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Salem Witch Trials

In the small New England village of Salem, Massachusetts, beginning in the year 1692, over a hundred people would be persecuted under the accusation of practicing witchcraft and nearly one-fifth would be put to death. A mere seventy years after a most courageous group of people had embarked on a long and grueling journey to free themselves from the political and religious oppression encountered in their home country, the new community they created in North America would fall victim to a deadly form of persecution. Obviously, the accused were not actually magical beings, and probably no one was casting spells, mixing potions, or communicating with the devil, so how did these accusations come to be? The widespread conspiracy of witchcraft in the small Salem Village was, in fact, rooted in the religious, social, and economic tension of the time and was mainly targeted toward women as a way of limiting their power and asserting control over their status in the emerging social structure of the English colony.

Accusations of witchcraft, sparked in February 1692, rapidly took flame engulfing nearly 200 people, the majority being women, and eighty percent of those were at the height of their social power (Jackson; Marshall). These trials eventually resulted in the hanging of nineteen people. This included thirteen women and six men. In addition, the accusations led to the death of one man by pressing with heavy stones and multiple deaths, including those of children, while incarcerated. The incident began with Elizabeth, the nine-year-old daughter of local minister Samuel Parris, and her eleven-year-old cousin Abigail Williams. They started to act very strangely, contorting their bodies, screaming out strange sounds, and having violent outbursts. A doctor explained their actions as the result of supernatural elements. When two male magistrates questioned these girls, they accused three women, Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne, of afflicting them. All the women were easy targets. Tituba was a Caribbean slave to the Parris family; Sarah Good was homeless and begged on the streets; and Sarah Osborne was old and impoverished (Blumberg). None of these women had family to speak up for them, or prominence in the town. They were not powerful women, but they were women who could be used as a powerful example of the capacity of control.

Tituba confessed to the charges of witchcraft, while the other two claimed innocence. After the three women were thrown into jail, suspicions intensified, and once well established, the accusations easily shifted to those who were more prominent in the society. As the trials continued, however, following months of prosecutions, officials eventually began to denounce the trials, which finally came to an end. A day of fasting in remembrance of the tragedy was ordered by the General Court in 1697, and in 1703 the trials were declared unlawful. A formal apology was not offered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts until 1957 (Blumberg).

Conspiracy theories are found in every area of life, ranging from harmless thoughts about collective childhood memories to, in this instance, a deadly persecution. People are constantly looking for ways to be in control over their lives or the lives of others, so when situations arise in which unknown and mysterious factors are at play, conspiracy theories allow people to regain a sense of control (Harambam). These theories can be completely harmless, mere attempts to explain confusing situations; however, they can also become dangerous ideas that become weapons against specific groups of people. They can be used to effectively stigmatize certain ideas and people (Harambam). Journalist Zaria Gorvett explains how conspiracies are often targeted at particular groups, saying, "Successful conspiracies always have the right villain. Throughout history, many widely accepted conspiracy theories have conveniently placed the blame for distressing incidents or trends on the population's favorite baddies." An example of this is illustrated when an unexplained fatal illness made its way through Rome in 331 BC. Those in power at the time opportunistically placed blame on local women (Gorvett). Gorvett mentions an analysis by a classical historian at the University of Chicago, Victoria Pagan, that noted, "The success of the Roman poisonings conspiracy is likely to be partly down to the way it portrayed upper class women and slaves, who [sic] powerful male elites found threatening." Society at that time was suspicious of women, who were seen as "secretive and dangerous," and provided an easy scapegoat for the rampant deaths that were most likely attributable to some kind of natural epidemic (Gorvett). To describe how the social environment in Rome impacted the popularity of the theory, Gorvett writes, "In short, a conspiracy involving a gang of murderous women…was always going to be more appealing than the truth." This is a pattern that has been repeated throughout history and is evident in the unfolding of the lethal Salem Witch

Trials.

A major contributor to the success of the accusations against women in the Salem Witch Trials has its underpinnings in the religious beliefs of the time. The Puritan religious belief system at the time powerfully dictated societal norms. The Puritan teachings frame witchcraft as an evil practice with ties to the devil (Stone). Alia Stone, a researcher at James Madison University, writes, "Witchcraft in Puritan society was often a hallmark of a covenant with the devil either intentional or unintentional…. Puritans mostly believed those who practiced witchcraft pledged themselves to the devil in order to commit misdeeds." The position of women in Puritan society becomes increasingly important as we examine how this tragic event unfolded. "Women, and girls were both somewhat distanced from the teachings of the Bible. They only learned what the men in the town taught them. Most did not read the Bible for themselves. In fact, they actually had very limited education that tended to be restricted to domestic duties" (Colburn). Women were perceived as more susceptible to the devil because they were less involved with religion (Colburn). Not only were women more receptive to the call of the devil, the idea that women were evil was a seed that had been planted at the very root of Puritan ideals, based on the biblical stories of a woman causing the downfall of mankind. Scholar Elizabeth Reis writes in her book *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*, that "womanhood and evil were inextricably linked in the minds and hearts of seventeenth-century New England Puritans." Reis writes, "Puritan culture encouraged women to believe it was their vile natures that would take them (to the devil)." Women were already viewed as wicked under Puritan beliefs, so the idea that they could be easily swayed by the devil was one that deftly took hold over the vast majority of villagers at the time. This association between the inherent evil nature of women and the religious Puritan society created a fertile environment for theories of witchcraft to form, which only grew as social and economic conflicts began to take hold in Salem Village.

The social and economic unrest in the town during this time aided in the targeted attack on these women. Starting in 1689, conflicts associated with King William's War between England and France made its way through the American colonies. The damage these colonies faced was quite extensive and created hundreds of refugees traveling to find safety in Essex county, especially Salem Village. The sudden increase in the population forced a large strain

on resources. This sudden stress only added to the unrest that was already present as an economic rift was growing between classes. The wealth of families with ties to Salem's ports was continuing to increase, while those who depended on agriculture still labored to survive (Blumberg). Unrest in the town grew because of the growing class division, coupled with the controversy that "brewed over Reverend Samuel Parris, who became Salem Village's first ordained minister in 1689, and was disliked because of his rigid ways and greedy nature" (Blumberg). "The Puritan villagers believed all the quarreling was the work of the Devil" (Blumberg). An unsettling undertone of distrust spread through Salem village, and "residents were only too willing to blame someone else for their troubles" (Purdy). By pinning claims of witchcraft on the already less powerful part of the population, women, the townspeople had an easy scapegoat for the economic and societal unrest they were confronting (Purdy). As these women faced the town's built-up frustrations, they had seemingly few allies, and when powerful politicians supported the conspiracy, any hope for justice or fair treatment vanished.

