders in their own time, by creating their own communities within their network of fellow survivors. Quite evidently, the Women’s Movement of the 1970s demonstrated how trauma survivors advocated for their own mutual support, which was the first step in overcoming their abuse, repression, and suffering. For the emerging feminists of this time period, breaking social norms was the first step in rewriting unethical gender standards out of existence.

Although it can be assumed that developing meaningful connections with other survivors and partaking in focused therapy treatments are crucial contributions to healing, van der Kolk unfortunately proves that there will always continue to be existing underlying trauma. From a neurological perspective, two halves of the brain process the pain of the past in dramatically different ways. The right brain, however, is trauma’s main focus. van der Kolk denotes that “when something reminds traumatized people of the past, their right brain reacts as if the traumatic event were happening in the present” (van der Kolk 45). van der Kolk shows that trauma, in some form or another, has the ability to interfere with our awareness of healing and remediation. This understanding serves to perpetuate the toxicity that societal gender expectations can hold- affirming that time and time again, antiquated gender expectations can continue to damage and prevent an individual’s ability to connect with others.

In reality, there is no one simple solution to the mess of complications that stem from years of trauma. However, validating other individual’s experiences can be the first step in obtaining a more corrective understanding of societal gender views. For Stephanie Land, it is clear that the struggles she faced as a single-mother living in poverty became amplified due to social constructs surrounding the expectations of
conventional motherhood—such as having a spouse, being financially stable, and living in a physical home. Although some may argue that the strongholds of certain gender constructs have been inherited for far too long for them to be rewritten, Land proves that it is possible to defy orthodox views by challenging the readers of her memoir to reevaluate how living continuously by such gender norms can cause destructive communities. As she discusses her transition from homeless mother to sudden public figure, Land comments on her newfound perspective regarding suffering, eagerly encouraging people to “look marginalized people in our community in the eye and listen to their stories of struggle, heartache, and impossibility” (Land). When Land shares her heartfelt wisdom from a place of urgency, the difficulty of her youth is brought to life, and the demand for ethical standards regarding the conventional maternal role to be rewritten in a gender-biased society becomes more obvious.

Despite the fact that misconstructed gender expectations have negatively influenced society for years, delving into the lives of the oppressed women in Herman’s analysis, studying Marsha’s recovery detailed in van der Kolk’s study, and acknowledging the struggles Stephanie Land faced brings to light how urgent a sense of community becomes to trauma survivors. When individuals have the opportunity to connect with a network of people who validate their sensitivities and recognize their oppressed past, the chasm created by such gender norms can slowly become remediated through healing. In time, the hope is that through the mass revival of healing, women can be the motivating force that reshapes societal expectations through powerful reformation.

Works Cited
For this assignment, students were asked to research a specific comedian who provides social commentary. Here, the writer argues that comedians have an important societal role to play in spreading awareness about serious issues and explains how one specific comedian effectively accomplishes that task.

Hannah Gadsby: Integrating Serious Content Into Stand Up Comedy

By Libby King
Dr. Stein - Out of Bounds

They say laughter is the best medicine to cure just about anything. As humans, we use the phrase "laughing until it hurts" to describe the feeling when we laugh so hard our stomachs begin to hurt, but we don't talk about laughing instead of hurting. Nowadays it is common to see comedians make light of uncomfortable topics by making jokes; thus turning a negative to a positive. Furthermore, comedians are applauded for their takes on controversial topics while incorporating knee-slapping jokes. However, it can be difficult to do this because of cancel culture's laser focus on comedians. What some fail to realize is that it is a comedian's job to talk about controversial topics so that they can make a difference. The best comedians are the ones who can be authentic and talk about uncomfortable topics yet not make a mockery of people affected by said topics. If all comedians found a way to incorporate topics that people try to avoid such as; gender inequality, and LGBTQ+ stereotypes, instead of the usual light hearted jokes, people could begin to look at these topics in a different way and it could expand horizons. A comedian who has made a name for herself doing just that is 42-year-old Hannah Gadsby.

Cancel culture plays a big role in holding celebrities or public figures accountable for their inappropriate actions. This may sound beneficial for the public; however, social media users of the general public (not including influencers) are beginning to abuse their power. Holding people of high influential power accountable for their wrongs, inappropriate actions or comments is a great thing for media users to do, but when they are shaming, sending death threats, and silencing influencers, it becomes an abuse of power. Comedians are often canceled because some people feel they take jokes too far and cover topics that shouldn't be joked about. However, most comedians will say it's their duty to discuss uncomfortable topics and make them more familiar to audiences. According to Jim Norton (2017), a comedian who is known for his controversial jokes, “We take these knots in society-like, you know how you get a knot in your neck- and our job as comedians is to take our knuckles and kind of work it out” (as cited in Hartsell, para. 11). What Norton means is that it is comedians' job to talk about topics that may cause the audience to sit in discomfort. He thinks that whether some find it offensive or not, if comedians don't bring up the topics people don't want to talk about– who would? He's implying that comedians introduce these topics and make light of them so that one day they will not be so hard to talk about. Another comedian, Jeffrey, Ross (2017) adds, “I think it’s our
job to go too far. That way we know as a society what too far is” (as cited in Hartsell, para. 11). Comedians test the boundaries of what’s socially acceptable to comment on. I feel that comedians are a great way to test the waters, but I can also see how this could potentially cause problems. It is a moral quandary to consider how comedians can get away with this when other celebrities would be canceled. When comedians make an entire room of people laugh about a serious subject, they are also making some of them more comfortable to discuss said topic so that one day it can be normalized. Comedians are not trying to offend anyone; rather, they test boundaries because that’s their job. In the end, then, comedians should not be canceled for their efforts to make the uncomfortable comfortable, they should be applauded.

With the popularity of social media, videos of comedians’ shows get spread quickly, so when they speak about uncomfortable topics to make these topics more known by audiences, they have the power to make change and educate viewers all over the world. Comedy is no longer just a way to spread joy. Instead, it is used to inform an audience about topics they may not have been previously exposed to because of the discomfort brought along with them. Caty Borum Chattoo, founder of “The Laughter Effect,” an investigation into how comedy is affecting society and someone who is known for her knowledge of social commentary, agrees. She, along with Lauren Feldman, a Communications professor at Rutgers, wrote A comedian and an activist walk into a bar: The serious role of comedy in social justice exploring comedy’s social role. They say that “Comedians who say something serious about the world while they make us laugh are capable of mobilizing the masses, focusing a critical lens on injustices and injecting hope and optimism into seemingly hopeless problems” (Chattoo & Feldman 2020, para. 2). Chattoo and Feldman are illustrating that using comedy to talk about serious subjects is an effective way to create change in society. This is because comedians have their audiences in the palm of their hands and can therefore talk about whatever topics they choose as long as they make their audiences laugh. So, when comedians choose controversial topics, the audience will be engaged, thus making the uncomfortable a little more comfortable. Comedians, therefore, spread important information. Chattoo (2016) states, “Entertaining or comedic portrayals of serious issues open the door for audiences to pay increased attention to subsequent serious treatment of issues in traditional news media” (para. 4). Comedy draws an audience in and allows people to learn about uncomfortable subjects in an unconventional way. This has proven effective over time and it’s no secret that comedy is starting to stir up change and make a difference in society. Differences like exposure and spreading awareness on uncomfortable topics can benefit society and educate people which may lead to them being more willing to talk about what makes them uncomfortable. Comedians push boundaries and ultimately may be the gateway we need to talk about the topics others are too afraid to talk about.

Comedians have become influencers with the power to make a change by talking about controversial topics. One comedian who does a fantastic job of incorporating uncomfortable or controversial topics into her
bits is Hannah Gadsby. Gadsby is an Australian comedian, part of the LGBTQ+ community, and known for her Netflix specials Nanette and Douglas. Jenna Krefting, an expert in gender studies and comedy commentator, talks about how Gadsby uses her comedy for more than making others laugh, she uses content to bring awareness to uncomfortable topics. Krefting (2019) is referring to Gadsby’s Netflix special when she comments, “Gadsby uses comedy to interrogate comedy and the ways production and consumption are gendered, among them the pressure placed on women to self-deprecate in order to satisfy gendered cultural values and expectations of femininity” (94). In other words, Krefting is saying that Gadsby is able to make the audience laugh while commenting on something she struggles with in her profession. Gadsby starts off talking about comedy and gender in general, making jokes about men being defensive when women don’t laugh at their jokes. She uses these jokes to grab the attention of the audience and then uses that opportunity to shed light on gender inequality. She ends by saying, “I put myself down in order to speak, and I simply will not do that anymore not to myself, or anyone who identifies with me” (Gadsby, 2019, 2:46-2:56). Gadsby is talking about how it is harder for women to be successful in the comedy industry without self-deprecation, but this also can apply to other females in their own careers, in school, and in life. Women every day are pressured to quiet themselves or put themselves down in order to please men and Gadsby made me think of all the times I have done this. Gadsby is a great example of someone who is shedding light on the gender inequities faced on a daily basis, while still making people laugh. Although gender inequality may seem like a normal topic to discuss, many feel that male privilege does not exist and for women who feel it does, this can cause discomfort. Gadsby has stood up to those who have silenced her or made her feel small in the past by acknowledging that she won’t let this happen any longer. Small steps can lead to big outcomes and just one person saying she won’t let men make her feel inferior can cause other women to do the same. The comment section of Gadsby’s videos are full of men saying she is not funny, and although this may not be men trying to cancel her, they are hating and trying to silence her. Gadsby is standing up for herself by not letting these men silence her or tear her down.

With Hannah Gadsby’s name rising on the comedy radar, she uses her fame to highlight serious experiences she’s been through in order to help those who see the hardships she has been through in life. Krefting (2019) explains, “She includes parts of her story that are not meant to be humorous, she refuses to downplay the seriousness of sexual and gender violence, and she strategically refuses to ease the tensions” (101). Of course, as a comedian Gadsby makes the audience laugh, but she doesn’t stop there. She also takes the time to educate the audience about important topics in a more serious light. For example, Gadsby (2021) says, “I’m not a man-hater but I am afraid of men. And if you think that’s unusual then you are not speaking to the women in your life. I wonder how a man would feel if they’d live my life.”(5:35-5:43) Gadsby is using her position as a comedian to break from the jokes to talk about a topic some find uncomfortable. What she is
saying is that when women point out how there are double standards or when they promote feminism, they are labeled as angry and man-haters when they really just want to shed light on gender inequality so one day it can be gone for good. Gadsby is speaking for every woman when she says she's afraid of men because at least once in every woman's life they have feared a man. She brings up an excellent point at the end when she questions how men would feel if they lived the life of a woman for one day. The first step for men leaning about consequences of gender inequality is understanding what women go through on a daily basis. Some may point out that this part of her act wasn't funny and as a comedian, she should stick to telling jokes, but sometimes it's best to break away from what's expected in order to raise awareness on something as important as gender inequality.

Comedy is changing society with every show. As comedians, they feel it is their job to push boundaries and talk about uncomfortable subjects. Hannah Gadsby pushes boundaries by talking about gender inequality, and adding elements of seriousness into her shows. If every comedian spent even just one minute of their show talking seriously about uncomfortable subjects, we could start moving forward to a better future because they would be educating people about topics they may not be willing to look into on their own time. Instead of focusing on canceling comedians, we as a society should focus on the uncomfortable topics they are trying to bring to light. Gadsby (2019) says it best when she says, “I believe Picasso was right, I believe that we could learn to paint a better world if we learned how to see it from all perspectives” (7:30-7:38).

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In this thoughtful analysis, the author defends the position that there is a positive aspect to cancel culture, particularly when individuals choose to boycott art produced by people who have committed immoral acts.

When Bad People Make Good Art

By Jenna Kosnick

Prof. Simonds – Pop Culture of the 21st Century

With the rise of the #MeToo Movement and the idea of cancellation permeating pop culture, the present day often appears to be an awful time to attempt to quietly enjoy an artist. Those who are against cancel culture argue that people have grown too sensitive, that people are unwilling to allow celebrities to be imperfect, and that there is no need to persecute others for their harmless enjoyment of media made by unpopular artists. Consumption of a work of art, they argue, need not equal support for the person who made it. The idea that those separating the art from the artist are besieged rebels is seductive. It allows those enjoying works of art made by bigoted, criminal, or otherwise morally repugnant artists to be cast as the rational ones being shouted down by an emotion-driven mob. Thus, those with the much lauded ability to separate the art they enjoy from the artists who made it are transformed into the enlightened few, protecting their right to watch Woody Allen films and to rock out to Marilyn Manson, despite the credible sexual abuse allegations against these men. The problem, however, is that these beliefs rest on the assertion that there is, in fact, a harmless way to consume media made by people who have abused and mistreated others, which is ultimately incorrect. While it may be possible to emotionally and intellectually separate the art from the artist, there is no way to separate consumption of their artwork from the power it gives the artist. Furthermore, continuing to engage with their works is concretely harmful to their victims, as the experience of watching the elevation and celebration of a person who so negatively impacted them very often results in the victim experiencing severe distress. In light of human suffering, both immediate and potential, that can result, it is morally necessary to oppose the continued consumption of art made by immoral artists regardless of the quality of the work.

Choosing to engage with artwork made by bigots and abusers involves more than personal consumption of media; it grants power to those who created it. This is most immediately obvious when consumption involves a transaction. Here, the consumer monetarily supports the creator. For the vast majority of media, though, access without newly paying for the work - whether through already owning it, borrowing it, or contributing one of the billions of yearly views of pirated material - is easy to obtain (Spajic, 2022). The choice of what media to engage with, however, even if it doesn’t include a monetary transaction, still carries consequences.
By engaging with works made by immoral people, attention is still given to them. Allowing these artists attention can give them influence. As Kupperman (2017) points out, this influence can “be leveraged to do harm to others,” allowing the artists access to victims and ways to shield themselves from consequences (par. 6). Furthermore, even setting the idea of granting these artists’ influence aside, the amount of time anyone has to consume works of art is limited. By choosing to spend that limited amount of time on a creator who has done something morally reprehensible, time that could have been given to an artist who has not performed these acts disappears. Any influence or money this new artist could have received also vanishes (Grady, 2019). In short, engaging with the artwork made by morally corrupt artists cannot be viewed as a neutral act, both in terms of income generated for the artist in question and the impact such attention has on other creators in the field.

In the case of artists who have had credible allegations made against them or who have been convicted of abuse, the harm they have done, rather obviously, did not occur in a vacuum where only the artist was affected. The impact on their victims and on those who relate closely to said victims when people continue to consume this art cannot be ethically ignored. To look at a recent example, in the wake of accusations of rape and horrific abuse by multiple women against popular shock rock artist Marilyn Manson, he briefly paused making music. His comeback helped to drive one of his victims to an “eating-disorder relapse,” as she described seeing him at an album launch as a “kick in the teeth” (Grow & Newman, 2021 par. 124). For those who were harmed by the creator of a work, prioritizing good artwork over their pain is deeply emotionally affecting. Similar emotions can be triggered in people who, while not hurt by the artist in question, experienced similar harm. This “work is a kind of trigger” for them, linked to negative emotions and memories of abuse (Gordon-Smith, 2020, par. 5). Furthermore, the experience of watching those around them disregard experiences similar to their own can be isolating. The dismissal serves as a reminder that for those not victimized, such pain is “hypothetical, an imaginative possibility” that they “can choose to put aside” when engaging with certain artists (Gordon-Smith, 2020, par. 6). However, for victims such separation is a painful impossibility.

Ultimately, any consumption of art made by immoral artists cannot be done harmlessly because the artists are lent power and the pain of their victims is disregarded. And while many view taking a stance against such artists as an excuse to mourn the great works they will no longer experience, it is far more productive to view this as an opportunity. In the wake of these artists’ absence, there is now the space to consume works often excluded from popular relevance - often by the actions of these predatory artists themselves. The chance to create a new canon of great works, now created by people who are both morally and artistically great, would finally be within reach, not only of the individual consumer, but of culture itself.
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Through a carefully crafted cost-benefit analysis that addresses and overcomes multiple naysayers, this writer determines that there are too many young people seeking college degrees to their own individual detriment.