A political leader's beliefs and opinions can greatly impact that of the community in which they live. Two professors, Russell Muirhead of Dartmouth, and Nancy L. Rosenblum of Harvard, claim that people in power are usually seen as a source of reliable information, so when they begin propagating conspiracy theories, the average person is quick to believe their claims. They say that "Ordinary people trying to understand the world are going to become very disoriented as they try to navigate this kind of whiteout blizzard of conspiratorial fictions and lies" (qtd. in Kolbert). It becomes very difficult for people to decide what information is reliable and what is not, when their leaders, who they usually look to for truth, are spreading misinformation (Kolbert). Kolbert mentions the arguments of Muirhead and Rosenblum that claim people in power promoting conspiracies can quickly become dangerous. When people turn to their leaders and are met with wild stories, they begin to lose faith in the legitimacy of their government (Kolbert). A large divide can be created between individuals who follow along with these ideas and those who do not (Kolbert). The trials gained speed with the support of both Boston Minister Cotton Mather, and local Puritan ministers, who urged people to turn on the women, and vanquish the evil among them, preaching Exodus 22:18: "Thou shalt not suffer a

witch to live" (Purdy). Having such support from people in power, the accusations immediately held more weight. Mather spread his beliefs that "Witchcraft is not only real but that it is also a major threat to the entire Puritan belief system as well as to the structure of the society" (Colburn). With a leader's legitimization of this theory, its support from local townspeople suddenly skyrocketed, and it became a weapon that effectively executed multiple innocent people.

All these factors created a phenomenon within a society that became quick to incriminate women, even on accusations as irrational as witchcraft. Bridget Marshall writes in her article, "Most Witches Are Women, Because Witch Hunts Were All about Persecuting the Powerless," "When women stepped outside their prescribed roles, they became targets. Too much wealth might reflect sinful gains. Too little money demonstrated bad character. Too many children could indicate a deal with a devil. Having too few children was suspicious, too." Women faced an abundance of scrutiny as a result of the fearful gaze from men who saw their own power potentially threatened. Sylvia Frederici, a well-known and respected scholar, teacher, and activist, is the author of a book titled *Caliban and the Witch* that focuses on how gender impacted the existence of witch-hunts across the globe. Frederici writes that "The witch-hunt deepened the divisions between women and men, teaching men to fear the power of women." As women became more prominent in society, the men in power were able to use people's economic and social grievances to create a pointed attack. The townspeople's initial doubts and curiosities about these claims of witchcraft were manipulated into a weapon to specifically target a group that was becoming powerful enough to frighten the current dominant majority. Men were too afraid of the possibility that women could overtake their role in society, and thus the theory of the Salem witches was born.

As civilization continues forward, this tragedy must be a reference, and society must actively fight against such ideologies forming. "Group-think" is a term that describes "a phenomenon that occurs when members of a group prioritize unanimity over a realistic appraisal of the situation at hand" (Lee). Tragic situations like the Salem witch trials occur when people begin to ignore their own opinions and morals and follow along with whatever the majority is claiming. This creates dangerous circumstances in which "prioritization of solidarity and disregard for personal opinions could result in poor decisions detrimental for the group's

members and non-members" (Lee).

   Continuing onward, it is evident that individual members of society must turn to their own internal ethical standards when faced with decisions. These witch trials can serve as a lesson to our society, teaching us that each must think for him or herself to be sure the situation at hand is just. In order to avoid being involved in a group where false claims are spurring a call to action against innocent people, it is important to support and strive for awareness, always questioning dubious assertions from the dominant majority.

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HIS207

Resented Saviors: The Rise and Fall of Monasticism in Medieval Europe

A culture of spiritual retreat has always been part of the fabric of the Mediterranean world. From Egyptian religious leaders to Hebrew mystics, the Sinai region specifically has always had a rich contemplative tradition. From this eastern spiritual tradition, an organized community-centric form of Christian monasticism swept through Europe as Roman power declined. St. Benedict's detailed organizational tracts took eremitic monasticism to a new level in Europe with the establishment of cenobitic work/pray monasticism during the ascendance of the church in the west in the late 400-500s CE. These new concepts went further than eastern traditions and incorporated much more social and economic organization. The Benedictine model turned out to be incredibly successful due to the post-Roman power vacuum, and it created a flourishing monastic tradition that was spiritual but also cultural and economic, with regional fortress-like monasteries that nurtured scholarship, the arts, and commerce and provided a source of educated counsel to secular leaders.[1] While this form of organized monasticism saved much of Western European scholarship and culture after the fall of the Roman Empire, the rigors of the monastic life and the material success of these institutions eventually bred corruption and resentment and spurred multiple reforms and eventual decline.

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1.   Jean Sorbella,"Monasticism in Western Medieval Europe," metmuseum.org. Accessed January 31 2021, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mona/hd_mona.htm.

From its outset, the early church was under a significant amount of pressure from Roman authorities. Late in the reign of Emperor Diocletian, in 303 CE, a new wave of Christian persecution occurred throughout the empire. These suppressions, and the later political unrest as the empire fragmented, made life chaotic for Christians in imperial cities around the Mediterranean. This contributed to the formation of a spiritual movement, some of whose more zealous adherents fled to caves, mountaintops, and deserts in the nearby Sinai Peninsula and Canaan, which had long been spiritual retreats for many cultures. In fact, in *The Life of Saint Anthony,* the Bishop Athanasius relays that Anthony persuaded many to embrace the solitary life and colonize the nearby mountains and deserts in the eremitic tradition.[2] While St. Anthony rejected worldly life in a suppressed church, and he and his devotees went on journeys of faith in the desert to escape an unfriendly secular world, his spiritual successor, St. Benedict, came of age in central Italy in the late/post-Roman world when the church was in ascension. This gave rise to two different kinds of monastic communities in the early church: eremitic monasticism with a loose, charismatically inspired community that renounced material gain, and cenobitic monasticism that was well ordered, strictly organized, and economically successful.[3]

While still centered around spiritualism and contemplation, the Benedictine monastic tradition in central Italy had the most influence on the spread of monasticism in Europe. This was due to the codification and promulgation of the 73-chapter organizational tract *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (516 CE). The Rule lays out the norms that guide monastic relationships and spirituality while also giving pragmatical guidance on organizing day-to-day monastic life.[4] This text was so influential and went into such painstaking detail on monastic organization that by 1100 CE, Benedictine cenobitic monasticism had superseded the monastic codes of the eastern church fathers and had become the dominant form of monastic observance practiced in the Latin

2.   Kay Brainerd Slocum, in *Sources in Medieval Culture and History* (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011), 24.

3.   Gert Melville. *The World of Medieval Monasticism: Its History and Forms of Life*, (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, Liturgical Press, 2016), 7.

4.   Melville, *World of Medieval Monasticism*, 31.

west.[5] Benedictine organization also promoted the Roman virtues of stability, order, and moderation, contributing to its success in recruiting the intelligentsia of late antiquity that were living among the violent and often barbarous debris of the ebbing Roman Empire.[6] Starting from his fortress-like monastery at Monte Cassino, Benedict's acolytes spread this form of organized cenobitic monasticism throughout Europe where it eventually gained thousands of adherents and, later, royal sponsorship. As an example, Charlemagne requested a copy of The Rule for monastic organization in his realm. Thus, while Benedictine organization had sprung from the spiritual heritage of the eastern church fathers, its noteworthy component was an organizational nature that allowed it to take root and flourish in a disorganized, post-Roman world.

The impact and astounding growth of cenobitic monasticism in Europe during the early medieval era cannot be understated. From 500-1000 CE, monasteries organized around the Benedictine Rule were established from North Africa to Britain and from Spain to Poland. While some were sacked and suppressed and their spread throughout Europe ebbed and flowed, most Benedictine monasteries on the European continent flourished and expanded. It is around this time that many of these religious communities began to acquire extensive landed estates. In fact, one abbey founded in the Sabine area northeast of Rome in the eighth century CE became so enormous and wealthy that it had its own tax-exempt commercial ship![7] The political leadership of the day took note of the civilizing influence of the monasteries in their lands (and their wealth) and began to afford them protection and sponsorship. "Charlemagne in particular…knew how to enlist monasteries to meet his kingdom's various needs, whether in technical matters concerning the logistics of provision, in military affairs, or for the formation of a political elite."[8] The interaction with local and national nobility also increased the stature of the

5.   Greg Peters, in *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 74.

6.   Clifford Hugh Lawrence, in *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2015), 33.

7.   Melville, *World of Medieval Monasticism*, 44.

8.   Ibid., 44.

monasteries and, in particular, the Abbott, but these entanglements with the outside world, while politically and economically lucrative, came with their own problems (and were contrary to Benedict's Rule). As monasteries grew in power and prestige, they became less the remote fortresses of spiritual contemplation and more regional social service agencies providing libraries, hospitals, mills, schools, orphanages, and old age homes for nobles. The system was, quite literally, a victim of its own success and soon became bloated, corrupt, and unwieldy (not to mention impious). Still, Benedictine cenobitic monasticism arrived in the right place at the right time and stepped in as a civilizing influence in Europe during a rather chaotic time. Despite their secular entanglements and eventual corruption, early medieval monasteries had a great hand in promoting scholarship, culture, religion, and leadership during Europe's transition from the Roman Empire to more settled forms of monarchical governance.

The Rule of Saint Benedict strictly advocated vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for monastic life. In fact, one of the major shortcomings of the style of Benedictine monasticism that dominated Europe is that it was too complex and demanding to uphold over time (it is worth noting that the first group of monks that Benedict led near Subiaco, Italy, tried to poison him after a few months, which speaks to the fact that, despite the hagiography, he might have been somewhat of a martinet). Unfortunately, as monasteries accumulated endowments, commercial wealth, and worldly goods, those noble goals of poverty, chastity, and obedience became more of a guideline than a rule. It should be remembered as well that these vows were for individual monks and nuns but, at least in the way they were interpreted at the time, not for the rather commercial monastery complexes themselves which had become large moneymaking and social service institutions. Another problem that arose in large monastic communities is the extra labor and hangers-on required to maintain and run such large operations. Lay people, workers, young "oblates" (literally young people given to or "obligated" to the monastery), and even retirees were now part of the monastic retinue. Thus, like any large, successful organization, over time, there was a certain amount of decay from the original ideal, but, in the case of European monasticism, there were also periods of renewed vision and reform.[9] In fact, despite occasional attempts at secular and papal meddling and reorganization, the large monastic reform

9.   Peters, *Story of Monasticism*, 119.

and renewal movements actually sprang, counterintuitively, from the eastern eremitic tradition and from some of the larger, more powerful monasteries in central France.

In Gert Melville's book *The World of Medieval Monasticism*, he follows the chapter on "The Flowering of the Benedictines" with the "Return to the Desert."[10] Many other histories also note that the monastic excesses of the period 800-1000 CE led to a new wave of asceticism and reform that took inspiration from eastern monastic traditions. This "return-to-basics" response was not just a protest against the corporate wealth and worldly involvements of the great abbeys, but also a genuine spiritual quest for disengagement, solitude, and poverty symbolized by the need for manual labor and simplicity.[11] In addition to a return to eremitical traditions, there was also a revival and a return to the fundamentals of St. Benedict's Rule. The hugely influential Cluny Abbey in Burgundy, France, had the good fortune to have noble and papal sponsorship, freeing it from local meddling and allowing for a series of conservative reformist abbots between 800 and 1000 CE. These reformers transformed Cluny into something known as an *ecclesia,* or a monastic church that encompassed all of Christendom, and given its focus on restructuring, had the goal of making the Christian world "bright and new."[12] This reform was not only about a re-devotion to spiritualism and Benedict's Rule, but also one of revival and reorganization of other monastic houses and convents (sometimes deeded by church leaders or nobles) into a hierarchical structure subordinate to the "Cluniacs." Their quick and stunning success in refocusing monastic life on the liturgy and reforming other wayward monastic houses and orders was, in fact, the cause of their eventual decline. While begun as a principled effort to renovate European monasticism, the Cluniacs, like their predecessors, became wealthy, corrupt, and perhaps committed more to worldly affairs than to those of the spiritual world. By the 1100s the Cluniac reforms had run their course, but, as with any vibrant institution, more monastic reform movements were on the horizon.

Around 1100 CE another Benedictine offshoot at an abbey in central France, the Cistercians, came to prominence as the next wave of reformers (along with their white habits). Professor Clifford Lawrence writes, "The simple austerity of the early

10.   Melville, *World of Medieval Monasticism*, 89.

11.   Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism,* 136.

12.   Melville, *World of Medieval Monasticism*, 77.

Cistercian observance and the fervor of its evangelists, combined with a dynamic central organization, brought the order spectacular success."[13] The Cistercians claimed "to have revived the pure and undiluted Benedictine Rule,"[14] which also indirectly implied that their brother Cluniacs had lost their way. While adopting changes to counter-Cluniac reforms regarding monastery ornamentation and the accumulation of wealth, one of the most important Cistercian reforms or contributions was the elimination of the system of "oblates," or orphans, children and lay brothers and other workers attached to the monastery. Oblates generally had few ecclesiastical duties and were less zealous than those monks and priests truly dedicated to the faith. Most chronicles of the time state that they had become a drag on monastic institutions and, due to a lot of bad behavior, were generally reviled by the public. Still, even though there was another burst of reform and revival, by the late 1200s CE, the Cistercians also became victims of their own success and, due to the accumulation of wealth and power, were generally looked down upon by the public as corrupt, out of touch, spiritual elites.