The Student Loan Crisis: Re-examining the College Degree
By Avery Manzolini
Dr. Stein - The American School

Middle-class families across the U.S. have seen college as a path to a life of fruitful employment for decades. But what was once a guaranteed route to economic prosperity is today seeming more and more like a crippling financial burden, not least because the cost of college is rising dramatically— and has been for several decades— but also because an increasing number of young people are opting to forego more suitable career paths in favor of pursuing degrees from which they stand to gain little economic benefit. Colleges, defined here as four-year brick and mortar institutions, have been accepting far too many students for far too long, and the apparent disconnect between attendance and benefit is the direct result of the oversaturation of people pursuing a college degree. This paper will first examine the relationship between rising college attendance and the general decrease in value of the college degree, as well as challenge the dominant cultural role of higher education. Then, I will turn my attention to various counterarguments and explain why students who are not suited to collegiate environments should entertain alternatives to four year degrees.

Before I put forward my argument, there are some questions that must first be answered if it is to be properly understood. After all, how many students is too many- and by whose methods are we to address this question? Consider the following statement: if the benefits of any good or service are said to apply to too many people, then the implication is that, consequently, the product itself is somehow less valuable to its consumers. College degrees are no different; their value lies in the benefits they may yield. Since graduating from college today is yielding fewer benefits for an increasing number of degree holders, their value, which I define as the level of opportunity a degree can unlock for its holder, is dropping precipitously. Granted, there are numerous reasons to which one could attribute this depreciation, but only one of these is corroborated by the empirical data. This is by no means the only explanation, but when one considers the fact that the decrease in the relative value of the college degree directly coincides with the dramatic increase in the number of students seeking one, it becomes clear that, in all likelihood, too many students are heading off to college each year.

The most lucid illustration of the ubiquity of the college degree is revealed only when one takes into account the increasingly direct relationship between total college attendance rates and the relative benefit of attending. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), the percentage of high school completers who chose to attend collegiate institutions has steadily increased from 49.3% in 1980 to
69.1% in 2018, reaching its peak in 2009 at 70.1% (Digest of education statistics). That means in today’s America close to 70 percent of all high school graduates and General Education Development (GED) recipients make college their next step en route to the workforce. On its own, this data stands as a reflection of the cultural significance of higher education. However, when viewed in conjunction with the fact that the average recent college graduate is nowhere near as economically secure as his counterparts from the mid 20th century, one can begin to recognize that this dramatic, seemingly benign increase in the overall percentage of students attending college is at least partially responsible for these economic perils. In fact, the average college graduate of 2013 will make $5,000 less in yearly salary than the average graduate of 1970; moreover, 25% of bachelor’s degree recipients make no more than the average high school graduate (Abel & Deitz, 2014).

These statistics however, are also an indictment of the American middle class and its generally impulsive moral reasonings with regards to such life altering questions. Parents, as one would expect, want the absolute best for their children, and whenever market conditions are generally good, for example before the housing market crash of 2008, they will not hesitate to shell out for this decidedly elusive and widely inconsistent best path forward (Digest of education statistics, 2021). On the surface, this comes as no surprise. That people spend more money when the economy is good is one of the very basic principles of market-based systems, but upon closer inspection, this idea may reveal something important about the broader moral imperatives of the archetypal middle class family. When students, and their families, are faced with the prospect of a future of relative economic security, most will be encouraged to lay claim to this promise. Yet, when we understand that college has assumed the role in American culture as the guarantor of such promises, the financial side of the equation becomes merely a formality— a yes or no question. In other words, if parents can afford to send their kids off to college they will not hesitate to do so, even if they are somewhat aware of the financial risk (Abel & Deitz, 2014). This is corroborated even further when one considers the fact that the U.S. is becoming wealthier every year; its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased tenfold since the late 1970s and college attendance rates, predictably, have followed suit (Abel & Deitz, 2014).

Given the dramatic increase in the number of degree holders, is it becoming more difficult for them to find a sustainable source of income after graduation and, furthermore, college itself is becoming less financially viable. Just look at average tuition rates, which, according to the NCES (2021), have nearly tripled since the late 1970s (Digest of education statistics). Although the increase in average tuition is not as neat and simple as that of attendance rates, this can be explained by fluctuations in the economy and the general financial needs of individual institutions. Whenever there is an economic downturn and thus a decrease in attendance rates, a similar decrease in average tuition rates can be observed. This, of course, is the opposite of what prevailing economic wisdom would predict: when demand (attendance rate) decreases, prices (tuition
cost) should increase, but with college, this does not seem to be the case. Curiously, though, as soon as there is a significant rise in attendance rates, such as the 5% increase from 1980-85, tuition rates skyrocket—in this case from barely $9,000 a year to almost $12,000 (Digest of education statistics, 2021). This means that colleges, being mostly non profit institutions, can choose when to adhere to traditional market principles. When it is profitable to artificially boost tuition in the face of increased demand, colleges will do so; when it is profitable to decrease tuition as demand stagnates, colleges can afford to do so. This is the benefit of providing a good or service whose price is not wholly determined by complex supply chains, manufacturing costs, and the like. In sum, the increase in college enrollment—and therefore graduation—began in the late 1970s, after the oil crisis and right around the same time that the benefits of college began to decrease and the costs of tuition began to rise. This direct relationship between attendance and relative benefit, or lack thereof, seems to indicate a cause and effect relationship between the two. But, since college has assumed a role of cultural prominence in modern life, families will pay whatever colleges ask them to, even as the decision to attend is looking more and more like a perilous financial error.

Many will retort that the four year college’s unchallenged position atop the educational hierarchy is justified, and that, this being the case, anyone and everyone should be entitled to the very best economic opportunity. This perspective has risen to prominence within political circles in recent years, and is on display every time someone demands the erasure of student loan debt or advocates for free college tuition. But the problem with such proposals is that they presume equality where there is none. They anticipate that each and every student, regardless of their manner of upbringing, raw intellectual potential, and their personal virtues, is able to compose their faculties in a way that is intellectually remarkable. It is precisely this idea that, arguably, has led our entire education system and everything it once stood for astray in recent years.

The idea that every child in America is entitled to a college education implies that every child in America is capable of completing college coursework and rests upon the decidedly fallacious supposition that the benefits of higher education are unlimited in their scope. If post-secondary education is expanded to include anyone and everyone, it effectively becomes a sort of pseudo high school whose purpose would no longer be to educate exceptional individuals for specific careers, but to provide the population with a general education. Moreover, if young people continue to flock to college campuses in great numbers, it won’t be long before there is an oversupply of degree holders, even as the number of jobs actually requiring bachelor’s degrees increases at a much slower rate. It is undoubtedly true that the college system may need reforming, but artificially deflating the cost of post-secondary education, thereby making it more accessible, simply floods the job market with over qualified candidates when there is relatively little demand for them. Proposed solutions to the student loan crisis, such as erasing billions of dollars worth of student debt with the stroke of
a pen, and compelling hard-working Americans to subsidize the increasingly futile educational journeys of their fellow citizens would only serve to exacerbate this problem.

The only way to truly mitigate the plight of the oversaturated degree is to do just the opposite of what some political radicals have suggested— to decrease college attendance rates, thereby forcing colleges to reconsider their needlessly exorbitant tuition prices. This would amount to tarnishing the almost flawless reputation that college has garnered over the years, and encouraging high school seniors to make the right choice for their specific skill set and intelligence level. In other words, college can no longer be pushed as a sort of one size fits all solution to the economic qualms of students. Certain individuals are just better suited to certain environments, and the fact is that, at least based on IQ statistics, far more than half the population is not cut out to attend a four year college. If we continue to pretend otherwise we will only further distort the college degree, while quickly turning it into a meaningless label that connotes none of the intellectual acumen it was intended to represent. It therefore falls to families to make the appropriate decisions for their children, however gifted or intellectually challenged they may be, not only for their own benefit, but for that of broader society. For some students, a bachelor’s degree may be exactly what they need— for most, though, it is some kind of vocational education or blue collar labor that will provide them with the highest financial benefit for their efforts.

When people speak of college today, so often the conversation centers around the general experience of college life. In recent years, social gatherings, sporting events, and lifelong friendships have taken precedence over academic strivings and feats of intellectual competency. As benign as this may seem, it is truly a reflection of America’s collective, societal values and an indication of the transformation of the college degree. As we embark on a future fraught with uncertainty, and as millions of hard-working Americans continue to fall victim to the false promises of higher education, it is time we as a nation begin to realize that equality exists perhaps not in actuality, but in abstraction and idealism. And although we may, rightfully, herald it as a virtue of near unparalleled importance, equality is on occasion simply unattainable. In this case, that means not everyone is entitled to the most rigorous education because not everyone needs to receive it.

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In this essay, the writer uses a variety of sources to explain how the NBA has expanded its role in promoting social justice as a form of outreach to its diverse fanbase.

Diversity and Social Justice in the NBA

By Hunter Mulvey

Dr. Larkin - Sports: Going Beyond the Games

In order to demonstrate its promotion of equality and equity, the National Basketball Association (NBA) writes on its mission and values page (2022), "We do the right thing. We are honest, ethical, and fair-leading by example in sports, culture, and society" (Our Mission and Values). The NBA claims its purpose is to inspire and connect people, no matter their background, through basketball because diversity ignites innovation and the shaking up of the status quo. There has been an extensive debate regarding the role of politics in the sporting environment, prompting the NBA to be featured in the media countless times for non-basketball-related issues due to the prominent role of activism amongst its players. After the switch from former commissioner David Stern to Adam Silver in 2014, players were given more freedom to voice their political views and concerns without fear of being reprimanded by the league (Medina, 2020). As a result, there has been a continuous increase in the number of players choosing to take a stand against matters they strongly believe in, along with new methods through which they demonstrate their support. The NBA's prominent role in modern sports culture has served as an outlet for raising viewers’ awareness of social matters, increasing public support towards resolving such conflicts. By virtue of the monumental size and diverse backgrounds of the league’s fan base, such public leverage allows for controversial topics to both reach and be debated amongst individuals who might have ignored such issues in the past. Thus, society as a whole becomes more connected due to the spread of information and the new perspectives garnered in correspondence to the NBA’s ability to reach such a varied audience. Altogether, the interconnectedness created allows for a better understanding for bringing about necessary changes in society.

Three days after Jacob Blake, an African American male, was brutally murdered by a white policeman, the NBA established the National Basketball Social Justice Coalition (NBSJC) on August 26, 2020, to advocate against the racist systems plaguing the nation. After the Bucks’ refusal to play in their first-round series in the playoff games, in order to express the team’s anger regarding police brutality, the possibility of a complete league shutdown pushed NBA owners to come up with a strategy to advocate for social injustices that matched with the league’s values (Williams, 2021, p. 266). Therefore, the NBSJC was formed with the mission to center public attention around bills promoting racial equality while engaging with elected officials. One of the organization's most profound impacts in its less than two year time span is the meeting between North Dakota Representative Kelly Armstrong and the NBA coalition. During this summit, the parties discussed a
recent bill regarding drug-offense-related disparities in federal sentencing. The topic would not have captured
the interest of a significant number of people otherwise; it was the popularity of the NBA that caused more
viewers to be aware of the meeting as they were interested in what their favorite players had to say, therefore
increasing the overall public awareness (Medina, 2020). Karen Bass, a Democratic Representative of California,
voiced her support for the NBSJC in an interview with *Sports Illustrated*. She stated, "They can help change the
consciousness and awareness of people. I mean, I just can't stress enough how vital of a role that is and how
significant it is for them to be involved" (Rosenberg, 2020, para. 9). Through this statement, Bass explains how
the NBSJC itself may not create direct changes regarding societal issues, but its presence can generate the
awareness necessary to lead to such changes.

The NBSJC has donated over $300 million to developing economic empowerment in the Black
community and worked diligently to raise interest in the 2020 election. Through the use of 23 team arenas
and practice facilities, the NBA provided minority groups with access to both learn about and use their voting
rights by partnering with organizations such as I Am A Voter, resulting in more than 20,000 individuals
registering to vote (Medina, 2020). Altogether, the NBSJC uses the NBA's platform to address issues of voting
rights, policing, and civil injustice, as its primary goal is to advocate for meaningful policy change. By placing
particular emphasis on providing minority groups with the fundamental tools needed to create change, such
as voter registration, the NBA promotes the growth and acceptance of new opinions, whose voices represent
the budding solidarity behind social development.

Lebron James, with a name even non-sport viewers recognize, has become a leading voice for social
justice. In correlation to the NBSJC's movement for fighting voter suppression amongst minority groups, James
formed his own organization, "More Than A Vote," whose sole purpose was to register low-income African
Americans as voters. The effort subsequently proceeded to gain support from another NBA legend, Michael
Jordan, who pledged to donate $10 million every year, despite straying away from political matters in the past
(Bunn, 2020, para. 4). James's natural talent on the court has allowed him to reach such a high level of
stardom that the leadership he possesses is respected by millions of fans who care about hearing his opinions
and this influences his basketball star colleagues, too. As James stated in an interview with *Time* regarding the
credibility of the NBA and its players when it comes to social matters, "people are finally starting to listen to
us- we feel like we're finally getting a foot in the door. How long is up to us. This is the time for us to finally
make a difference" (Bunn, 2020, para. 33). Through this affirmation, James confirms how major sports leagues
such as the NBA are able to spark broader conversations about political forces incapacitating the nation due to
players feeling comfortable enough to now speak out. As sports serve as a natural societal bonder and
promoter of conflict resolution in regards to athletic feats, the gradual fostering of social equality amongst
sporting-related organizations such as the NBA, should come as no surprise.
Besides focusing on voter inequality, Lebron James has also used his platform to address the Black Lives Matter movement through game-play attire. During his first post-COVID game, James wrote #Justice4BreonnaT on his sneakers to voice his support for the arrests of the three police officers who wrongfully killed an innocent victim, Breonna Taylor, sparking another match in the already ablaze battle against police brutality (McMenamin, 2020). James also wore a Black Lives Matter shirt during pregame warmups and held his fist up in solidarity with teammates, which received national media attention. James's continuous acknowledgment of and prominent stance on the BLM movement, as shown through countless interviews and game demonstrations, has only solidified public awareness and concern over such topics, as his athletic skills and the large fanbase they generated make him a prominent individual to listen to in media culture (Rosenberg, 2020).

The wide popularity of and influence possessed by the NBA and its players has allowed the organization to be featured in the media for a reason other than basketball: social activism. As many fans actively follow the organization's every move, the NBA acknowledged that it was necessary to use its platform to advocate for changes in society that were reflective of the league’s moral standings. Therefore, by creating the National Basketball Social Justice Coalition, the NBA has directed its fanbase’s attention to issues society has long overlooked. In doing so, the general public is now more aware of the prevalence of violence and racism in the nation, which has created the motivation necessary to create legislative change. As fans gravitate towards the opinions and behaviors of their favorite players, such as Lebron James, most notably, allowing players to voice concern over matters they believe in is bound to generate conversation regarding such problems.

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For this Heritage Unit essay, the writer argues that the values embodied by Saints Francis and Clare are particularly important to emulate as the COVID pandemic divides our country.

The Sanctity of Sacrifice

By Kathleen Murphy

Prof. Collins – Narrative: The Inside Story

When faced with a historical text, it is easy for people to assume that it has no meaning beyond what it meant years ago. It is upon looking deeper into the narratives, though, that connections can be drawn to modern times and important lessons are presented. The stories of Saint Clare and Saint Francis are still relevant today because they not only made major sacrifices for the greater good of those around them, but they overcame the differences that kept them apart. In a world that is riddled with controversy over mask mandates and the choice to get a COVID-19 vaccine, the ideals that Clare and Francis embodied regarding sacrifice and unity are needed to encourage people to make even small sacrifices in order to come together for the safety of those around them. The Francis Trilogy mentioned that some people “display the weapons of iniquity” when they don’t give a second thought to those around them (Thomas of Celano 23). Francis and Clare would be appalled by those today who only think of themselves and won’t make sacrifices for others or overcome their differences when it comes to looking out for each other by using personal protective equipment and getting vaccines.

Francis and Clare both made major sacrifices when it came to not only their material belongings, but also their lifestyles and the way they acted. Francis grew up comfortably and carelessly. As Thomas of Celano stated, “Maliciously advancing beyond all of his peers in vanities, he proved himself a more excessive inciter of evil and a zealous imitator of foolishness” (23). He was raised by vain parents, who passed this predilection for vanity and greed on to him. Even with his extravagantly materialistic upbringing, Francis was said to be a kind person. And eventually, he was able to overcome the way he was raised to live a life in accordance with God’s will. Although Francis’s conversion was more drastic, Clare also experienced a radical change in the plans set for her life. She was raised with the expectation that she would get married to better her family’s wealth and status, but like Francis, she, too, made a great sacrifice by leaving everything she had behind. Something notable about Clare’s sacrifice was when she escaped her home in the middle of the night to join Francis and the other friars, she had her hair cut off to signify that she could no longer marry. For a woman at that time, this was an act of rebellion. She left the way of life she was brought up to respect and abandoned the life her family had planned for her to become a servant of God.

There are clear connections between the sacrifices Clare and Francis made and the sacrifices people should make today in the age of COVID-19. Many people don’t want to give up some of their autonomy and
receive the vaccine or wear a mask to protect their community. It is common to hear in the news today people use the phrase “my body my choice” to oppose getting vaccinated. Making a small sacrifice to get a vaccine or wear a mask around others is a way to care for those around you, and an action like this would be strongly encouraged by Francis and Clare. They embody what sacrifice is, and people today could benefit from learning about and appreciating what they did. In their time, they left behind everything they had to serve others and thus cared for the greater good of those around them. Today, we have a duty to protect others. While wearing a mask or getting vaccinated may not be as big of a sacrifice as those of Francis and Clare, taking these precautions demonstrates the ideal of loving thy neighbor that they lived by.

Although they had common beliefs about sacrifice and service, Francis and Clare didn’t always share a common vision. As Sister Margaret Carney points out, they came “from very different social classes. They not only [did] not see one another as equals, they [saw] one another as enemies” (29). While it did take a while for them to become brother and sister in Christ, in doing so, they were able to overcome the ways in which they were raised. When the two put their differences aside and set out to follow a common cause, they were able to make much more significant contributions than if they had set out on the journey alone. The actions of Francis and Clare stressed the importance of unifying in order to overcome differences. When Clare joined with the friars to follow Francis’s mission, Carney said that she functioned “as peer and sister, not as property or servant” (35). The group was not concerned with status or wealth as the larger society at the time was; instead of focusing on differences, they placed more emphasis on what united them as a whole. Their “commitment,” Carney explains, was “to change the way that people related to each other, and they replaced the labels of social class with beautiful words, ‘brother/sister’” (37). The way that Francis and Clare behaved when they dedicated their lives to a common cause is something that people today could learn a lot from.

The COVID-19 pandemic is something that people need to protect themselves and others against. How they go about that, though, is where conflicts can arise. Vaccines and mask mandates have become an excuse for people to exaggerate their differences, and thus people have become divided when they should be united. These issues have become politically hot topics, and many people argue about them just for the sake of arguing. It doesn’t seem to be often considered in these debates that the measures are there for the safety of everybody, and that the pandemic is something that can affect anyone, regardless of political standing. It would be a positive thing if everyone, not just Christians, learned from the examples of Francis and Clare and the ways in which they put aside their differences and worked for the common good. They teach us that we are all sisters and brothers; nobody is more worthy or entitled than others. Just like these historical figures, people today need to unify in order to protect each other and overcome the tragic consequences of the pandemic.
The stories of the lives of Francis and Clare are immensely important, not only due to their historical significance, but because of what they teach us about life. Their narratives provide a basis for understanding how people should treat each other, and the lessons gleaned from their lives can be applied to many different present-day conflicts. Their sacrifices and overcoming differences for the common good apply especially to the ways in which people need to care for each other in the age of COVID-19. All humans could learn something from the examples of Francis and Clare, who would agree that unity and sacrifice are more important than self-indulgence and selfishness.

Works Cited
In this well-researched paper, the writer interweaves personal testimony with popular and scholarly sources to highlight the inaccurate and damaging depiction of chronic illnesses in popular fiction and films. She argues that it is crucial to change the narrative to tell stories about people, not patients, for the mental and physical well-being of those being represented.

Patients, Not People: The Narrative of Chronic Illness as Examined Through Cystic Fibrosis

By Annabelle Neidl

Prof. Collins - Narrative: The Inside Story

Life with a chronic illness, which can already make day-to-day living difficult, is not made any easier by society’s response to that illness. The fictional narratives of conditions like cystic fibrosis (CF) depicted in popular media are often riddled with inaccuracy and fail to capture the wide range of experiences that those living with a chronic illness can have. Not only are these narratives inaccurate, they are also imitative of one another rather than the actual lived experiences of the people they claim to represent, such as myself. These narratives simultaneously romanticize and dramatize cystic fibrosis, defining characters by their illness rather than who they are outside of it. In reality, our story is not always a tragic one. We live despite our illness, not for it. This, however, is rarely the case in our on-screen depictions; our so-called representation is just a depressing recreation of what writers think we look like and want to show rather than how we actually live with CF. This misrepresentation is not just unacceptable from a factual standpoint, it also negatively affects the mental and physical health of those living with chronic illness. When one only sees themself reflected in media that fails to recognize them as a real person, their perception of themself and their illness may become unhealthy, and that may lead to problems with their actual, physical health. Popular media’s current depiction of chronic illness is not only inaccurate and inauthentic, it actively hurts the people being misrepresented.

In order for one to understand why the fictional narrative of cystic fibrosis is flawed, one must first understand cystic fibrosis itself. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, CF is a progressive, genetic disease present in less than 100,000 people worldwide (“About Cystic Fibrosis”). For someone to inherit CF, both of their parents must have a mutation in their CFTR (cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator) gene, which then prevents the CFTR protein from working properly. This affects the lungs and pancreas. The airways in our lungs are clogged, which may lead to infection or respiratory failure. On a day-to-day basis, many people with CF experience excess coughing or shortness of breath. The pancreas is also clogged, which prevents digestive enzymes from absorbing important nutrients. Before the 1980s, this was a death sentence because many people with CF did not live to see their 20s. Today, however, the average life expectancy is 41, and even this fails to account for the drastic leaps in technological and medicinal progress that have appeared in recent years (“About Cystic Fibrosis”).
Despite each new miracle drug and added year, those who are born with CF live in a different temporal narrative than their healthy counterparts. Writer Daniel J. Schubert explores this in his essay "Temporal Assumptions: Aging With Cystic Fibrosis," in which he compiles the experiences of many different CF narrators. For most people, he says, it is “the onset of illness” that “brings an awareness of, or a falling into, time” (Schubert 268). But when you have a chronic condition like cystic fibrosis, there is no onset of illness and therefore no “falling” into awareness. Rather, we are born into time. From an early age, the doctors’ appointments, medical treatments, and bottles of pills create a certain impression on us. CF naturally becomes incorporated into how we lead our daily lives, and this self-awareness can manifest in many different ways. Those who experience more severe symptoms, such as frequent hospitalization may “live one day at a time” (Schubert 270). Others, such as myself, who are lucky enough to experience very few severe symptoms, may simply have a strict adherence to rules: I take my pills on time (usually), always call my doctor when I am sick, avoid touching dirt, and so on. However, all of this is not to imply that our entire lives are lived solely for our illness—quite the opposite, in fact. CF patients like myself “have not had a future interrupted by an illness,” but rather “an illness interrupted ... by a future” (Schubert 270). This is our victory over inevitability. We live, and we do so for as long as we can.

Most screenwriters, however, fail to find the critical balance between being a person with a future and being a person with a chronic illness. Hollywood’s refusal to represent authentic illness and disability narratives is not something new, and it is certainly not limited to cystic fibrosis. Across medium, genre, and disease, illness is an easily exploitable subject for quick drama. This, of course, is not limited to film—sick lit, or literature about sickness, has existed for decades, featuring examples such as The Fault in Our Stars (2012) by John Green and Five Feet Apart (2018) by Rachael Lippincott. But it is the blockbusters, rather than the New York Times Best Sellers they are often based on, that have cemented this trend in popular culture. With widespread popularity, however, comes cliches and stereotypes. Screenwriters reference the standard set by fictional works rather than those who have lived the experience they are attempting to portray.

ABC News journalist Marc Lallanilla argues that cancer is an easy target for screenwriters “scouting around for a slow and tragic death,” and as such, an oft-exploited subject in Hollywood. Many films, novels, and TV shows use cancer as a “dramatic ploy” that the protagonist must reckon with (Lallanilla). Rarely do these films acknowledge that most forms of cancer are treatable, or that the success rates for such treatment can be high; in Hollywood, cancer is a death sentence. This is true in The Fault in Our Stars when one of the protagonists falls victim to the sudden return of his cancer. The other protagonist’s fate is left unresolved; her death neither confirmed nor denied, though this unsatisfactory and unhappy ending is not an inspiring break from tradition, either. The Fault in Our Stars helped to popularize sick lit, and its film counterpart helped to establish sick lit cinema. As such, it helped set this standard in Hollywood. Films like Brian’s Song and Terms of
*Endearment*, though less popular with teenagers and young adults, have also contributed. While these movies may serve as representation, they still fuel anxiety and spread misinformation. The crux of the issue is that screenwriters believe “people doing well doesn't make a good story,” and as such, follow the standard rather than exploring new, less fatalistic ideas (Lallanilla).

Given this context, it should be no surprise that representations of cystic fibrosis often make the same mistake. *Five Feet Apart*, another novel turned film, is one of the most egregious examples of this. The movie is centered around two teenagers who have been hospitalized as a result of their cystic fibrosis: Stella, who is on the waiting list for a lung transplant, and Will, who is undergoing a medical trial in hopes of combating a bacterial lung function. All CF patients are required to stay six feet apart, or else risk exchanging dangerous bacteria, but the two fall in love and conspire to break the rules. When this film first debuted in 2019, many people with cystic fibrosis were unimpressed. Reporter Erika Smith interviewed audience members with cystic fibrosis to get their take on the film’s mistakes. The film’s most obvious flaw, as indicated by many of the interviewees, is no stranger to sick lit cinema—the romanticization of chronic illness. As “CFer” Jenn Whinnem describes it, cystic fibrosis is a fatal illness that can be “isolating, embarrassing, and at times, downright terrifying” (qtd. in Smith). And yet even as the film has its protagonists romantically admiring each other’s surgical scars and commiserating over the struggles of living with chronic illness, it refuses to depict “how hard it is to breathe and how self-conscious one might be. There's a type of shame . . . because it's not normal for one to cough as many times or that hard” (qtd. in Smith). Cystic fibrosis is gross. The severe lung problems we have (as well as pancreatic problems, though those are ignored almost entirely) are caused by an overabundance of mucus. It blocks the large and small airways of our lungs. We—especially those of us who are in critical condition—cough. In that same vein, research provided by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation shows that 90% of CF patients have digestive issues, again caused by an excess of mucus (“The Digestive Tract”). With all of these problems, come many, many bottles of pills. However, if one were to watch *Five Feet Apart*, they may very well think CF’s only symptoms are ambiguous lung ailments and looking attractively malnourished. We, the audience, know they are sick—sick enough to be hospitalized—but we are never confronted with the reality of that situation. Instead, we are shown the most watered-down, palatable version of cystic fibrosis that the screenwriters could provide.

This is deeply tied to another one of *Five Feet Apart’s* most glaring issues: marketing. According to Smith, neither this film nor the book it was based on were written for people with cystic fibrosis; they were written to be what is referred to as pity porn for teenage audiences. Due to its medical inaccuracies and poor representation, *Five Feet Apart* fails to act as educational material for those wishing to understand what daily life is like for those with CF. The only time *Five Feet Apart* is unflinching in its presentation of cystic fibrosis is in death. The film, for all its reluctance to say or do anything groundbreaking or authentic, is more than willing to
kill off the precious few examples of characters with CF that we, the cystic fibrosis community, have. Stella’s best friend, Poe, another hospitalized CF patient, dies, and his death is used to fuel her and Will’s destructive romance. Will himself only has one month left to live when the film ends. Again, this grim depiction comes not from a place of commiseration with the cystic fibrosis community, but rather, a desire for easy marketing. Smith notes that one now-deleted tweet of the trailer, which was a part of the film’s social media campaign, was captioned “we’re not crying, you are,” which is not only a transparent indication of the film’s purpose, but also deeply unsettling (qtd. in Smith). The social media marketing campaign was misguided in other ways, as well. Multiple influencers were hired to advertise the film by comparing the six feet apart rule to their own long-distance friendships, which, while not as blatantly offensive as the tweet previously mentioned, is still disappointing. The delicacy, authenticity, and respect that chronic illnesses like cystic fibrosis should be handled with is completely absent in both the film’s direction and in its marketing.

The key issue is that screenwriters fail to recognize chronically ill people as people. Rather than write a complex character, they write characters like Stella and Will, who have absolutely no illusion of personhood. They were written to be sick in a romantic, pitiable way, and that is all they are. What little personality they do have is problematic; for example, they are rebellious, but only in relation to their life-threatening illness. Stella’s nurse, Barbara, wants to keep the two apart because the last CF romance she witnessed killed both teenagers involved. The protagonists’ affair is made doubly dangerous by the fact that Stella is in critical condition waiting for her lung transplant, and Will is carrying a contagious bacterial infection that has pushed him to the point of hospitalization. This illustrates yet another character trait we can observe, again in relation to their chronic illness: irresponsibility. Stella’s one hobby outside of languishing in her hospital bed is making YouTube videos, though those, too, are about cystic fibrosis. The film does allow Will a passion for art, but with so much of his and Stella’s screen time devoted to either complaining about cystic fibrosis or dying from it, the brief taste of complex characterization is hardly impressive. The irony of Five Feet Apart is that no matter how desperately the characters fight to have “an illness interrupted by a future,” their ill-conceived romance is ultimately pointless so long as the writers impose upon them “a future interrupted by an illness.” That is the ultimate narrative. Their entire personalities and lives outside of their CF are put on hold so that they may suffer for the sake of the story. They are hospital patients, not people.

Despite all of this- the romanticization, marketization, inaccuracy, and failure to find balance in CF representation- Five Feet Apart is not universally disliked. In his article on Five Feet Apart, Brad Dell, who has cystic fibrosis, argues that representation is representation, regardless of some of the “insensitive, ignorant, and ineffective” choices that were made during the film’s marketing campaign (qtd. in Smith). Similarly, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation stated that the organization is “hopeful that the movie will provide a positive opportunity to increase awareness” (“Five Feet Apart”). Others, though, such as CF patient Elsie Tellier, argue
that “we shouldn’t have to settle for bad representation,” regardless of intent (qtd. in Smith). Although that statement was written regarding *Five Feet Apart* specifically, this issue is not at all exclusive to characters with CF; chronic illness is often treated this way by screenwriters and studios. A character cannot simply exist with chronic illness and if they do, their messier symptoms are ignored for a majority of the runtime until the writers deign to acknowledge them. Having realized this, one naturally raises an important question: is there an example of media that manages to portray Cystic Fibrosis without fault—a perfect example that can encompass the unique experience of every chronically ill person? No. While the narrative of cystic fibrosis will always contain some consistencies, as outlined by Schubert’s “Temporal Assumptions,” we are all individual people. In fact, some of the examples critiqued above that I found no connection with may encapsulate the feelings and experiences of select individuals out there, and that is perfectly fine. Unfortunately, almost every CF narrative seems to appeal to this very specific, often inaccurate, experience, which is simply not fair to those of us who want authentic representation.

This false narrative is not only unfair, but also actively harmful to the mental and physical health of those living with cystic fibrosis. Leventhal’s Common Sense Model (CSM), is a method of understanding a patient’s response to their illness. The theory proposes that “illness perceptions directly influence coping strategies, which in turn influence outcomes” (Huston and Houk 271). Essentially, someone’s cognitive representation of their illness—whether it be chronic or terminal—affects how that illness may develop. This is determined by “five main cognitive domains,” including identity, timeline, consequences, cause, and “perceived controllability or curability,” as well as emotional perceptions, which is not a cognitive domain (Huston and Houk 270). One study, conducted by the University of Georgia, compared how youth with diabetes and youth with sickle cell disease fared when examined under the CSM model. They discovered that young adults with positive perceptions of their diabetes would often “habitually link discussion of symptoms and negative emotions with solutions” while young adults with negative perceptions of their illness were more likely to link their symptoms to negative consequences (Huston and Houk 270). Essentially, their cognitive representation of their chronic condition would partially determine their mental health in relation to that illness.