After the Cistercians, there were various other monastic reform movements, such as mendicant orders that worked among the people and lived in poverty, like the Dominicans and Franciscans. Again, one can see the roots of these reforms as attempts to get back to eastern monastic fundamentals after the wild success and inevitable corruption of the previous corporatist Cluniac and Cistercian movements. In addition, with the advent of the concept of knighthood, and with the encouragement of the crusades by the papacy, a new form of monasticism that blended with it the concept of chivalry gave rise to military orders, like the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitallers. By combining the monastic and military vocations in medieval society, military orders fit neatly into church attempts to divert the violence and aggression of Europe's nobility into more civilized and useful outlets such as the crusades.[15] The Templars in particular were incredibly successful in the 12th and 13th centuries. In fact, by the late thirteenth century, they had almost 870 castles, preceptories, and subsidiary houses spread across Latin Christendom which

13.   Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism,* 183.
14.   Ibid., 183.
15.   "The Military Orders: An Introduction," *Online Reference for Medieval Studies,* City University of New York, *(March 29, 1996), http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/milintro.html.

were built into a network of support which provided men, horses, money, and supplies for the Templars of the East.[16] Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately since these orders were less than the Christian ideal), most of these orders declined in influence and met their demise in the folly that was the crusader states. These reinventions could not forestall the march of history, and the rigors of monastic life as well as the exclusiveness, suppression, war, and plague eventually caught up with the institution in Europe.[17] The rise of cities in the late Middle Ages also drained recruits and resources from the great monastic abbeys and convents. Despite the repeated attempts at reform, these external factors and an elite-like separation from the public saw religious houses after the 13th century enter a period of decline from which they would never recover.

Rather than being seen as a cautionary tale of overreach and failure, the rise and fall of medieval European monasticism should be regarded as an astounding success story featuring the evolution of a primitive tradition into a resilient institution that filled a void in the chaotic post-Roman socio-political landscape. It also protected and stimulated European scholarship and culture, provided needed commercial and social services (as well as jobs for elites), and enacted self-correcting reforms to meet emergent challenges. That it flourished for over 1,000 years and still exists in a modest form today speaks to its resilience and the innate desire of some for a contemplative lifestyle. Nevertheless, as the modern business axiom says, success often contains the seeds of its own destruction. As these sprawling and wealthy institutions moved into the late Middle Ages, they became ripe targets for public ire and royal dispossession and suppression. The fact that one of the final acts of European monastic life was the rise of the military orders and the perversion of the crusades speaks to how far away the institution drifted from the contemplative tradition of Saints Anthony and Benedict. Still, it is remarkable that, in a rather turbulent age, an institution this successful and wealthy was able to last as long as it did, given that it was surrounded by foreign interlopers, avaricious nobles, unruly serfs, and a corrupt church. Thus, while those eastern hermits certainly tapped a spiritual vein, it was the western church fathers' organized concept of work/pray

16.   Malcolm Barber, "Military Orders: The Templars," *Online Reference for Medieval Studies.* City University of New York, (March 29, 1996). http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/templar.html.

17.   Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism,* 259.

monasticism that created a robust, resilient institution that was able to carry Europe forward toward the Renaissance.

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ENL101

The Trickle-Down Effect of Student Debt

The college experience as we know it has become a quintessential part of American culture. For decades, the prospect of growing up has included the milestone of packing up and living on a college campus. Young people not only had the opportunity to grow into academia, but also to experience life on their own. However, outpacing inflation by double its rate (Sherman), the cost of private and public universities has climbed an average of 155% in the last 20 years (Boyington and Kerr). This idealized cornerstone of American culture has only a vestige of its memory remaining and has created a massive debt issue in its wake. In 2021, national student debt hit an all-time high of approximately 1.7 trillion dollars (Friedman). The rapid pace at which college prices have been rising over the last 20 to 30 years has created a financial disadvantage that is disproportionately affecting minority groups and younger generations.

With this information, it should come as no surprise that the largest age group for student loan borrowers are the younger cohort. In fact, 14.8 million student borrowers are between the ages of 25 and 34 (Friedman). According to the federal student loan portfolio, this means that student borrowers 34 and under make up half the population of student borrowers in the US (Friedman). Of course, their numbers work unfortunately well in conjunction with the major spike in the price of education over the last two decades. In contrast, debt for student borrowers over 50 stands at 8.5 million, owing collectively around $350 billion (Friedman).

This is a noticeable deficit compared to the $600 billion that millennials and students 24 and under owe in student debt (Friedman). The growing issue for baby boomers, the next oldest group, is that the student debt they owe is not only due to their own personal pursuits for education. According to surveys done by Fidelity, in 2020, boomers experienced a 33% increase in the student loans they owed compared to the previous year due to supporting their families' education (Arvedlund). This is a disturbing example of how the weight of student debt for the younger, more current group of student borrowers is bleeding into the lives of those once unaffected.

Being born during a particularly disadvantageous economic era is not the only circumstance to breed the oversaturation of

student debt. A study done by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that socioeconomic background, race, and gender all play big roles in the debt student borrowers are taking on (Lake). Not only are men likely to pay off their student debts at a rate of about 7% higher than women after graduation, only 56% of White male students take on student loans at all (Lake). Meanwhile, 71% of Black students will take on debt to complete their education, and Black women are taking on student loans more than any other group (Lake). The socioeconomic disadvantages that exist within communities of people of color create a higher demand for them to educate themselves. However, the inequality that exists for many people creates a pay and job disadvantage which will make them more likely to default. A study done by Judy Scott-Clayton of Columbia University showed that within 12 years of graduation, 38% of Black students and POC defaulted on student loans while only 12% of white students would default in the same time frame (Looney et al.). Without equal opportunity for student borrowers, the problem of student loan debt will continue to grow and affect students of minority backgrounds disproportionately.

Remarkably, this trend of rising tuition costs and increased student debt does not necessarily apply overseas. University education in England is on average $4,000 more expensive than it is in the United States (Safier), yet national student loan debt looks meager in comparison to that of the US. By the end of 2020, England's national student debt closed out the year at approximately $140 billion (Bolton). Despite the United States being runner up for the most expensive education, the US far outpaces England in student loan debt (Safier), which suggests that tuition may not be the only cause. Clearly, the US student loan debt structure is in need of reform.

The student loan crisis in the US is an issue that has created a major impact, not only on the economy of the country, but also on the general outlook related to the value of college education. Many fear that it may not be worth the money or financial toil down the road to pursue a college education. Making smart decisions when applying to college and remaining aware of financial obligations will help students understand the impact of loans on their lives and on the economy. Until then, public and private universities alike will continue to enjoy the splendor of charging ever-increasing tuition rates to consumers who feel voiceless.