Another study conducted by the Open University of The Netherlands examined how the CSM model affected not only a person’s mental health, but their physical health, as well. This study focused specifically on how women with breast cancer were impacted by their own cognitive representations. Through the testimony of 119 different women, it was determined that:

Patients who view their illness as a condition with serious symptoms and consequences, patients who believe their illness is chronic and patients who consider their illness uncontrollable were found to report worse physical and mental health than those who believed the opposite (Lechner et al. 849).
The study also found that in order for the subjects’ health to improve, they needed to have developed healthy coping strategies. This is in line with the study performed by the University of Georgia’s findings concerning the link between positive cognitive representations and the subjects’ willingness to look for healthy solutions. Clearly, how one perceives their condition has a very real effect on their physical health. But what creates that perception?

While someone’s real-life experiences are absolutely integral to how they construct their cognitive representations, their representation on-screen also has a part to play. One 2012 study from the European Society for Medical Oncology suggests that fictional depictions of cancer are too fatalistic. This particular disease is a popular target for screenwriters; out of the 82 films examined by researchers, 63 percent featured characters who were killed by their cancer (Preidt). Often, “the ill person doesn't get over the disease and his death is somehow useful to the plot's outcome," which directly mirrors the death of Poe in Five Feet Apart (Preidt). It is his death that inspires Stella to eventually flee the hospital with Will, ignoring her waiting lung transplant in the name of teen love; he is an inciting incident, rather than a character. Researchers participating in the study noticed that “this pattern is so strongly standardized that it persists in spite of real progress of treatments," illustrating how widespread this unfortunate standard is (Preidt). The issue is that chronically ill characters in the media are all too often just patients, not people. Our presence in the narrative is justified by tragedy. However, the reality is that we spend our entire lives contradicting that tragedy. We live despite it, not for it. It is hurtful and depressing, then, to see the few fictional representations of cystic fibrosis we have disregard that narrative. Furthermore, it becomes difficult for me and other chronically ill people like me to not internalize that much more popular narrative standard into our own cognitive perceptions. It is difficult to resist “a future interrupted by an illness” when that appears to be our only option.

Cystic fibrosis presents itself in many different ways, and I am one of the lucky people who does not yet need a breathing tube, lung transplant, or hospital bed. I go to class, eat junk food for lunch, and stay out late with my friends like any other eighteen-year-old, and then I pop about twelve different pills in my mouth and slip on my doctor-prescribed SmartVest to make sure my lungs and liver will still work in ten years. Those two aspects of me coexist. My life and my inevitable death are ever-present in my mind. Are some days harder than others? Certainly. Am I the only example of life with Cystic Fibrosis? Of course not. I am not demanding that screenwriters throw out every CF or chronic illness narrative that revolves around the illness itself, explores mortality, or has dark themes. However, we- people with Cystic Fibrosis- need variation in the characters who portray us. Furthermore, those characters need to be written with medical accuracy in mind. Films like Five Feet Apart do not serve as representation, but rather as a reinforcement of unrealistic, negative cognitive perceptions of our illness. The continued creation of disappointing films such as this could have genuine consequences not only for those in the cystic fibrosis community, but for people with chronic illness.
as a whole. We need representation that is not focused entirely on a tragedy we are already intimately familiar with and painfully tired of. The crux of my complaint is this: I have spent many late nights staring at my ceiling thinking about my mortality. I have spent far more late nights staring at my ceiling thinking about my homework. I would like to see more characters who do the same.

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Heritage Adapting as Identity Evolves

By Anna A. Patel

Prof. D'Souza - Heroes

Heritage is more than passing down traditions, cultures, and objects. Moreover, it is not merely history because it lives on in the present and will continue into the future. Heritage involves ideas and elements that shape identities and have an impact on our morality. Children are brought up with family traditions that have been passed down for generations and experiences that are building blocks for establishing and developing morals. As they mature into adulthood, an individual will also make personal choices regarding what they will take from their heritage and what they will leave behind. Beginning in childhood, individuals will be exposed to a plethora of heroes as they have become a part of everyday culture. Whether they be comic book superheroes or ordinary people, these heroes shape a person’s perception of life itself and how to live it. And as one gets older, the lens with which they see the world changes. Clare and Francis experienced such changes during their lifetime as both pulled away from the environment they were raised in and flourished by creating a new way of life for themselves. This is also demonstrated in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” in which one prisoner changes his way of thinking and tries to get other prisoners to do the same. The new view enables the prisoner to explore and add to his formerly established ideas and heritage. This display of courage on the part of Francis, Clare, and Plato’s prisoner to reshape their heritage is what gives power to the individual and further enables them to become heroes. The way an individual adapts their own heritage contributes significantly to them becoming heroes themselves and ultimately having a profound influence on others.

In the complete darkness, confined in a cave, in chains, and facing a wall, there is not much life to live other than staring into the darkness. This is a place where nobody is a hero and a prisoner has no influence over others. In the “Allegory of the Cave,” Plato illustrates an environment in which prisoners share the heritage of unenlightenment that has been instilled in each prisoner. Plato shifts the scene to one with the possibility of liberation when “one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light” (209). Although at first the light blinds the prisoner, he eventually gains not only his sight but insight into the lies he had believed. When he goes back to the cave, he is the only person who knows of the light, and the truth about the shadows on the wall. In this allegory, the prisoners represent people with no understanding of reality, while the freed prisoner embodies a philosopher who confronts the lies and wants to bring others the same knowledge he has acquired. By not keeping the truth to himself, the
philosopher gives the prisoners an opportunity for actualization and a chance at intellectual freedom. Even though the prisoners do not accept the truth, the story exposes readers to the power of truth and how everyone should strive to be enlightened. To do so, a person must reject deceptive reality and create a new path for oneself by changing their perceptions and evolving from ignorance.

This new path that the released prisoner creates is not only for himself, but for anyone who would like to follow him into enlightenment. He breaks away from the culture of the cave full of uneducated people and ignorance by gaining insight into the truth. The freed prisoner’s new knowledge sheds light on the darkness. There is not much diversity of thought in the original setting, and if no change had been made, there would have been no room for advancement. The allegory conveys a message about the truth and it articulates the possibility of becoming enlightened. The prisoners have a common heritage of believing in all that is observable, but the freed prisoner breaks away from that heritage. This highlights the importance of not conforming to what was taught about life in the past. Being able to alter one's thinking and expand one's knowledge allows for growth. The prisoners are confined to a system that does not allow for growth; however, when one gains new knowledge, that can create great change. Without the ability to stand up and change the course of one's life, much cannot happen. The freed man would have continued to live cluelessly if he had not accepted the new knowledge. He left behind wrongful convictions after he was exposed to the truth, thus bringing him a new form of life.

As they grow up, children gain knowledge and an understanding of morals from their family, which provides the foundation of their identity. If reared by arrogant and vain parents, children will likely become arrogant and haughty. In a materialistic environment where people are raised thinking they are superior, children will learn to disrespect others as a result of their sense of superiority. Francis of Assisi was raised in such an environment where materialism was valued more than humanity. He did not know any better because this was all he was taught, “For a flawed tree grows from a flawed root” (Thomas of Celano 23). Children absorb values from the actions of their parents. If parents do not set good values, the children will grow to be similar to their parents. This results in the children being nurtured to mimic their immoral environment and lack the ability to challenge their fostering.

Francis bathed in ignorance and futility, but after falling sick and being on the brink of death, Francis’ way of life was challenged by a vision from God. Although Francis attempted to ignore the meaning of the visions, he began to feel the effects of change. Francis grew bored of the once admirable beauty of luscious goods and could no longer resist God’s plan. Still, Francis found it hard to leave his former lifestyle. But he wanted more, and he desired “to possess wisdom, which is better than gold, and to acquire understanding, which is more precious than silver” (Thomas of Celano 30). Francis’s dedication to ascetic poverty is noteworthy as he hailed from a life of privilege; he rejected materialistic society and went on to live a spiritual
life. Even when his father bound him, Francis did not succumb to the blindness of greed as his father had. Francis rejected the heritage of only seeing value in gold, and instead focused on the suffering of the poor. The contrasting behavior of Francis and his father highlights how their heritage diverged. Francis became fully devoted to God. Francis’s willingness to diverge from how he was raised and to crusade for a new way of life allowed him to live a life of service and humility. The fearless action of leaving his past life allowed Francis to establish a deeper connection with God and his community. Through this transformation, Francis left behind his past vanity and flourished with a new identity that propelled him to influence many Christians.

Before his transformation, service and humility were not a significant part of Francis’s identity. When a civil war broke out in Assisi, he participated. The source of this turmoil was the desire of the growing merchant class for more of a say in trade and government. The chaos was fought to end the divide between the middle class and the aristocracy. Many noble families fled in fear and lived in exile; Clare’s family was one of them. Although Francis took part in the war as a young man, he was a changed man a decade later. The morals that he lived by had evolved, and this caught the attention of Clare, who, “very much long[ed] for the simplicity and freedom that [put] Francis among the working people of the city, a group of people with whom she... had almost no contact other than the servants in her household” (Carney 32). Inspired by Francis’s transformation from a vain individual to a kind soul, Clare did not want to live a lavish lifestyle, and the exposure she had to those who were poor opened her eyes to a world in need of change.

The introduction to a new way of life or a new perspective often awakens a desire in a person to break away from their previous way of life. Clare rejected her parents’ expectations to marry. She wanted the liberation of helping those in need. Clare did not give in; she resisted, and ultimately changed her way of life, as “[h]er beautiful dress [was] exchanged for a plain woolen tunic, her hair [was] cut short in the manner of women consecrated for life to God’s service. A short veil to signify that she is no longer eligible for marriage [was] placed on the shorn head” (Carney 33). Clare’s radical actions in breaking away from the heritage involving expectations for women signifies how Clare became a hero for many other women at the time. Clare broke away from those expectations and followed her desire to be solely devoted to God, which was revolutionary, as very few women from privileged families did that. Clare’s drive to practice her devotion in such a way by giving up her status demonstrates that no matter what class, a woman can be faithful to God; this makes her a role model, a hero to women who are otherwise raised to believe that they have to live a domestic life. Clare’s life had been planned out by her parents, but Clare’s brave rejection of that way of life set a precedent for women who joined her in her calling. Clare broke away from the expectations and created a new path toward addressing poverty and building compassion and humility.

Many will disagree, of course, on the grounds that changes made to one’s heritage are not as crucial as heritage that is taught from a young age and wholly accepted without any changes. Some may argue that
Francis of Assisi did not adapt his heritage, and instead was simply doing the duty of a good Christian. However, Francis and his followers did something that many Christians did not: they treated the lepers as human beings. In the Middle Ages, lepers had to abide by a set of rules. For example, they had to “wear bandages to cover their sores and [they] carried a bell to warn people that they were coming. They weren’t even allowed inside churches” (“How Did Doctors Treat Leprosy?”). Not only was the disease contagious, many Christians believed it resulted from sin, and therefore the lepers were viewed with abhorrence. In contrast, Francis “cleaned the lepers’ bodies, dressed their wounds, and treated them as human beings, not as refuse to be fled from in horror” (Rohr). Being in contact with lepers was revolutionary. The Catholic Church did not even accept lepers; yet, Francis fearlessly rebelled against that ideology. Francis’s ideology involved serving his fellow humans without discrimination—a belief system where everyone was seen as equal.

Tenets of heritage passed onto a person from birth make it hard for many to “leave familiar things behind [because] things once instilled in the spirit are not usually weakened” (Thomas of Celano 25). Although it is difficult to leave the comforts of familiarity, it can be done. As heritage gets passed down, each generation revises it. These adaptations are necessary because heritage must change with the times. Individuals reform elements of their heritage and in doing so shape their identities, enabling some to become heroes. It is an individual's will to change customs that allows heroes to emerge.

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For this essay assignment, students were required to write a first-person narrative that connected one of their own experiences to concepts of social justice. The author’s voice is conveyed clearly and with conviction.

The Challenges of Being Open About Sexuality

By Ella Philbin

Prof. D’Souza - Heroes

For a majority of my life, I was surrounded by heteronormative stereotypes and the idea that I, like all other women, would end up in a happy relationship with a nice man. In the cardboard cutout suburbia where my home is located, high school football stars are idolized and most families consist of generations of local high school alumni, watching their children attend their alma mater decades after them. On the surface, the culture of my hometown was about people borrowing sugar from one another, but that benign image was underlyingly filled with intolerance. Adults felt uncomfortable with those different from them and passed prejudice down to their children. These negative views concerning diversity surfaced in kids I grew up with as early as sixth grade, when a friend of mine had begun dating someone of the same gender. At this point in life, dating consisted of holding hands and passing notes; regardless, whispers followed them around the halls. From the way the first same sex couple in my middle school was treated, it became clear that the children I attended school with had already begun to adapt hate into their everyday actions. Anything that was not what was viewed as normal became grounds for heckling and judgment. There was a fixation on anyone who did not conform to stereotypical gender roles that I had believed were left behind decades ago. Against my better judgment, I conformed in order to avoid unwanted attention by prescribing to the standards of misogynistic sports stars and women who ignored their own self worth in order to appease the male gaze. The fear of judgment closeted me for over six years, and this showed the power the people in my hometown, specifically in high school, had. As the majority, heterosexual people possess a privilege that can cause those who are not heterosexual or cisgender to be afraid to live as their true selves due to the fact that heteronormative stereotypes are considered our society’s norm.

Throughout high school, my personal goal was to make myself completely invisible and forgettable. Walking through the hallways with air pods in my ears helped avoid conversation, and my small circle of close friends mostly just received the occasional wave. I was attentive in classes and consistently focused on the work to drown out the voices of insanely ignorant classmates. I was completely successful in going unnoticed. I was not as successful at suppressing the confusion regarding my sexuality. Ignoring and suppressing my feelings led to an overwhelming fear concerning my identity. “Who am I?” was a question that I could not answer because I had no idea. With the lack of sense of self, came hopelessness and a feeling of worthlessness.
that made me miserable. A feeling of suffocation plagued me. I had never felt more alone and alienated than I did at this point, even if I had avoided the public humiliation from vocalizing who I truly was.

Just as it felt that I had no purpose, one person completely changed my life for the better. My best friend sat me down and told me that she was bisexual. She was always fearless, so when she was sure of herself, she made it known to everyone that this was her truth. If people gave her looks or spoke about her, she held her head high and did not falter. Her bravery immediately made her my personal hero, but the fact is it should not have. What made her so heroic to me is how she handled the intolerance pointed at her because of her sexuality. Being who she was and being true to herself should have been accepted and respected, just as she had been before she made her sexuality known. It took me two years to follow in my best friend's footsteps and be true to myself. During those two years, though, I began to stop comparing myself to others in my school and started dressing how I wanted to dress. I began to do my makeup more boldly and dyed my hair outlandish colors. Once I had come into my sense of self, I mustered up the courage to publicly adopt the queer label, no matter what judgement followed. My classmates continued using ignorant language and invalidating the LGBTQ+ community. In a strange way, the prejudice ended up strengthening my sense of self and taught me that I must be happy with myself before trying to please the people around me.

The fear I felt about my identity relates to how privilege influences what is acceptable in society. Peggy McIntosh, in her essay, addresses a multitude of privileges, including those related to race, gender, and sexuality. In reference to the heteronormative privilege of those in heterosexual relationships, McIntosh writes, "I can travel... without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us" (80). It is clear that when a person has always experienced privilege, it may seem nonexistent, but its presence is very real, and is especially obvious to those who are disadvantaged. I benefit from white privilege and previously, while closeted, from heteronormative privilege. The overwhelming power of majority privilege has been shown in my life firsthand. Being in the minority in terms of sexuality made the threat of insults and discrimination an everyday occurrence, which relates to the story of Jeri in When the Stars Are Scattered. The name Jeri in the Somali language roughly translates to limpy. Since Jeri does limp, he is consistently reminded of his differences from the other kids due to his name. Jeri addresses his name while talking to Hassan about his disabilities and says, "You know, I really hated it when everyone started calling me ‘Jeri.’ It reminded me that I was different from everyone else... it’s part of who I am. I limp. But it’s only part of who I am” (qtd. in Jamieson and Mohamed 79). Similarly, those discriminated against based on sexuality are often called offensive names and subjected to stereotypes due to those names. Jeri chooses to be proud of and reclaim his name rather than see it through the eyes of those who use it in a derogatory way, which relates directly to both my own and my best friend's experience with negative gossip in our high school. While many may ignore discriminatory judgment, there is a power in acknowledging the things said about you and embracing them, even if they were
meant negatively to begin with. Taking the prejudicial criticism of people who have heteronormative privilege, and turning it into something positive displays confidence in one’s identity. Having confidence in your own identity works against societal boundaries, and over time, may cause a change in what society deems the norm.