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ENL102

The Use of Black Women to Uphold White Patriarchal Capitalism: Colonial Era to the Modern Day

Angela Davis once said, "Woman was the test, but not every woman seemed to qualify. Black women, of course, were virtually invisible…" Thinking about this quote, and the context in which it was written (women's suffrage), makes one wonder, in what other areas are Black women "virtually invisible"? One system that relies heavily on and virtually ignores Black women is capitalism. Capitalism is defined as "an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state" ("Capitalism"). Viewed through this lens, the unpaid labor of women, especially Black women has provided the muscle to keep the backbone of America upright. Since colonial times, Black women's bodies were sexualized and weaponized against them for the sake of profit and property ownership for the white "ruling" class. Black women's bodies were "privately owned" and traded for their industry by the elite white men of America and continued to be utilized in an economic and political system that suppressed the meaningful participation of Black women in America's growth. Capitalism continues to be upheld in favor of those with extreme wealth, while others struggle for necessities, and this is especially so for Black and indigenous women of color. Prior to 1681, there was no distinction in law between people of differing races or skin colors. According to the research done by Jacqueline Battalora, the first appearance of the word "white" was written into law after Bacon's Rebellion in 1681 and served to "[represent] the need of elites within the colonies to control large masses of laborers, and their desire to have greater access to women" (26). Despite sharing the commonalities of living in abject poverty, working for little to nothing in return, and sharing resentment towards those who lived in relative opulence in comparison, this "white" distinction gave white people something to maintain with zero effort (the color of their skin) and endowed "white" people privileges not afforded to African laborers. With racial divide among the working class codified into law came consequences that stripped Black men of their humanity and what little privilege came with being male in colonial society. While Black men were barred from marrying

white women, holding public office, and owning weapons, white men suffered virtually no consequences for the violation and rape of African women and engaged in such crimes "to the advancement of their investment in property or that of the landowner for whom they labored" (Battalora 39). In this context, African women were used to uphold the wealth and status of capitalism and white patriarchy from the colonial era of America into to the modern era.

In the American South, Black women were used to uphold white patriarchy in several ways. From becoming the majority of field workers on plantations due their cheaper "price" on the slave market, to supplementing the workforce, Black women played a large role in the success of the plantation system and devastation of the Black population. In "The Slave Experience: Men, Women, and Gender," Jennifer Hallam notes that "enslaved women wielding hoes were contributing to the commercial production of their masters, not the nourishment of their families." This practice not only hindered the health and welfare of the Black family, it also placed commercial production and white wealth above the people who were working to produce it. Hallam also observes that, "… childbirth… was an economic advantage for the master, who multiplied his labor force through slave pregnancy." Not only did Black women uphold the wealth and means of production via their physical labor, they were also forced to add more "laborers" to this labor force by means of the violent rape of their own bodies. They could not withdraw consent, and any means of fighting against such violations meant cruel punishment and further degradation.

In the decades and centuries between the legal recognition of "white" as a privileged status, the United States grew vastly. From the American Revolution to the signing of the Constitution and the expansion of the states into the western half of the country, slavery continued, and Southern states prospered on the backs of enslaved laborers. Crystal Feimster points out in her article "When Black Women Reclaimed Their Bodies" that "no Southern states made it legally possible for slave women to file rape charges against a white man before 1861." The continued sanctioning of rape by the states further promulgated the idea that Black women were not fully autonomous human beings capable of withdrawing consent. In addition to denying Black women sovereignty over their own bodies, in many states Black men and women could not testify in court against white people. With Black women existing outside the legal definition of rape and unable to testify against their rapists, there were no options for Black women to see justice

served for the violation of their bodies and the continued use of their bodies to uphold white supremacy and white patriarchy.

The end of the Civil War did not mean more legal protections for Black women. In 2013, Estelle Freedman writes, "Even after Emancipation, when rape laws in the South formally became race-neutral, Southerners claimed that African-American women could not be raped because they had no moral purity to defend." In the early 20th century, as migration of African Americans to the Northern states increased, the Southern economy experienced the effects of lost labor. Southern planters and employers used threats, intimidation, and unrelenting abuse to restrain the exodus of a free source of labor for Southern states (Tolnay and Beck 220). As the migration North continued, the African American press began to restructure the racial conversation surrounding the rape of Black women. For example, *The Chicago Defender*, in the early 20th century, reported on the rape of Black women by white men, including in a 1911 article titled "White Gentleman Commits Rape: That's All Right – It Was On A Colored Girl – Permitted by the United States Government and the Confederacy" (qtd. in Freedman). More gradually, the white press slowly began questioning the validity of the "black rapist" as a form of white terror (Freedman). The use of Black women as a direct source of free labor began to decline after Emancipation and the migration North. Now, rather than be the direct buttresses of capitalism via rape, childbirth, and the use and sale of Black children as a result of constant violation of their bodies, women, especially Black women, came to be the support structure at home for Black men who were often only able to take low wage, dangerous jobs.

Though slavery as most "know" it may no longer exist, the power dynamics between people of color and white people remain problematic. As Akeia Benard observes in "Colonizing Black Female Bodies Within Patriarchal Capitalism," "*relations* of domination may change, but *systems* of domination do not." The United States evolved from colonial era slavery to what Benard calls an era of "patriarchal capitalism." Patriarchal capitalism is the concept that the form of capitalism we are familiar with today requires a measure of unwaged labor to support it, and in this particular case, that would be the unwaged labor of women of color. The United States has historically had an imperialistic and white supremacist underpinning in its attitude towards labor. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, this meant slave labor. Then came

indentured servitude, child labor, and in the modern day, unequal wages for the same work. Additionally, American corporations are legally able to use prison labor to produce products sold and marketed in America (Garcia). The incarceration of Black women at disproportionate rates is yet another way that Black bodies are used to uphold capitalism. Cardiff Garcia, host of NPR's *The Indicator from Planet Money* states that the prison labor industry is a "multi-billion-dollar industry with incarcerated people doing everything from building office furniture and making military equipment to staffing call centers and doing 3D modeling" (Garcia). Not only does this prison workforce produce products for the private sector, in many prisons they do so for the state as well, according to activist Dominique Morgan (qtd. in Garcia). This practice gives states a compelling reason to incarcerate as many people as possible to maintain a large, productive workforce incapable of taking any "time off."

After centuries of the physical and sexual exploitation and character assassination of Black women from colonial times and through the Reconstruction, Frances Beale observes that "she has suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, having been forced to serve as the white woman's maid and wet nurse for white offspring while her own children were, more often than not, starving and neglected." In this way, women "represent a surplus labor supply, the control of which is absolutely necessary to the profitable functioning of capitalism"(Beale). Women, especially Black women, are paid less for the same work that men are and are generally relegated to low wage positions with little opportunity for advancement in a capitalist system that profits from this type of wage and labor exploitation (Beal; Frye). Through oppressive wage structures and minimal growth opportunities, a capitalist society can stunt the forward momentum of an entire group of people, in this case Black men and Black women who support Black men and provide unwaged labor in the home. It is through these means that Black men and women are withheld opportunities that they may legally have a right to… opportunities such as running for and holding office, engaging with their communities in volunteer positions and making themselves visible as more than domestic workers in a society that often doesn't "see" them. When wages are low, hours are long, and duties in the home take up any free time that may be available, it is not difficult to see how Black men and Black women are kept "behind the scenes" in a capitalist society that depends on this exploited labor force