I believe society will never fully accept LGBTQ+ couples until the majority understands heteronormative privilege and its influence. This can be reflected by many laws currently in place such as transgender people being prohibited from serving in the military. The singling out and alienating of citizens who are LGBTQ+ prevents people from truly understanding one another. Additionally, while there are unnecessarily demeaning laws in place, there is also a lack of protection laws, such as the lack of protection from hate crimes in states such as Alabama. The United States is anything but united in the support for the lives of its non-cishet citizens. While change in the past decade has been tremendous and pointed America in the right direction, intolerance of LGBTQ+ people in small suburbs like my own is still ever present through microaggressions and the lack of unconditional support. It is naive to believe all people will miraculously support the LGBTQ+ community if progressive laws sweep the nation, but it is practical to believe the next generation could be provided a more tolerant, safe, and accepting America if we work towards diminishing ignorance. Looking back on my own experiences, I wish I would not have been enveloped in fear about my identity for so long, but looking forward, I hope to see a change for the better. I hope the children taught hatred in my middle school grow and refrain from teaching this to their own children. I look forward to raising children who respect all people, regardless of sexuality, race, or gender. In many cases, intolerance is paired with ignorance and by diminishing ignorance, we can create a society that is more universally accepting.

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On the Question of the Teaching of History: An Inclusive Framework for 9th to 12th Grade

By Kiara Éléna Pierristil

Dr. Gibson - American Exceptionalism and Its Critics

According to the New York State Board of Education, the primary purpose of teaching Social Studies is “to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (“New York State Common Core Social Studies K-12 Frameworks”). In other words, the teaching of Social Studies serves to create critical thinkers and worldly citizens. To achieve that purpose, it is important to study the different communities in our country in an attempt to understand them and their lives. However, the study of disadvantaged groups should not be conveyed through the eyes of white males. History is best told from the mouths of those who have lived it. Therefore, the only way to fulfill the purpose of teaching history is to implement a curriculum that stays clear of indoctrination by introducing the points of view of the disadvantaged groups in our country.

Before expanding on the point of indoctrination and the way history ought to be taught, it is important that we first understand what history is. Wilfred M. McClay and John McBride, authors of A Teacher's Guide to Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story, wrote that “history is not the sum of the whole past. It is a selection, out of the expansive river of the past, like a carefully cropped photograph, organized wisely, and truthfully” (4). They also said that this careful selection of events “allows us to focus on a particular story, with particular objectives in mind” (McClay and McBride 4). McClay and McBride accurately point out that the teaching of history could never include the “whole past” (4). As a result, historians are free to incorporate and arrange facts in a way that supports their narratives. Most history textbooks integrate the same factual pieces of information, all assembled in a way that fits the white male perspective. This biased perspective does not serve to create well-rounded citizens. On the contrary, it only perpetuates white male prejudice. As teenagers learn about the events that have shaped America, they must learn from multiple narratives from members of various disadvantaged groups. Exposing high school students to a wide variety of narratives will allow them to form their own opinions.

The current Social Studies high school curriculum is extremely influenced by the New York State United States History and Government Regents Exam. Teachers base the content of their curriculum on the questions that they know will be on the test. People may wonder how teachers know which questions will be on the test. Melissa Amy Maestri, a professor at the University of Delaware, did an analysis of the New York
State United States History and Government Regents Exam in which she found that the exam has been asking a small number of questions about disadvantaged groups. From January 1998 to June 2005, she found that “an average of 1.2 questions were about women’s history, .50 questions about Native American history, .62 questions about Asian American history, and 3.7 questions about African American history” (Maestri 394). Because her analysis was published in 2006, one may argue that it is no longer relevant. However, the New York State United States History and Government Regents Exam still asks a small number of questions about certain groups of people. For the most recent five years the exam was administered, I found that an average of .015 questions have been about women’s history, .012 questions about Native American history, .016 questions about Asian American history, .070 questions about African American history, and .015 questions about Hispanic communities (“United States History and Government Regents Exams”). This shows that there has been a decrease in the number of questions about disadvantaged groups in recent years, which is counterproductive to producing well-informed students.

Along with asking a very small number of questions about those disadvantaged groups, the questions asked are about the same topics every year, with only a slight variation in the wording of the questions (Maestri 389-390). For example, the questions asked about Native Americans always relate to the topics of the French and Indian War, the Indian Removal Act, and the 19th century issues revolving around how Native Americans differed from white settlers. Since the education system is created in a way that leaves teachers no choice but to teach to the test, it is safe to assume that the lessons being taught in the classroom about the people in these disadvantaged groups are only centered around the same repetitive topics that are on the test. This way of teaching prevents the students from getting well-rounded and accurate knowledge of such people and their contributions to both American history and American society today. It also portrays the people in the marginalized groups as nothing more than the trauma they have suffered. It prevents students from creating their own opinions about the role that the government has played in the making of the country and in the suffering of marginalized people. Furthermore, it gives students a limited view of each group, which will lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Not only is this dangerous for the people in those groups, but it is also dangerous for those who are not. By not learning of the other roles that people in this group have played and the other injustices they have suffered, students will never be able to fully understand current issues and how to better support those who have been marginalized.

The best way to adequately prepare students for the future is to teach them an inclusive narrative history told from the perspective of the different groups that teachers are educating students about. For example, Native Americans are way more than the product of the Removal Act or the actions of President Andrew Jackson. They were not completely eradicated in the 19th century and their community today consists of multiple tribes with different values, customs and traditions. Therefore, the curriculum should integrate
elements of their lives and traditions after their relocation onto the reservations. The curriculum should also incorporate how the lives of Native Americans have been negatively impacted by the relocations to this day. Similarly, Japanese Americans are more than just their time spent in the internment camps. While it is important to acknowledge the past wrongdoings of the American government toward Japanese Americans, the curriculum should also include elements of their lives and culture. It should cover how Japanese culture has contributed to everyday American society. The history of African Americans is more than just the Civil Rights Movement, slavery, or Martin Luther King, Jr. While it is important to talk about those events and iconic figures, it is equally important to mention other, lesser-known contributions to American society and culture. The 1619 Project, while not perfect, provides some ideas about how the curriculum could integrate some lesser-known African American achievements. The curriculum should also include lessons about the LGBTQ+ community— the struggles they have faced and their accomplishments, along with the culture that they helped create.

In addition to teaching a more inclusive historical narrative, the curriculum should also strive to let go of its white washed perspective and adopt a more authentic voice. As of right now, there are too few first-hand accounts from the marginalized communities whose history is being taught. History is best told through the mouths of those who have lived it. Therefore, the social studies curriculum should include more primary sources from people in minority communities, for they alone can tell us about their own experiences. For example, on the topic of slavery, the curriculum should include narratives from people who used to be slaves. The experiences of slavery should not only be told from the point of view of the political elite and the members of the slave owners’ community. The curriculum could include books like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The hardships of the Native Americans during the Indian Removal should be told from the perspective of the Native Americans who made that terrible trek. They alone can properly tell us how deeply this government policy affected their lives. The curriculum should be adjusted to include *Family Stories from the Trail of Tears* taken from the Indian-Pioneer Papers Collection. It should include documentaries about women who attended the Seneca Falls Convention and first-hand accounts of those involved in the Women’s Suffrage Movement. It should include books like *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, which offers the history of the United States from the standpoint of some marginalized communities. These sources can easily be found and the books can be purchased online or at almost any bookstore. These simple adjustments are easy to make and the fact that they have not already been made shows just how much the history curriculum adheres to the white male perspective.

Many people have argued against an inclusive curriculum based on the concept of patriotism. Critics have said that topics such as slavery, racism, the Tulsa Massacre, Native American boarding schools, and other
harsh topics that highlight America’s past mistakes should not be discussed in the classrooms. They believe that teaching children about those topics in-depth will lead to children hating their country. Donald Trump in his speech at Mount Rushmore said that “our children are taught in school to hate their own country and to believe that the men and women who built it were not heroes, but that they were villains” (qtd. in Petrilli 178). On the opposite side, author Jonah Goldberg has said that “slavery’s resonance in America comes not from its evil but from the founders’ hypocrisy...nearly every civilization practiced slavery, but none claimed to believe that ‘all men were created equal’ and that ‘they are endowed by their creator with certain unreliable rights’” (qtd. in Petrilli 178). Although I understand their concerns, pride in one’s country should not be the main focus of history education. The teaching of history serves to ensure that future generations will abstain from repeating the mistakes of the past. These events along with the decisions made by the founding fathers when creating this country should be studied in depth in the classrooms. An alternative when teaching about the founding fathers would be to drop the hero and villain’s narrative altogether and embrace one that portrays the founders as intelligent human beings capable of greatness and also capable of making mistakes. The men and women who founded this country put in place a great, unprecedented system of government. However, they also made decisions that negatively impacted multiple communities and resulted in the suffering of millions. This kind of narrative is more truthful and it allows students to derive their own conclusions from the founders’ influence. Since patriotism should not be at the forefront of educators’ minds, this narrative along with the inclusion of times and events when America did not reach its highest aspirations should be taught, allowing students to make their own decisions.

The incorporation of material from marginalized groups into the curriculum should also be accompanied by a certification process to replace standardized testing. While the U.S. History and Government Regents Exam has caused substantial harm, the importance of testing children’s knowledge remains. To do so, schools could incorporate the model followed in International Baccalaureate classes. In this model, students write multiple reflective historical analyses about the marginalized groups they are learning about over the course of the year. They would keep all of those essays in a portfolio. The teachers would then assess the portfolios to see how the students' knowledge about the history of the U.S, the different groups in the country, and the government has grown over the course of the year. It would also empower the students to form and voice their own opinions and to develop their writing skills. This model is better than the Regents exam and resulting curriculum because it evaluates students’ understanding of history rather than their ability to memorize information.

Along with reflective essays, the students could create and present a research project at the end of the year. For their project, they could choose to focus on a time period, an event, or a person in history they feel deserves more in-depth study. The students could also be asked to present Supreme Court cases and
research how they affected the past and continue to impact the present. This technique would facilitate the growth of skills such as the ability to analyze, to gather essential and accurate information, to research, to create, to understand, and to apply the teachings of history to current events. For example, students could research how Black Codes, which were passed as a way to replace many of the elements of slavery, continue to affect the African American community today under the banner of misdemeanor charges. They could research the effect that the Indian Relocation Act has had on the Native American population to this day, or how the Roe v. Wade decision is now impacting families in this country. A research project is better than the U.S History and Government Regents exam because it will teach students how to develop a research paper, a prolonged activity that involves many critical thinking skills that will help shape students into well-rounded thinkers and engaged citizens.

The goal of history education is to create critical thinkers and world citizens capable of understanding and recognizing the path that our country has paved and the struggles that each marginalized community has faced. The way to achieve this mission is for our educators to be given the time and opportunities to present students with facts that equally highlight both the atrocities that this country has committed and its accomplishments. Educators should also present students with narratives that uplift the voices of people who have been marginalized and whose stories have been neglected by our current curriculum. The newly revised curriculum would encourage students to discuss the past alongside the present. The certification process would evaluate students’ ability to comprehend history, and not their ability to memorize facts. The result would be a generation of students who are knowledgeable about history and a community of engaged citizens like the founders had intended.

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Starting from a personal history standpoint, this research paper argues for the accurate inclusion of Asian Americans in high school curricula as a way to overcome harmful stereotypes and decrease anti-Asian sentiment, which would then allow Asian-American students to develop positive racial identities. Using templates from *They Say/ I Say* to introduce and explain quotations and to effectively incorporate a naysayer allows the author to fully develop her argument.

The “Model Minority” in Education

*By Michaela Pomposello*

*Dr. Lewis - Constructing Identity: Exploring the Self*

I could say that I am a proud Asian American, but it wouldn’t be true. I went to school in a small country town near Brunswick, New York, just outside of the city of Troy. I was just about the age of seven when I started to feel different, and out of place. Kids would ask me, “Where are you from?” and I would answer, “I’m from Clifton Park!” But then they would ask, “Where are you really from?” which would make me feel like an outsider, like I didn’t belong. No one else was being interrogated about where they came from. Instead of telling my parents, I kept silent. That was the beginning of rejecting my racial identity, rejecting a part of myself. The journey to accepting who I am was long and hard, but through the use of media sources that helped me to reconnect to my racial identity, I am starting to become a proud Asian American. To stop the ignorance that leads to racism against Asian Americans, we all need to come together and fight for their voices to be heard. Our educational system is the baseline for making changes to the way Asian American are treated. Currently, the educational system only presents a Eurocentric view instead of representing the melting pot of cultures that make up American society. Asian Americans are Americans and need to be represented in the school curricula. Providing a multicultural education which involves implementing different students' cultures would help combat the harmful effects of stereotypes, decrease the hate towards Asian Americans in the United States, and create an atmosphere that allows Asian American students to develop positive racial identities.

Asian Americans go through the educational system with various stereotypes in the forefront of their minds; the two main ones are the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotypes, which negatively affect their identities. As described by Lee (2020), the perpetual foreigner stereotype is how Asian Americans are seen as foreigners regardless of how long their families have been in the United States (p. 82). While the model minority stereotype seems more positive because it depicts Asian Americans as hardworking and successful, it denies that some Asian Americans struggle with societal barriers. It is also used as a political weapon to bring down other minorities while at the same time pitting them against each other (Lee, 2020, p. 85-86). These stereotypes negatively affect the development of Asian American youths’ racial identities. A high achieving Asian American high school student explained that “The [Whites] will have stereotypes, like we’re
smart... and sometimes you tend to be what they expect you to be and you just lose your identity... lose being yourself” (as cited in Lee, 2020, p. 81). In other words, Asian American students don’t feel like being smart is special and unique to them, as individuals; instead, they lose a sense of themselves and can’t separate their own uniqueness from the messages about the model minority stereotype that is projected onto them. Another account of the effects that the model minority has on Asian American identity development comes from Canwen Xu, a college student who attends Boise State University and presented a TED Talk about her experiences growing up Asian American. According to Xu:

> The truth is, Asian Americans play a strange role in the American melting pot. We are the model minority. Society uses our success to pit us against other people of color as justification that racism doesn’t exist. But what does that mean for us, Asian Americans? It means that we are not quite similar enough to be accepted, but we aren’t different enough to be loathed. We are in a perpetually gray zone, and society isn’t quite sure what to do with us. So they group us by the color of our skin. They tell us that we must reject our own heritages, so we can fit in with the crowd. They tell us that our foreignness is the only identifying characteristic of us. They strip away our identities one by one, until we are foreign, but not quite foreign, American but not quite American. (TEDx Talks, 2016, 6:48)

Xu is complicating matters further by explaining how society views Asian Americans as neither black nor white; instead, they are in a gray zone. And, as Xu said, Asian Americans are not seen as fully American nor fully foreign, which demonstrates the harm of the perpetual foreigner stereotype. Asian Americans feel this disconnect in the development of their identity because they are torn between the two opposing concepts, which seem like two separate worlds.

Currently, the University of Southern California has an online art exhibit that is geared toward debunking the model minority stereotype (Debunking the model minority myth, 2020). The exhibit used a combination of narratives and artwork or images to represent the stories of Asian Americans that showcase the emotional effects this stereotype has had on the racial identity development of Asian American students. A painting done by a student artist depicting the model minority stereotype is used to pit Asian and Black Americans against each other. The anonymous Japanese American student artist states, “My ancestors had to go through hell and then pretend it didn’t happen. Now Asian Americans have to deal with this term unfairly and act a certain way (studious, quiet, smart, nerdy) or else they’re looked down upon. This term and its history must be publicized so that people can be educated that its purpose is to divide POC [people of color] and pit us against each other” (Debunking the model minority myth, 2020). The artist is expressing her frustration with how these stereotypes depict Asian Americans as one identity, and if they stray away from those characteristics, they are seen as failures. She also mentions that the model minority stereotype is used to pit people of color against each other and to showcase this deficit written into our history we need to
change our education curricula. On top of that, we need to educate ourselves to help get rid of the anti-Asian hatred that exists in our society. Another Asian American artist used digital art to express how she felt about failing to embody the model minority stereotype. The anonymous student artist said, "I think in the realm of education, seeing an Asian student not succeeding was a fall from grace. There was definitely a time in my life where I thought I didn’t deserve help…. I was expected to be above racism. It was only after I almost took my own life that I realized that it wasn’t my fault. There’s a reason why APIDA [Asian Pacific Islander Desi American] students have one of the highest suicide rates in the country, and it all loops back to the model minority" (Debunking the model minority myth, 2020). In essence, these artists are expressing how the unrealistic standards that result from stereotypes have negative effects on Asian American students' mental health. When they find themselves struggling, they are too embarrassed to seek help and instead internalize these feelings of failure, which dramatically impacts the formation of self-worth and a positive sense of racial identity.