Through centuries and decades of physical, psychological, and sexual torture, Black women have been used to uphold a system of oppression that benefits very few people—and in large part the ultra-wealthy. From the days of legislation that barred Black men from marrying Black women to the dismantling of voting rights laws and union busting efforts of the modern day, Black women have borne the brunt of this nation's social failures. By the 1970s, people of color were taking bold steps to let American leadership know that no longer would equality be "asked for." In 1974 Silvia Federici wrote of women, "… we have cooked, smiled, f[-----] throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anybody else, but because we did not have any other choice" (82). Although Federici's work centered around white women at the time, her statement is particularly true in the case of Black women, who historically had little choice in these matters from before the very founding of this country. With this perspective, one is forced to consider the value that the unwaged work of Black women has added to the United States' economy. Capitalism is reliant on a support network that it barely acknowledges exists. This is startlingly true when you look closely at any area that houses a large portion of service-industry workers and the support systems that are available. One example of the use of Black women when needed, and the discarding of Black women when inconvenient and no longer serving the purpose of propping up white wealth, is that of the poultry industry in the South in the mid-20th century. Poultry plants sought out "right-to-work" states that helped suppress union membership and forced laborers to work harder to maintain unity during strikes. In an essay titled "Ain't No Life For a Mother," Carrie Freshour observes that "The rise of the poultry industry was built on the backs, arms and hands of Black women in the South" (Freshour). She goes on to describe how the poor working conditions led to lengthy strikes led by Black women, who represented the majority of poultry workers by the late 1960s. These strikes led poultry corporations to import undocumented workers to depress wages and the overall costs of labor. Union membership dropped precipitously with these efforts. The import of undocumented workers led to the displacement of Black women in the poultry workforce at a time when welfare reform and the "welfare queen" were driving aspects of political conversation (Freshour). This same conversation also painted Black workers as having a poor work ethic while incarceration rates for people of color were increasing. In addition

to using the labor of Black women when convenient and importing undocumented labor when it was no longer cost effective to employ Black women due to their advocacy, Black women and families were often unable to access the social services that were meant to ease the workload not just at work, but at home as well (services such as childcare and food stamps) (Freshour).

It is through the study of the progression of labor laws that we can see how capitalism has used Black women throughout history to maintain its power. When advocacy groups fight against poor working conditions, low wages, few benefits, and the importation of even cheaper labor, these efforts are often led or inspired by Black women. Capitalist power structures use the legal system and our system of government to, in turn, fight these attempts at improving the lives of its lowest waged workers to maintain their hold on as much profit as they are able. This is true of plantation owners in the South, right up through the modern day fight for the unionization of Amazon plants in the South. Throughout these centuries, capitalist power structures have adapted to the fight for equality and equity and created ever more creative ways to divide the labor forces that produce their wealth. Every step of the way, Black women have fought for their rights. From Harriet Tubman and her work to free the enslaved from chains of plantation life, to the washerwomen of Jackson, Mississippi in 1866, to International Workers of the World activist Lucy Parsons, to union organizer Sanchioni Butler at Nissan in 2017, the efforts of Black women have influenced vital changes. Black women took on these challenges even as the system of capitalism worked to limit their power to unite, organize, and demand the respect and wages they deserve. It is through this work and these efforts that we continue to see how the society we are familiar with has been built by the bodies of Black women. Through this advocacy work, Black women often improve the status of all women by advocating for change not just for themselves, but for all of those who face the same or similar social ills in society and the workplace. Angela Davis once spoke of the invisibility of Black women, but she also taught us that "You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time," and that is the work that Black women have done through the centuries and continue to do today.

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ENL101

A Solution to Plastic Waste Pollution

Plastic waste has played a significant role in destroying the ocean, marine life, and the environment. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature reports, "Roughly 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced each year, and out of that, 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in the ocean" ("Marine"). There has been an increase in plastic usage worldwide. The damage is growing as many plastic particles are discarded haphazardly. This causes widespread pollution over land and water. The cause of plastic waste stems from, among many causes, poor solid waste practices and beach litter created by human activities. Plastic waste tends to interfere with all organisms of the ecosystem, causing potential harm through entanglement and death from plastic consumption. To effectively end the damage plastic causes, a ban on single-use plastic should be implemented. It is important to examine this solution by assessing the ban's effectiveness and the impact it would have on global economies compared with recycling as an alternative solution.

To protect the environment from waste pollution, the ban on single-use plastic is the best solution to reduce plastic usage. Single-use plastic is any packaging and serviceware such as spoons, forks, bags, wrappers, and bottles commonly used one time. Plastic bag restrictions are being introduced in many areas of the United States. California was one of the first states to

introduce regulations banning single-use plastic, which prohibited the distribution of plastic bags in supermarkets, chain pharmacies, and other retail stores. Since the policy to ban plastic bags came into effect, "Californians Against Waste (CAW), a nonprofit organization that sponsored the bill, has reported a substantial reduction in plastic bag litter in the state's rivers, beaches and landscapes" (Philippe). According to Philippe, CAW personnel recorded 65,000 shopping bags dispersed throughout water bodies during a 2010 annual beach cleanup, a quantity that CAW claims fell by 72% in 2017 due to the ban. In support of the single-use plastic ban, government officials imposed laws geared at limiting plastic use and distribution to control plastic bag usage.

To decrease plastic usage by banning single-use plastic is a step toward eradicating plastic pollution. A single-use plastic ban in China resulted from "China's biggest dump reaching its full capacity, 25 years ahead of schedule" ("Single-Use"). According to Le Guern, in 2008, China's parliament passed legislation prohibiting businesses and merchants from providing free bags with a thickness of fewer than 0.025 millimeters thick. The ban on plastic has impacted China positively as "the country avoided using 40 billion bags due to the plastic bag ban and China was able to save 1.6 million tons of petroleum" (Le Guern) that would have been used to incinerate plastic. Even though plastic bags are convenient for customers, the production of plastic is a waste of energy and resources. In support of banning single-use plastic, various countries have taken steps to control plastic waste pollution.

To combat global plastic production, environmentalists and government officials of various countries play a vital role in banning single-use plastics by limiting the distribution. According to Philippe, "Across the globe, countries have increased their efforts to limit plastic bags and other plastic materials from being produced, distributed, and ultimately released into the environment." The first country to support banning plastic bags was "Bangladesh in 2002 as plastic waste caused clogging in flood drains and damages … causing environmental destruction" (LeGuern). More countries followed by instituting a ban on plastics. "Ireland imposed a steep tax on plastics, which resulted in plastic use falling by 90%" (Le Guern). As less and less plastic is being used, plastic production has decreased, resulting in money saved which could be used to expand the recycling program. "According to the EPA, plastic pollution costs some countries one

million in annual fees to remove waste mostly made up of grocery bags"(Philippe). With more large economies supporting banning single-use plastic, "there has been a rise in local manufacturers producing heavy-duty, recyclable and compostable bags"(Le Guern). Companies have now joined in the fight to ban single-use plastic. For instance, "swapping out plastic straws for paper in restaurants like McDonald's in the United Kingdom and Ireland" (Lindwall). The ban on plastic has prompted "Disney to eliminated single-use plastic at all their locations" (Lindwall). With the ban, more and more entities are taking the initiative to phase out the use of plastic to respond to shifting consumer habits. However, there is always the fear that prohibiting plastic may lead to further environmental problems with consumers finding alternative products to plastic bags.

Some may say banning single-use plastic is the warm-up to a solution but not the end goal. It can be argued that banning single-use plastic creates more harm than good. It decreases plastic usage, increases paper bag usage, and encourages customers to shift to harmful alternatives leading to environmental harm. Paper bag production leads to deforestation, which damages the natural environment (Gollom). While no one solution is perfect, a plastic ban is a start to improving the natural order of the environment globally. The production of plastic bags causes more harm on land and to waterways as "it pollutes and is more toxic"(Hite), so banning single-use plastic will cut production, which will decrease the harmful effect on the environment. There are also other methods by which plastic usage can be managed, and one such implementation is through recycling.

Plastic pollution has become a nuisance to the economy; another alternative solution used to reduce waste is to recycle plastic that causes harmful effects on the environment. Plastic waste management by recycling has many advantages. It conserves natural resources, water, and minerals, and there is no need for land to grow timber. Recycling is more cost-efficient and safe for the environment, and "it reduces greenhouse gas emission"("Positive Effect"). Not only is it cost-efficient, it also gives new life to waste materials. Although recycling has advantages, it also has disadvantages. One weakness of recycling is that not all recycled items meet expectations. "Recycled products are not as durable as newly processed material; they do not last as long and tend to be of lesser quality"("Positive Effect"). For instance, recyclables are generally made from harsh chemicals that are not safe for the

environment or public health. Though a perfect solution is yet to be identified, the ban on single-use plastic is the best solution as it is proven to reduce plastic waste.

Though plastic usage is convenient and beneficial, single-use plastic imposes threats upon the natural environment. In order to tackle the plastic crisis, banning single-use plastic would be the first and most effective step in decreasing plastic consumption habits. Today, many countries have started imposing laws geared at reducing plastic use and focusing on using alternatives. Due to plastic bans, countries now see an increase in revenues that can improve recycling programs and cost-efficiency. Plastic bans will have a significant impact on the environment in eliminating plastic.

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ENL108

Anti-Transgender Legislation Is Legal Discrimination

How do we determine the gender of the people we interact with daily? We look at elements of their outward appearance, including clothing, hairstyles, jewelry choices, or the use of makeup, to name a few. This is the basis of gender identity. It is how one expresses one's gender without revealing one's genitalia publicly. One's biological sex refers to being distinguished as male or female based on reproductive organs and structures at birth. There is nothing biological that drives a person with a penis to wear a suit rather than a dress. Those are things that society has decided. Every single day, we accept that one's gender identity correlates with one's assigned sex at birth, yet we cannot know it does with certainty. We trust our judgement and go about our days. It would seem, without being any the wiser, we already share many spaces with transgender people that are designated by sex. Anti-transgender legislation is a classic example of a solution in search of a problem or perhaps more insidiously, a way to legislate against a group of people we just don't like or don't care to understand. Transgender people have always existed but are garnishing the spotlight because they are feeling more comfortable in society with growing acceptance from the general public. Regardless of growing support, bigotry still abounds and is the source of new anti-transgender laws. The complete lack of evidence or data

relating to any of the claims behind enacting anti-transgender laws leaves only one conclusion: some parts of society just don't like transgender people based on their differentness, an all-too-familiar concept behind many discriminatory laws targeting minority groups that have existed in this country since its founding. These laws are especially harmful for the transgender community, but whether directly or indirectly, they will indefinitely harm us all.

   The Trump administration's transgender military ban was enacted on the baseless assertion that inclusive service threatened unit cohesion, readiness, and lethality. A recent study done by The Palm Center focused on the effects of the ban and noted that "until now, no one had ever assessed the ban itself to determine whether the policy fixes those ostensible problems. What we found is that the policy actually made things worse when assessing the very priorities the Trump administration laid out as the rationale for reinstating the ban" ("DoD's Transgender Ban"). This study looked at operational data from 2016, when the policy was inclusive, compared to 2019, after the ban was reinstated. It's a good example of the problems that anti-transgender policy creates. The study by the Palm Center not only concluded that the ban did not improve the same areas that were targeted but actually made them worse. The ban negatively impacted recruitment, reputation, retention, unit cohesion, morale, access to medical care, order, and discipline. Before this ban was instituted, the inclusiveness of transgender Americans had already been assessed leading each of the five military branch service chiefs to subsequently testify that inclusive policy was a success, according to the study ("DoD's Transgender Ban"). But despite the approval of the inclusive policy by the leader of each of our military branches, the Trump administration reinstated the ban anyway. We effectively undermined the strength and stability of our military on the basis of bigotry. Devin Dwyer reported for *ABC News* on retired General James Cartwright, who was instrumental in lifting the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, who stated quite plainly, "The studies were all conclusive that, one, [sic] there was no operational impact. In fact, that was just the opposite."

   Women's sports haven't been a concern to most people until recently because stopping transgender women from competing in them is the new anti-transgender talking point. The proponents of these laws claim they are enacted in order to ensure fairness in women's sports and that a "biological male" would have an unfair advantage. The claim that trans women will

dominate female sports isn't born out of any kind of research or data. The Olympics and the NCAA have both allowed trans women to compete in women's sports for years without incident. In fact, the NCAA is a vocal opponent of these types of laws. Kim Chandler of the *Associated Press* wrote in the *Washington Post*, "Republican legislators have been hard-pressed to come up with actual instances in which a transgender girl's participation has caused a problem on a girl's sports team." Dr. Eric Villain, a pediatrician and geneticist who studies sex difference in athletes, explains that no evidence of disparities between trans and cisgender girls in sports has come to light stressing that "There are no good faith reasons to limit transgender women's participation in sports, especially at the high school level" (qtd. in Ermyas and Wakeham). Moreover, Ermyas and Wakeham explain that "Villain has advised both the International Olympic Committee and the NCAA and says these laws generally aren't based in scientific evidence, but rather 'target women who have either a different biology or…simply look different.'" We are essentially allowing women and girls to have their genitalia publicly scrutinized. So, a cisgender female who happens to be six feet tall, with a smaller bust, and a shorter haircut may be forced to prove her sex to an authority in order to participate in sporting events. To call this draconian is an understatement. Dr.Villain further explains, " The body of a marathon runner is extremely different from the body of a shot put champion, and a trans woman athlete may have some advantage on the basketball court because of her height, but would be at a disadvantage in gymnastics" (qtd. in Ermyas and Wakeam). The same could be said of two cisgender women. A six-foot-tall cisgender woman may have certain advantages over a cisgender woman who is five feet, three inches tall. Different bodies have different advantages and disadvantages, so it doesn't seem to make sense to start separating athletes according to biological traits in order to achieve fairness because it would be impossible. Policies that exclude and ostracize transgender people and subject cisgender people to unnecessary scrutiny are arbitrary and rooted in prejudice. We have no place for discriminatory laws in our modern-day society, especially not in elementary and high-school level sports.