The unrealistic standards that Asian American students are held to puts them at serious risk for unnoticed mental health issues and this affects their ambitions. Hsu (2022) reports on a book by Erin Khue Ninh that documented extreme cases where Asian Americans assumed the identities of successful students even though they were not, in fact, doing well in school. The book “tells the stories of scammers, grifters, and impostors—Asian Americans follow high-pressure, expectation-heavy paths that can lead down darker alleys of faux accomplishment. There is Azia Kim, who masqueraded as a Stanford undergrad for months. Elizabeth Okazaki did something similar there, posing as a graduate student, attending class, and sleeping at a campus lab” (Ninh, as cited in Hsu, 2022). In making these comments, Ninh urges us to acknowledge the damage that stereotypes have on Asian Americans, especially those who can’t keep up with the unrealistic academic standards. These two students show the extreme measures that some Asian Americans are willing to take to fit the model minority stereotype even if it doesn’t benefit them. These academic risks showcase that we need to address these stereotypes where they begin, in our school system.

Some might dismiss the challenges that Asian American students face and deny that there is a need for inclusive education, which sometimes stems from their stance on the controversial issue of Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to the LA Times editorial board, “At the heart of critical race theory is the concept of systemic and institutional racism - the notion that racism isn’t an occasional aberration of individuals acting in biased or hateful ways, but entire systems that have built up over this nation's history that put people of color at a perpetual disadvantage and that will take purposeful action to remedy” (What critical race theory is - and isn’t - and why it belongs in schools, 2021). In other words, CRT addresses the societal disadvantage of marginalized groups due to racist laws embedded into our legal system, education system, health care system, etc. A common belief among those who oppose CRT is that the teaching of policies that were implemented
and negatively impacted POC rather than celebrating our achievements will cause students to hate their country. A statement by the governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, confirms this idea: “In Florida, we are taking a stand against the state-sanctioned racism that is critical race theory. We won’t allow Florida tax dollars to be spent teaching kids to hate our country or to hate each other” (Governor DeSantis announces legislative proposal to stop W.O.K.E. activism and critical race theory in schools and corporations, 2021). In other words, Governor DeSantis is arguing that teaching our students a more diverse and less Eurocentric curriculum will make them hate their country and divide children instead of bringing them together. Ultimately, though, this view is mistaken because educating people doesn't make them hate their country. Instead, it makes them have a better understanding of the nation’s history. That history is full of things to be proud of, but also full of mistakes and struggle, which help to show how we came to where we are in society today.

The current political climate in the United States is very polarized and full of hate. This creates an uneasy atmosphere for Asian American students and other fellow students of color because they are in the middle of a debate that determines if their racial identities will be integrated into the curricula. The importance of implementing multicultural education is that it allows students of color to see themselves in the outside world and gives them an identity to develop by making their history known. In short, it would allow students of color to feel represented in the curricula. Recent events related to the COVID-19 pandemic show how deeply rooted the negative stereotypes of Asian Americans are. The rapid increase of hate crimes committed against Asian Americans filled the news. Without representation in the curricula, Asian American students’ are suffering from the negative effects of racism. This hate pushed Illinois to be the first state to require the teaching of Asian American history (Petrella, 2021). State Representative Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz stated, “Teaching about that history, along with the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the contributions people of Asian descent have made to American history and culture, will lead to greater understanding, both for fellow Asian Americans and for others...Empathy comes from understanding, and we cannot do better unless we know better” (Gong-Gershowitz, as cited in Petrella, 2021). In making these comments, Gong-Gershowitz is urging us to see the importance of teaching a multicultural curriculum because it creates an educational system where students feel they have a place. This is especially important for Asian American students because they are constantly made to feel like foreigners in their own country. Therefore, requiring the teaching of Asian American history can help Asian American students feel respected as true Americans as well as help other students develop a better understanding of the struggles Asian Americans have overcome in their efforts to achieve the American Dream, which creates empathy and understanding of each other's history and background.

Asian American students need to be heard and not silenced. From my own experiences, Asian Americans are always in a weird limbo when it comes to being heard in our society. We aren’t discriminated
against in the blatant way that African and Latino Americans are, but we are mistreated with more subtle forms of racism. The racist comments are meant to be brushed off and forgotten, but the truth is that without education about these stereotypes and without Asian American history being taught in schools, Asian Americans will always feel like outsiders, like they don’t belong. Without that knowledge, they take on the identity of the model minority, leaving their true identities behind to fit the mold that has been created for them—a mold that has unrealistic standards and, in extreme cases, causes some to take their own lives. To prevent this and create a safe atmosphere for the formation of a positive racial identity for Asian American students in the United States, we need more inclusive curricula that represents all.

References


In this original analysis, the author weighs the influences of several philosophers, ultimately claiming that John Locke’s ideas, especially inalienable rights, primarily fueled the foundation of this nation. Standing strong in his claim, the author responds to counter arguments by detailing how Locke’s ideas most closely match America’s highest aspirations and thus continue to resonate today.

A Lockean Country: Its Past and Present
By Raiyaan Shaik
Dr. Gibson - American Exceptionalism and Its Critics

At the core of America’s founding lies an interconnected web of philosophical arguments revolving around human nature and its role in social structure. Despite multiple figures having an overall effect on today’s society, some specific arguments have played a more prominent role in the development of America’s government. One such leader is the English philosopher John Locke. As a physician, John Locke used his logical thinking to fuel his empiricist beliefs about the political sphere. Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* argues that human beings can manage their own affairs through reasoning and therefore excessive paternal government supervision is not warranted. While moderating the radical beliefs of his predecessors, John Locke pushed for a government that was legitimized by the consent of citizens who were born with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property. While some of his ideas have been met with criticism, it is undeniable that Locke’s ideas planted the seeds for the most optimal form of government. Therefore, in both the nation’s founding documents as well as in modern everyday life, John Locke’s political philosophy has left an impactful legacy by establishing his ideas as the foundation of our governmental structure.

Despite being easily accepted in today’s era, Locke’s ideas of inalienable rights and limited government were considered revolutionary for his time. He believed it was necessary for the government to derive its consent from the people — even during a period predominantly ruled by monarchies. Unlike Thomas Hobbes, who believed that subjects cannot betray their social contract even towards the actions of a questionable ruler, Locke believed that a ruler’s- or government’s- abuse of power should lead to its overthrow. His influence on Thomas Jefferson and the rest of the founders can be directly seen in the Declaration of Independence, in which “a long train of abuses and usurpations” against King George III is listed to justify overthrowing the king. This demonstrates that the founding fathers were well versed in Locke’s philosophy, even mimicking his wording for Locke states, “if a long train of abuses, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the people ... they should then rouze [sic] themselves, and endeavor to put the rule into such hands which may secure to them the ends for which government was at first erected” (4). This fundamental right to overthrow a government that abuses its power originated from Locke’s philosophy and was a driving force during the American Revolution.
Locke’s influence is not limited to the idea of a government of the people, but also one with a method of self-regulating power. Locke’s influence can therefore also be seen through the separation of powers into three branches, outlined in the first three articles of the Constitution. The reason for checks and balances to counter each branch is found at the center of his argument: one branch, rather than three, is doomed to abuse its power. Therefore, even though he recognized why these branches could not be combined, he realized that they were necessary for the structure of a successful government. When describing the role of a government, he explains that “the great and chief end, therefore, men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property” (Locke 1). Locke’s vision for the government’s branches to protect the citizen’s property contests Thomas Hobbes’s beliefs supporting one sovereign monarch. A government built upon Hobbesian philosophy would lead to one source of power with no way to control any wrongdoings. Simple reflection on America’s government demonstrates that the founders agreed with Locke’s stance, as our legislative, executive, and judicial branches are still in successful operation today.

Despite his influence being evident in our governmental structure, some may say that Locke’s view on human nature is faulty. Such beliefs were found in the ideas of philosophers like Hobbes and David Hume. However, when examining the primary sources it is clear that Locke developed the most applicable philosophy that reflects the needs of our current day democratic society. Hobbes’s ideas deviated from Locke’s belief that all humans are born with an innate sense of virtue. For instance, Hobbes claimed that humans are born with no morality. Rather, they are just filled with self-interest to the extent that “if any two men desire the same thing, which they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies” (1). Due to the fact that friends can become adversaries as a result of human nature, Hobbes believed one sovereign was needed to not only limit people’s pursuit of self-interest, but also to establish how both human nature and social structure have interdependent effects on governments. These ideas conflict with Locke’s beliefs in people having a natural sense of virtue, allowing for a less monarchical government to thrive.

Hume also argues a point that contradicts Locke’s view of human nature’s role in government development. Hume’s philosophy reflects naturalist elitist views. He does not believe that humans were born with a blank slate and that everyone deserves a say in government. Hume’s ideas claim that select groups of people are more fit to rule a nation than others. This is similar to James Madison’s point of view as he “wanted the same sort of people... that Hume wanted in his national executive, men of large vision ... men who would not stoop to the base tricks by which local politicians prevailed over narrow-minded people”(Morgan 149). This goes against Locke’s ideas about equality and diminishes the freedom of representation in the government. Locke’s ideas allowed for a combination of all different viewpoints rather than just a select group of voices being heard. Despite how well the founding fathers were able to incorporate Locke’s idealistic
policies into our government, even the founders fell somewhat short of embodying his core beliefs. Locke’s outlook on life was dependent on his ideas about the equality of all individuals. However, it does not take a close examination of the Declaration of Independence to find a contrary point to this belief. The founders confidently claim in the document that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” while also allowing slavery to be a prevalent part of society back then. This inconsistency points to the fact that the founding fathers, many of whom were slave owners, only extended Locke’s philosophy of equality to white men. While it might be true that the founding fathers did not extend Locke’s ideas to all people, we must look forthrightly at the situation they were in at the time and appreciate that they incorporated as much of his ideas as they did because in doing so, they established a nation that still strives to live up to those ideals.

The founding fathers were given quite a task to construct a nation that would be stable for future generations. It is no surprise that they looked to the philosophical arguments of the past for support in their endeavor. The philosopher who best reflected their democratic values and revolutionary aspirations was John Locke. While some might consider his arguments idealistic, one must not forget that hopefulness is exactly what the United States is built upon. No logical government rises against a powerful global monarchy unless its desired future is built upon its highest aspirations and not those of sovereign rulers — a core philosophy of John Locke.

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The Effects of Discrimination in Modern Philosophical Theory

By Melanie Kathleen Sterling

Many fundamental philosophical works were forged in racist and sexist beliefs. Classical works such as Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* have created a lasting impact upon society despite the fact that they inherently embody intersectional discrimination. Other philosophers, such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have also displayed a clear pattern within their works that therefore handed privilege to white men throughout history. Even today, we have not left behind these patriarchal ideals. Our modern world has built upon the narrative of the patriarchy that encourages men to lead society while insisting women must follow. This is a foundation that is ultimately harmful to all.

Men have historically been viewed as the leaders within western society. This has lead to gender-based discrimination affecting nearly all aspects of life. Although women have made many strides towards gender equality, the fight is not complete. In 2020, women still made an average of $0.83 per dollar compared to a man (Sheth et al.). Women are the victim of 90% of sexual assaults (*Victims of Sexual Violence*), are more likely to be misdiagnosed while being treated for a medical condition (Shaw, 2018), and they continually have higher poverty rates than men (Sheth et al., 2022). There are many different factors that contribute to rates of inequality; however, the fundamental fact is that women have been put behind men.

White men, although not oppressed, also feel the harmful effects of sexism as a result of their power over society. A prominent example of this is white men having the highest rate of suicide in the United States (Kendi, 2021). Men are less likely to “admit when they feel vulnerable” (Schumacher, 2019, para. 14). Men are placed at the top of society, and therefore are pressured into the stereotypes of being strong, protective, leaders. When forced into this category, it becomes difficult to reach out for help. We tell young boys that boys don’t cry and that their struggles should be less important because of their gender (Schumacher, 2019). It is these stereotypical phrases, actions, and beliefs that makes men feel weak or embarrassed to ask for help or talk about their struggles. When discussing the harm brought upon society by the narrative of the patriarchy, the hardships of men are equally important to the conversation.

One of the most revered philosophers, Thomas Hobbes, wrote arguably the most influential work of modern philosophy. Written in 1651, *Leviathan* was a philosophical work dedicated to the ideals of civics, society, and ideologies of power. Most notably, Hobbes’s ideals were a heavy influence upon the United States Constitution. Although brilliant, Hobbes’s work has many notable flaws, mainly the dehumanization of women.
and people of color. This is blatantly obvious in Chapter 13 of *Leviathan* when discussing the theory of humans within the state of nature, or, a world without government. Hobbes believes humans are violent creatures, and without government, they are constantly in a state of competition. One reason for this competition is so men may be able to “make themselves masters of other men’s persons, wives, children, and cattle” (Hobbes, 1998, p.57). In this instance, we are made aware of women’s place in this state of society: women are equivalent to animals. Thomas Hobbes’s low placement of women within the social hierarchy creates a society of enslaved women. His writing dehumanizes women, and strips them of basic human rights. Just as an animal cannot sign a contract, a woman, who is seen as no more than an animal, also cannot sign a contract. Therefore, to become a wife, a man would sign a contract making said wife essentially his possession, like he would an animal (Pateman, 1988, p.118). Women are not granted the rights owed to a person; instead, they are treated as less than human.

*Leviathan* also perpetuates racial injustices and depicts white men as the only humans capable of being civilized. Hobbes states that the “savage people in many places of America [do not have any] government at all” (Hobbes, 1998, p.58). In his work titled *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills highlights the racism within such philosophical works. Mills states that the European man, after invading the land of other peoples, had decided that these creatures are not civilized and are no better than the animals we seek to separate ourselves from through the creation of government (Mills, 1997, p.65). Hobbes’s depiction of Native Americans being barbaric, uncivilized, and on par with animals is highly racist. According to Hobbes, only white men are civilized enough to forge a government and lead a successful society. This idea is harmful and has only encouraged the bigotry seen in modern day. The lack of non-white and non-male leaders has deterred the potential success humanity possesses. People of all races, genders, religions, and cultures are capable of generating innovative ideas. Intelligence is not limited to cisgendered white males.

Philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau also expressed discrimination within their works. Locke’s social contract theory stated that men are born free. However, the formation of a civilization requires rights to be given up, for the betterment of the entire society (Tuckness, 2020). Within his social contract theory, Locke refers to men as the “abler and stronger” of the two sexes (Walsh, 1995, p. 252). Rousseau uses language in his social contract theory that is outrageously sexist. Women are used as a metaphor to explain the fertility of the land (Rousseau, 2017, p. 25). However, further along in this text, while discussing the population of white men in Europe, women are ranked alongside foreigners, children, and slaves (Rousseau, 2017, p. 47). This explicitly places women as being equal to slaves and having no more rights than children. Women were dehumanized and stripped of their natural rights in these philosophical works.

Pateman discusses Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s social contract theory at length. She explains that Rousseau firmly believed that slave contracts were contradictory. The ability to sell oneself into slavery was
the right of a free man, who was allowed to choose under what terms he became a slave and was likely compensated for this in some way. A slave who cannot consent to a contract voids the transaction (Pateman, 1988, p.156). A slave who has willingly signed himself into slavery is, according to Rousseau, a free man, exercising the rights he holds. However, a woman who is married off does not have the ability to consent to this contract, yet it is still considered a valid transaction. She does not willingly agree to these terms, yet she is forced into this legal compact. Similarly, if she consents to this contract, it would not matter. Her consent to a marriage contract is completely irrelevant to the negotiations. The contract is essentially giving him the right to her person and decisions that impact her life and body, making her his property (Pateman, 1988, p. 168).

Unlawful contracts, such as the marriage contract in the state of nature still exist, but are significantly less frequent. Many women are forced into marriages that they do not consent to. Marriage, whether entered consensually or nonconsensually, is still a symbolic representation of claiming ownership of a woman. The woman taking the husband’s surname is a common and often overlooked example of the woman becoming the property of her husband. When a woman is walked down the aisle by their father figure, it symbolizes passing the power over the woman from her parental figure to her future spouse. Although these traditions are not seen as oppressive, they are rooted in the sexist gender roles of the past.

Despite the reputation of being an equal and free country, the United States of America is not immune to sexism and racism. The democracy this country was founded on is rooted in the prejudice of the past because of the deeply flawed philosophical works upon which it is based. White, landowning men stated that this democracy would truly be a government for and by the people. However, they refused to accept that there were many demographics of people excluded from the democratic mechanisms that would govern the country (Kendi, 2021). America cannot claim to be non-discriminatory when the Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal,” but initially only allowing white land-owning men were treated equally. The bigotry of the past is often portrayed as having been left in the past, but that is not the case. The use of the word men and man found within some of the most influential and crucial documents this country is founded on is the marker for a society lacking gender-inclusive terms. The gendered language of the past was used because men were perceived to be above women, and this discrimination is not a thing of the past.

White male privilege is potent within western society. Both racism and sexism are often inherited unknowingly. As Peggy McIntosh explains in her foundational work, white people are “taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege” (McIntosh, 1992, p. 71). The foundations of racism and sexism were built long ago, but they still affect society today.

As people become more aware of the gaps between white men and others, they cannot deny how many groups are affected by racial profiling and inequality. Immigrants, especially those who enter the country illegally, are a highly debated subject within the offices of lawmakers in the US (Davidson, 2013).
Despite being an overall benefit to the economy (Davison, 2013), immigrants are seen as threats to the people born with American citizenship and this is evidence of how racism continues to flourish in America. Muslims are another group in America who have experienced racial prejudice. They have been stereotyped and categorized as radical followers of a violent religion and identifiable by their appearance. In actuality, Islam is a religion that believes and preaches peace and even white people can be Muslim. The United States claims tolerance and acceptance while bigotry grows and is justified (Kendi, 2021). Bigotry in western society is often viewed as justifiable or excusable due to it having been ingrained into our culture. When historical figures with heavy influence use language that is discriminatory, it builds a foundation that encourages further bigotry. The influence of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau has created a society that deems discrimination acceptable.

The battle against the white patriarchy has been ongoing. The initial socio-political philosophical theories have always placed white men as the leaders of a civilized society and modern society has only expanded upon this idea, and allowed this inequality to grow. There is no clear end to this supposed white male superiority; however, as these issues become more prominent, they become more known and discussed. This conversation is the first step to creating positive change within our society. There have been many successful movements toward equality around the world fueled by the desire to eliminate ignorance. These strides are not complete, and as we move forward we must acknowledge the success of the past while remaining unrelenting in addressing the continued problems that plague the fight for equality.

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https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/#:~:text=Locke%20used%20the%20claim%20that,better%20ensure%20the%20stable%20comfortable


In this research paper, the author examines the procedures for placing someone in solitary confinement through the lens of trauma, acknowledging the severity of the punishment and, consequently, arguing the ways in which this necessitates a more meticulous method of imposition. Her well developed argument claims that modern methods allow for discrimination and bias to leak into confinement's implementation, thus constituting a misuse of power.

Solitary Confinement: An Abuse of Power

By Andrea S. Thomas

Dr. Liptak – Trauma Narratives

One of the most valuable aspects of the human experience is arguably human interaction—an element so fundamental to one’s quality of life that to consider removing it entirely seems nearly implausible. This, however, is the very real experience of prisoners placed in solitary confinement. Understanding the gravity of the practice and the natural inference that severe trauma stems from it—an inference with strong evidence to back it—one would also assume that the procedures for imposing this punishment carry a similar weight or formality. This assumption is, unfortunately, unfounded. Modern regulations regarding solitary confinement leave its use up to the discretion of prison guards and rarely require any form of justification beyond a verbal claim. Over the past forty years, the simplicity of this procedure has increased the likelihood of solitary confinement’s misuse and consequent severe trauma for minor infractions. As such, the poor regulation of solitary confinement is a problem of foremost concern that can be prevented by the implementation of stricter regulations. Such regulations should include providing specific determinants necessitating solitary confinement, enacting the use of external oversight, and altering the authority responsible for its implementation thus offering procedural conformity.

On any given day in the United States, there are over 80,000 incarcerated individuals in solitary confinement where they spend between 22 and 24 hours a day, seven days a week, confined to a small concrete room with walls separated by a mere three paces (Labrecque 49). All aspects of their lives occur in that cell within two steps from their toilet; however, aside from sleeping and eating, solitary confinement has stripped them of all other facets of life. The little time they are given outside of their cells is spent in a solitary exercise cage, which prison officials often refer to as dog pens. Such dire conditions are often considered justified as they pertain to the so-called worst of the worst—people whose violent actions have proven themselves deserving of what the United Nations terms torture (Sakoda and Simes 73). This claim, however, is largely based on assumption rather than reality. Violence is not the most common reason cited for someone being sent to solitary confinement. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Studies have shown that the most frequent causes cited as resulting in solitary confinement are low-level, nonviolent actions, signs of mental illness, or the consequence of risk assessments (Labrecque 54). The latter bears no connection to actions an
individual has committed, but rather involves an official’s assumption of a potential threat. These risk assessments allow inmates who have not yet committed any action deemed as an infraction to be placed into confinement without question (“Minor Infractions”). Thus, the behaviors most commonly resulting in solitary time are, in essence, uncategorizable as direct violence as much as assumed threat.

If violence is not the primary reason, this raises the question of what justifies assignment into solitary confinement and by what means duration is determined. The answer is surprisingly vague and completely lacking in judicial oversight - a combination perfectly suited to allow for a misuse of power. Individuals sent to solitary confinement must first be incarcerated in the general prison population by a court of law. From there, it is left to the discretion of prison guards to determine whether a prisoner’s actions fall under any of the listed criteria of infractions the prison deems worthy of isolation and to determine the duration of their sentence. This shift in power from court-ordered sentencing to reliance on a prison guard’s determination is counterintuitive considering the long-term impacts of isolation. Undoubtedly, all prisoners face trauma; however, isolated prisoners face mental and physical detriment of an entirely different level. This has been explained by psychologists as the conservation of resources (COR) theory, which states that the deprivation of basic life necessities, such as social interaction, requires a form of coping that, when developed with such a lack of resources, is unhealthy (Sakoda and Simes 69). Recent evidence supports this theory, showing substantially higher suicide rates in super maximum security prisons (supermax prisons), where solitary confinement is most prevalent, as compared to other prisons. In New York alone, the suicide rate at supermax prisons is about 12 times higher than prisons where the use of solitary is minimal or nonexistent (Crosby). Despite research proving confinement to be a far more severe punishment than general incarceration, the jurisdiction for committing someone to solitary confinement resides with correctional officers, without any external oversight or review.

The only regulation that prison guards must abide by is in regards to a list of infractions that result in placement into a confinement cell. While the list varies by facility, they all involve the same conceptual problem: broad language. The infractions listed are typically quite vague and leave their specific situational interpretations to the correctional officers. This opens the door to unnecessary extreme punishment for what would regularly be seen as a minor infraction. A common example of this can be seen with the Disobey Order infraction, which simply refers to ignoring or outright disobeying any order given by a prison official (“Minor Infractions”). This, however, can easily be misconstrued to apply to prisoners who unintentionally go against orders for reasons beyond themselves, such as a hearing disability or language barrier. In the case of a hearing disability, providing a functioning hearing aid would be a better-suited solution to prevent further infractions than social isolation and its resulting trauma. There is, therefore, reason to believe that prison guards dole out potentially unjust punishment given the vague criteria for determining infractions. The lack of clarity in what
behaviors constitute an infraction could justify the long-term solitary confinement of an individual due to things out of their control, such as a disability. Another infraction often vaguely listed as punishable by confinement is general violence (Pyrooz and Mitchell). By leaving the determination of what can be considered violence up to the discernment of prison guards, there is no clear line of action to prevent them from characterizing the use of mild profanity or the raising of one's voice as violent. Thus, it is clear to see that the common complication of confinement criteria is the lack of situational awareness.

Seeing how poorly designed modern criteria for placing someone into solitary confinement is and its consequent misuse as punishment for minor infractions brings into question what the intention behind confinement’s use truly is. Proponents of supermax facilities often claim that its use “maintain[s] order in a world that wants to be chaotic,” making prisons safer by separating inmates who are likely to incite violence (Gangi). However, research suggests the opposite. While it may be true in such situations that the separation of violent and nonviolent inmates can be a protective measure, it becomes clear that the use of solitary confinement as the way to bring about separation comes with a plethora of traumatic consequences that increase an inmate’s inclination toward violence. This can be seen in a study conducted in California which found that rates of violence actually increased with the inclusion of a supermax facility’s data (Lantigua-Williams). Thus, there is reason to doubt the efficacy of solitary confinement’s use in deterring violence.

The increase in violent tendencies is one of the many mental health implications of enduring extended periods of isolation. A significant reason for this increase is thought to be the mental state that isolation elicits, where, to the inmate, it seems as though they have lost the very things that make them who they are. The inability to see as much as a single blade of grass has both physical and mental consequences, including the deterioration of far sight, hallucinations, severe depression, and appetite loss. The feelings of being so far removed from the world a person once knew and potentially not knowing whether or not they’re still connected to any world, puts individuals at risk of losing their sense of self. As psychologist Dr. Craig Haney puts it, “human identity is socially created” (Lantigua-Williams). One is only capable of understanding themselves through their relationships with others. Solitary confinement strips prisoners of this human need. It has even been found that healthy individuals who are assigned to confinement often leave with newly developed mental illnesses. One survivor shared his perspective regarding the mental state he experienced as a result of solitary confinement, stating, “I started to realize that there was a slow disintegration... of my personality, my sense of who I was” (Solitary: Inside Red Onion Prison 00:15:38). This psychological deterioration often leaves those in confinement feeling numb to the monotony of their day-to-day routines, seeking comfort by acting out in ways that help them revive their senses. Unfortunately, this acting out does not result in aid from a psychologist as much as it lengths their stay in solitary confinement. The cyclical
nature of unjustified solitary placement - the development and symptoms of mental health impairments and prolonged sentences - is one of the primary ways in which solitary is used, or more accurately, misused.

As our knowledge about the mental harms of isolation increases, so does the population of confined individuals. Since the individuals placed into confinement are from prison populations, it’s not surprising to see issues such as mass incarceration affect solitary’s usage. Studies have shown that confinement is commonplace in modern prisons. Over 20% of federal and state prisoners have spent a minimum of one night in confinement settings over the course of a year (Labrecque 57). A likely reason for this is the arbitrary overuse of both long and short-term isolation as a means of control by correctional officers rather than utilizing it to allow for rehabilitation. The doling out of this punishment, moreover, is not without bias; this is largely thanks to the complete reliance on prison guards’ discretion, but also due to already present racial disparities in modern prisons. Correctional officers have free reign to determine what are considered violent or disobedient actions of an inmate, thus their personal biases, such as racial prejudices, are more than likely to come into play in the process. For example, a black inmate using profanity may be considered more dangerous than a white inmate saying the same things, thus creating an increase in serious citations for African American prisoners that disproportionately places them in confinement. New York State prisons are a prime illustration of this form of disparity as “black inmates were nearly four times as likely to be sent to isolation [and for longer durations] as whites” (Sakoda and Simes 88). The central problem in need of correction is the lack of supervision regarding the procedures resulting in solitary confinement.

Not only is the use of solitary confinement flawed in terms of when and how it gets assigned, there is also the problem of the punishment’s duration. Some common infractions have set lengths of confinement attached to them, whereas others are, yet again, left to the judgment of correctional officers. Prison guards often opt for an indeterminate duration where prisoners are kept isolated for any given period - potentially their entire lives (Crosby). Knowing the severe implications of prolonged isolation, this form of punishment is one of the cruelest, particularly when inmates are not given clear reasons as to why they are being isolated. This isn’t uncommon for individuals awaiting legal proceedings. An unfortunate instance of this can be seen in the case of Kalief Browder, a 16 year old who was alleged to have stolen a backpack and was placed in solitary for two years as he awaited trial (Lantigua-Williams). During that time, Browder made several suicide attempts and showed signs of severe paranoia and depression. This is just one example of the prison system’s failure to enact the principle of the presumption of innocence. Due to the informality of such procedures, extensive and prolonged solitary terms are not uncommon, nor are the consequent associated mental and physical health-related issues.

Seeing the primary pitfalls in solitary’s assignment, it is clear that a change must be made. To find a solution, one can reference the very origins of solitary confinement’s practice. Tracing back to Pennsylvania in
the 1790s, one will find a stark contrast in the modern and original iterations of solitary confinement, particularly regarding how it was meted out. When a series of Pennsylvania laws established the first formalized system of isolation, it called for punishment proportional to the crime. To best execute this, its assignment was separated into two primary pathways: disciplinary and criminal punishment (Shapiro 557). When used as a disciplinary measure, the discretion was left to correctional officers and limited to only two days unless authorized by a higher-level government official, in which case, the maximum duration was fifteen days. As a criminal punishment or long-term sentence, the authority was placed with a court and judge. While the sentence could last for several years, the duration would be split into intervals to prevent continual extreme isolation. The primary proponents of this practice also highly valued the use of external oversight, often without prior notice, to ensure conditions remained humane (Shapiro 552). This model of how to impose solitary confinement presents a much greater emphasis on oversight in both its assignment and duration than can be seen in prisons today.

Considering how vastly different modern solitary placement procedures are from the origin of the practice brings up the question of how this divergence developed. The answer lies in the disparity of solitary’s intended purpose over time. The modern confinement system gained traction during the tough on crime era of the 1980s and 1990s when prison populations were at record highs as was the rate of violence against prison guards (“Minor Infractions”). In response, correction officers began confining inmates and minimizing their human interactions. While initially not intended to become a long-term practice, it slowly bled into other prisons and led to the emergence of supermax facilities designed for prolonged isolation of violent prisoners. The increasingly accepted belief about prison reform at the time was that “nothing works” concerning rehabilitating prisoners, thus prison officials turned to solitary confinement as a means of simply enacting punishment rather than allowing for opportunities to change (Pyrooz and Mitchell). The modern use of solitary confinement did not sprout from legislation like the original incarnation had, but rather came from the actions of correctional officers that eventually became common practice. This informal development has allowed for a major breach in judicial checks and balances by handing over complete authority to prison guards without any true oversight. The harms of this informality have resulted in the indeterminate length of solitary confinement terms and major mental health concerns.

Certain aspects of solitary’s practice moving forward are notably needing alteration. Primarily, the responsibility for committing someone to solitary confinement must be returned to judicial authority. The transference of power from judges and courts to prison guards in the 1980s most accurately represents a shift in intention behind solitary confinement’s use. Thus, returning this authority to judges and courts would ensure that there is a formal process that establishes more justified punishments. Noting the responsibility of judges to remain honorable and free of bias, bestowing upon them such authority will prove effective in
correcting some of the many pitfalls of correctional officer discernment. Another necessary alteration to modern confinement is the reinstatement of mandatory oversight in supermax facilities by an external party to ensure that conditions remain humane. From this lack of oversight, modern prisons have been able to shield their practices from the public eye by turning down reporters’ and researchers’ requests for information when they are working to develop studies demonstrating the problems regarding confinement (Labrecque 53). This ability to entirely negate regulation of solitary confinement, or even the exposure of its procedural methods, is undoubtedly a breach of power on the part of prison officials. Thus, the reinstitution of a form of external oversight regarding confinement units would be an effective means to ensure the practice functions in an unbiased and justifiable manner, regardless of which party is responsible for imposing it.

The practice of solitary confinement is undeniably controversial, as heavily evidenced by its varying regulations across state lines. Despite this variance, there is one commonality when it comes to confinement: vague, unregulated procedures. Its practice inflicts mental trauma upon prisoners and, as such, requires a more meticulous procedure for its imposition. By leaving it up to prison officials, an increased number of individuals have unnecessarily faced isolation and the consequent severe trauma associated with its practice for minor infractions - a problem that can be prevented by the implementation of stricter regulations.

Works Cited


This author’s sophisticated negation of the naysayers’ arguments allows her to develop a clear, concise, and convincing argument that there is an ethical line between using genetic engineering to treat severe genetic diseases and its use for aesthetic reasons.

Boundaries in Genetic Enhancement: Where Do We Draw the Line?

By Maya Villanueva

Dr. Stein - Out of Bounds

What lengths would a parent go to improve the health of their child and their quality of life? Imagine your prospective child has a potential risk of inheriting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), a chronic disease, upon birth, but a medical treatment is available to prevent this. Would you take advantage of this opportunity? The parents of twin daughters Lulu and Nana did, and the procedure was carried out by Chinese scientist He Jiankui (Cyranoski, 2018, p. 13). However, there was extreme backlash from numerous medical researchers and scientists. The procedure was carried out through germline gene editing (GGE), which involves the process of making genetic changes to the parents’ sex cells, the egg and sperm, in order to alter the genetic makeup of the soon to be embryo. The legality of this treatment varies by country; it is currently illegal in the United States, but permitted in the United Kingdom and China with strict regulations (Jin et al., 2008, p. 2304). As gene modifications become more advanced, there comes a great responsibility with this larger than life medical power. For a process as intense as germline gene editing to become publicly available, guidelines on the scope of this practice must be set to avoid the moral consequences it entails. Some of these issues consist of interference with nature and the integrity of mankind (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 4). Furthermore, the autonomy of the child, possible increase in stigma surrounding disease and disability, use for non-therapeutic reasons and eugenic purposes, and committing potential harm to the embryo are all issues that must be considered. Without creating limits on genetic engineering now, the power of perfecting human genes could quickly be used for superficial, aesthetic reasons. In the years to come, germline modifications should be medically allowed when treating severe genetic diseases, including fatal diseases, but should not be abused for non-therapeutic purposes.

Scientific improvement has often conflicted with the idea of letting nature take its course and germline modifications are no exception. Some opposers of the practice take the stance that scientifically derived medical procedures are immoral because they violate the sacredness of the human genome (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 4). Altering the gonads (sex cells) raises the argument that science is crossing boundaries in the natural reproductive process and manipulating human genes is a “crime against humanity” (Annas et al., 2002, p. 153). Similar opinions are held regarding analogous reproductive choices, such as preimplantation genetic diagnosis, in vitro fertilization, and selective abortion. GGE utilizes the most advanced technology yet, creating the ability to remove certain traits and diseases that would otherwise be inherited.
The extraordinary features of GGE intensify the perception that the procedure invades natural biological processes; however, the same reasoning could apply to most modern medicine. By this standard, infection treating antibiotics and death reversing resuscitation would be considered unnatural and therefore unacceptable. Despite the fact that these forms of medical care interrupt nature’s course of events, this does not make them immoral or unsafe to carry out. GGE may seem to be an intensive, intrusive procedure, but it is actually completed through a simple process. In basic terms, GGE replaces the unwanted part of a gene with the desired gene, which will prevent the embryo from inheriting the harmful characteristic. This process is on a smaller scale than the implantation of a prosthetic limb or an organ transplant, so GGE should not be seen as meddling with the natural form of the human body. Genetically modifying the sex cells of the parents should not be deemed unethical because it is no more invasive than other socially accepted medical treatments.

Medicine often contains controversial components, but the goal is and always should be to improve the health and lives of people.

Editing the germline cells that will form the embryo does not violate the individual rights of the unborn child when taking into account the parent’s influence on their child’s life and the best interest of the child. Arguments against GGE consist of the idea that editing the genetic makeup of a child before they are born takes away the child’s right to make medical decisions themselves. The Child Rights International Network (2019) comments on the rights of body integrity, stating that “everyone, including children, has the right to autonomy and self-determination over their own body, and the only person with the right to make a decision about one’s body is oneself” (Bodily integrity). While I do agree that a living individual should be in control of the medical care they receive, it must be considered that parents are legally allowed to make medical decisions for their child until they turn 18 years old. While some of these treatments may have no effect on the child’s later life, procedures like a growth rod for scoliosis and integration of a prosthetic leg have a significant impact on the course of the child’s future, and are only done with the permission of the parent. Parents also make other decisions for their children outside of medical care including decisions related to education, religion, diet, sports, friends, etc. Such decisions naturally interfere with a child’s individual rights by the Child Rights International Network’s (CRIN) definition. CRIN and those who agree with it, miss the point that the use of GGE to prevent a severe hereditary disease in the unborn child is in the best interest of said child (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 5). If the child goes on to live a life without a debilitating disease, this will open opportunities for them that would not have been as easily possible otherwise. Of course, this assumes that the state of the child whose genes have been edited would in all likelihood not be worse off than the untreated child. The process of germline gene therapy for an embryo does not interfere with the unborn child’s rights as the decisions of the parents take priority until the child turns 18 years old and especially when said decisions are made in the best interest of the child’s health and wellbeing.
Purposely targeting a specific disease or disability with the goal of removing it raises an important question: is the process of germline gene editing reinforcing the stigma that these traits are unwanted? A disorder is medically defined as “a malfunction of the body” (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 6). By this definition, then, GGE is not reinforcing stigma; it is simply curing a malfunction. However, the situation is more complicated when approaching it from the social model perspective where a disability is considered a mismatch between the variability of the human body and societal norms for how a body should look (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 6). If considering both models, GGE would be aiding the medical model while maintaining the societal norms that qualities of a disability appear abnormal. There is some validity to this argument; however, improving aesthetics is not typically the goal of modern medicine. Instead, the main objective is to treat illness and disease. Consequently, characteristics that negatively affect the quality of an individual’s life will inevitably be addressed. Moreover, the majority of individuals suffering from a disease will undergo treatment if available to them—not out of shame due to societal prejudice, but to improve their quality of life (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 7). When parents make the decision to use GGE for their future embryo, they are preferring that their child does not inherit a specific disease or disorder. This does not imply that the parents believe people living with said disease or disability are living a less valuable life (v. Hammerstein et al., 2019, p. 7). Instead, they are ensuring the optimal health of their newborn child by taking advantage of the medical resources available to them. Since the moral implications of removing illness with GGE and discriminating against individuals living with illnesses are completely separate, GGE does not reinforce negative social stigmas surrounding medical disabilities.

The ethical dilemma of eugenics is unavoidable when the possibility of perfecting the genetics of a human embryo comes into play. Eugenics is the selection of desired inheritable characteristics, often to appeal to aesthetics and conventional beauty standards. This goes far beyond selection against disability and disorder; using GGE in this manner falls under non-therapeutic purposes. These eugenic motives are morally wrong and can increase social inequity, as well as decrease diversity. Some believe that implementing GGE for one use will quickly cause it to become abused for immoral, superficial reasons. v. Hammerstein et al. explain:

If GGE was allowed in human medicine for severe hereditary diseases, this would necessarily lead to violation of human dignity through eugenic use of the technology, instrumentalization of future children through non-medical enhancement and increased inequity in society through an artificial distribution of favorable biological characteristics among people living within this society. (2019, p. 8)

If GGE were to be abused in order to enhance aesthetics in a population, Hammerstein et al. believe the consequences could easily change the foundation of the human species and therefore it threatens human rights. However, this predicament could be avoided with the establishment of clear guidelines regarding the specific genetic diseases that can be treated through GGE. These regulations would be of great difficulty to
generate, particularly because the prognosis severity of a disease is partially subjective, and also varies by patient. Erika Kleiderman and her colleagues, who work for the Centre of Genomics and Policy at McGill University, think that there are a number of parties who should help determine these qualifications. They argue that “the responsibility of qualifying this notion does not fall on the shoulders of any one given group, but rather merits input from various stakeholders, including physicians, genetic counselors, patients and their families” (Kleiderman et al., 2019, p. 8). The amalgam of perspectives from different proponents of the medical system will best tackle the complexity of genetic disease from multiple (medical, emotional, economic, etc.) angles. Lethal genetic diseases (like sickle-cell anemia and cystic fibrosis) and severe hereditary diseases (like cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, and muscular dystrophy) should qualify for the use of GGE, as both significantly impact the quality of the patient’s life. This preliminary framework is vague and leaves many questions about the legal uses of this form of reproductive choice, but it is a starting point for discussions regarding the ethics of genetic treatments. In order to prevent the non-therapeutic abuse of germline gene editing for disturbing motives related to aesthetic perfection, medical guidelines regarding GGE’s scope of practice need to be formed and enforced early on. If unethical situations were to arise despite these regulations, this could be managed with additional oversight.

Germline gene editing is a procedure that still requires much more testing and research before it becomes widely available, but this will not take centuries. Some current research suggests that GGE has unintended consequences potentially causing harm to the embryo, but it will not be available to the general public until these errors are fully addressed. When it does become a safe practice, its use to treat fatal and severe hereditary diseases should be made an option to all of society. Initially, it will likely have a price similar to reproductive medical treatments like in vitro fertilization, but hopefully GGE would eventually have wider accessibility like birth control, prenatal testing, and selective abortion, which are medically insured. If the medical community were to implement such an advanced form of reproductive technology without clear restrictions, GGE does propose the risk of being abused for superficial purposes. Some parents will go to any length to give their child a physical and/or psychological advantage in life, and when done to fulfill societal expectations, that is unethical and not medically justified. This is why strict regulations must be put in place right away. Arguments about GGE surrounding the rights of the unborn child and possible effects concerning the social stigma regarding disability are outweighed by what is in the best interest and health of the child. Genetic modifications to the sex cells have the potential of targeting severe conditions that otherwise have no cure. With the goal of medicine in mind— to treat the health and well-being of an individual—it is only natural that such a practice be considered within the appropriate guidelines.
References


This author’s voice comes through clearly as she presents her original argument that rock is the musical genre best suited for a soundtrack should there be a film adaptation of The Nickel Boys. She supports that argument well by focusing on how “We Will Rock You” by Queen would help tell the story of one particular scene from the book.

“Shouting in the Street, Gonna Take on the World Someday:” The Nickel Boys and Rock Music

By Gabrielle Zontini
Dr. Haas - Music: The Soundtrack of Our Lives

Music is defined as sounds and rhythms the brain puts into patterns to express creativity and oneself. It has the unique ability to evoke emotional, and even physical responses from listeners, making it an ideal method by which feelings can be effectively conveyed to an audience viewing a film. Metaphorically, a movie soundtrack pulls viewers into the story and encourages them to empathize with the characters and feel the emotions of the scene. A film without music is just as impactful as one where the actors are reading their lines directly from their script, thereby making music the factor that can make a movie a tremendous success or a total disaster. The strong messages presented through rock music transform a movie scene by requiring the audience to think about the despair, fervor, and occasional anger felt in the songs and, in this case, how they relate to the emotions of the young men attending Nickel Academy in Colson Whitehead’s novel, The Nickel Boys. Rock is the genre that most fully encompasses the hardships of Elwood Curtis and other black boys at Nickel; the pain and urgency in rock music is not only present in the lyrics, but also in the sincerity heard in the singers’ voices.

First and foremost, the exigency conveyed through rock songs makes it the perfect genre to be in a movie adaptation of The Nickel Boys, as it entices viewers and allows them to empathize with the characters. Unlike some other genres, rock highlights an issue and occasionally presents a solution; in doing so, the listeners are encouraged to focus all of their attention on the problem at hand, thereby temporarily escaping from their own hardships. This is ideal for a movie soundtrack, as the audience is no longer simply viewing the movie, but rather, they become committed to the lives of the characters. By anticipating the characters’ next actions because of the sincere and urgent messages presented in rock music, the audience feels the emotions that the characters face as if they personally know them. This connection between the movie characters and audience is best conveyed through rock music, as songs in other genres are not as profound and do not stress the urgency of the conflict at hand. Rock music truly bridges the gap between the actors and the viewers by promoting empathy and predictions about the plot.

In addition to the urgency in rock music that engages the viewers, the discontent and anger not only heard but also felt in this type of music make it superior to any other genre as a soundtrack for the movie. This is because rock music adds shades of meaning that other genres do not convey; it is absolutely crucial that the
audience internally feels the same emotions that are externally presented through the storyline. In *The Nickel Boys*, Colson Whitehead addresses deep and frustrating topics, including racism and prejudice, that cannot be thoroughly conveyed if the emotions of the viewers are misaligned with the tone of the movie. The forceful instruments in rock music—such as the drums, cymbal, and guitar—when paired with insightful and indignant lyrics have a unique ability to subliminally shift the outlook of the listener, making them feel the emotions of the singer. Rock music subconsciously fills the audience with feelings of restlessness and anger, thereby intensifying their reaction to the inhumane acts that occur at Nickel Academy. No matter how powerful the words or actions of an actor are in a movie, the audience cannot be fully immersed without a rock soundtrack that sets an angry and discontented tone for the plot.

“We Will Rock You,” written by Brian May and recorded by his band, Queen, is an example of a rock song that would perfectly enhance the emotions the actors in the movie adaptation of *The Nickel Boys* would be trying to convey through the screen. This is essential to the audience’s understanding of the plot as it ties them to the story and compels them to empathize with the young boys at Nickel Academy. This song would aptly demonstrate how quickly the atmosphere at Nickel can change, and would be most aptly used in the scene where Elwood gives his notebook to one of the state inspectors that details the inhumane treatment against the boys at the reform school. The beginning of the song, “Buddy, you’re a boy, make a big noise/Playing in the street, gonna be a big man someday/You got mud on your face, you big disgrace/Kicking your can all over the place, singin’/We will, we will rock you” (Queen) should be played over the dialogue between Turner and Elwood where Elwood reveals his plan to warn the inspectors of the conditions at Nickel. Turner himself realistically responds that Elwood is putting himself and others in danger by taking action (Whitehead 129). In accordance with the upbeat though discontented nature of the song, Elwood carries out his plan and Turner eventually gives one inspector the notebook. In this moment, Elwood feels unstoppable, and that he will rock the fate of the Nickel Academy by spreading his experiences at the school to the outside world. The film would then cut to a few days after this event when Spencer and Hennepin take Elwood to the White House and beat him. At this point, the final verse of the song where Freddie Mercury sings, “Buddy, you’re an old man, poor man/Pleading with your eyes, gonna get you some peace someday” (Queen). In this moment, the song refers to Spencer and Hennepin trying to pity Elwood for truly believing that his words have any impact on the future of the boys at Nickel. This rapid change in point of view captures the attention of the audience by illustrating the pace at which moods and plans change at Nickel. The next verse, “Somebody better put you back into your place, do it!/We will, we will rock you, yeah, yeah, come on” (Queen) continues with Elwood being physically and emotionally abused by the two white men, who, in this moment, control the fate of his life and put him back in his place. By chanting the lyrics of the song rather than singing them, Freddie Mercury connects to the listeners in a way that is not possible when harmoniously singing a catchy
tune. The bass drum in the song sounds like Elwood’s pounding heart as he is faced with bigotry and torture and would therefore keep the audience absorbed in the actions taking place. This truly captures the duality of the song and how when played over different scenes, it can be applicable to both the protagonists and antagonists, demonstrating the constant fight that the boys at Nickel put up for their own rights. Unlike any other music genre, the lyrics, instruments, and restless tone of rock, specifically “We Will Rock You,” draw the audience in and provoke thoughts about the torture of young boys at Nickel, and how it relates to the overarching incensed tone towards racism.

Rock is clearly the best genre of music for a movie adaptation of Whitehead’s The Nickel Boys, as it emphasizes the internal rage that the boys at Nickel experience each day when they are stripped of basic human rights and treated like animals. In doing so, the audience is pulled into the plot and gains the ability to feel the same emotions that the characters at Nickel feel. Although many rock songs, such as “We Will Rock You” by Queen, do not directly promote violence as the solution to societal issues, they act as an outlet for strong emotions and capture the audience of the movie in doing so. By emphasizing the duality in which this song can be interpreted, this song demonstrates that the administration at Nickel continues to fight back against the boys, just as much as the boys fight them. For these reasons, rock is the genre best able to draw movie viewers in and make them feel the disgust and pain that the young men feel in The Nickel Boys.

Works Cited