The "bathroom bills" that bar transgender people from using the bathroom of their gender identity are a tool to further alienate the transgender community and in no way protect cisgender women and girls from sexual predators as many

proponents would have us believe. Most often, the claim put forth by proponents is that a grown man has no business using the same restroom where a little girl is present. In the 1970s, polling data showed that seventy percent of Americans believed that homosexuality was directly tied to pedophilia (Herek), meaning people thought homosexuals were more likely to also be pedophiles. Because of this alarming assumption, research was then conducted to either prove or disprove the theory. Professor Gregory M. Herek, who has a Ph.D. in social psychology and is internationally recognized as an authority on discrimination of sexual minorities, has summarized in a report that "Many child molesters don't really have an adult sexual orientation. They have never developed the capacity for mature sexual relationships with other adults, either men or women. Instead, their sexual attractions focus on children—boys, girls, or children of both sexes." That being said, it would appear that a transgender woman, a person assigned male at birth, would be no more likely to sexually molest a young girl over a young boy. In public restrooms, adult cisgender men and young boys are both allowed in the same space, but a person assigned male at birth is just as likely to prey on a child of the same assigned sex as a child with a different assigned sex, so if child predators are the focus, it would seem segregating bathrooms by age would be more appropriate. And that assumes that these bathroom assaults even occur in the first place. Alia E. Dastagir wrote in *USA Today*, "The National Center for Transgender Equality, The Human Rights Campaign and The American Civil Liberties Union say there is no statistical evidence of violence to justify the laws." The National Center for Transgender Equality states specifically on their website that "Law enforcement and sexual assault advocates in states and cities that already have trans-inclusive policies in place have said over and over: the claim that these policies cause safety problems is absurd and completely false" ("Transgender People"). The underlying reason would appear to be a stigma; Goffman defines this as "an undesired differentness" (qtd. in Herek), which is not a reason to enact legislation. Dastigar, in *USA Today,* went on to write, "These anti-trans laws pose a ferocious threat to the safety and dignity of not only trans men and women but to anyone who doesn't conform to traditional gender roles. In other words, a butch lesbian may face more discrimination in a public restroom than a fully transitioned trans woman, who can go about her business without anyone being the wiser." By allowing this type of discriminatory legislation,

we are opening up both the groups that are supposedly being protected and the initial minority group to discrimination.

The proponents of anti-transgender legislation would have the public believe that the inclusion of transgender Americans poses a very real threat to the public at large, whether it be by making the military less effective, dominating women's sports, or elevating the risk of sexual assault in public bathrooms. The problem with these justifications is that data shows, if any group in our society is in danger, it's the transgender community. A study published in *Science Advances* suggests that Sexual Gender Minorities (SGMs) experience disproportionally higher levels of violent victimization than their non-SGM peers. The only area categorized by violent crime where the rates between SGM and non-SGM people seem to be about the same is robbery (Flores et al). Robbery is category where the perpetrator may not know if the victim is an SGM or non-SGM which strongly suggests that the other categories of violent victimization an SGM person suffers is discriminatory. This same study indicates that "SGM's experience 71.1 violent victimizations per 1000 persons, compared with 19.2 per 1000 among non-SGM persons (Flores et al)." This implies that sexual and gender minorities are the ones in need of protective legislation, not the general public.

We decide gender in society based on how a person presents him or herself. By forcing a person who, by society's definition, is categorized as a woman to participate in or use facilities based on their assigned sex at birth, we are forcing them to reveal a very personal and intimate part of themselves that we don't ask of any other member of our society. Transgender people have existed for a very long time and to think that suddenly they are dangerous, because we are more aware of them, is ignorant at best. We should view this type of legislation with the same abhorrence that we would if the word transgender were replaced with Black, Latino or Latina, female, or gay. Freedom cannot exist in a society without equal protection under the law for every American citizen. Until the most marginalized of us all have the same civil rights, those rights are simply an aspiration for us all.

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Opioid Crisis in Massachusetts: The Cause and Effect

The opioid crisis has swept across the state of Massachusetts like a blizzard in winter. It has affected thousands of husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers with no remorse. When analyzing this crippling epidemic, it is important to examine the factors that caused it, such as the excessive prescribing of the drug OxyContin in the 1990s, and the introduction and use of Fentanyl. It is also important to consider the effects from the opioid crisis, such as the increase in the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).

Before the opioid crisis began in the early 1990s, there were developments happening in pain management and patient care. A new drug, OxyContin, was introduced and subsequently prescribed excessively for pain. Susannah Sudborough explains in her article "Opioid Crisis in Massachusetts: Where We've Been and Where We're Going," that the opioid crisis started as a direct result of Purdue Pharmaceuticals introducing the narcotic Oxycontin to the drug world and that this prompted "a lawsuit by Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, as well as doctors, lawmakers and other experts." OxyContin was touted as an incredible pain management medication, and it was stressed that the drug was not addictive; however, this claim was later found to be false. The drug company exploited top-selling doctors in order to boost sales, and doctors were over prescribing OxyContin regardless of the harm it was causing ("Opioid"). An article in *The Eagle Tribune* summarizes the details of the lawsuit that "alleges Purdue Pharma pressured doctors" (Matthews) to switch patients from one medication to OxyContin. Dr. Walter Jacobs, a top prescribing physician from Andover, Massachusetts, lost his license to practice medicine, and later admitted that he prescribed narcotics on a regular basis with no regard for the risks of substance abuse, and he even prescribed the same narcotics after reports of his patients overdosing (Matthews). Mr. Jacobs is one of many practitioners who over prescribed narcotics knowing the risks of substance abuse and overdoses in Massachusetts. OxyContin and Purdue Pharma were not the only reason the opioid crisis in Massachusetts exploded the way that it did. When

examining the opioid crisis, it is important to include other factors that contributed to the increase in opioid-related overdose deaths, such as Fentanyl.

Fentanyl has played a significant role in the opioid crisis and the increasing number of opioid related overdose deaths in the last 5 or 6 years. "Illicit Fentanyl" is used by drug dealers to increase the potency of other drugs, such as heroin. Drug users are usually unaware that the drug they are buying has been "laced" with Fentanyl. Fentanyl is extremely dangerous and "can be 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine" (Schuster and Vance). According to the article "Opioid Addiction is a National Crisis and It's Twice as Bad in Massachusetts" written by Anise Vance and Luc Schuster, "The spike [in overdose deaths] has been even more pronounced in Massachusetts. In 2016, there were 1,550 fentanyl-related deaths in Massachusetts, up from only 98 in 2013." Fentanyl has been a big concern in Massachusetts because it is killing people. One of the methods of use is IV injection. In an article in the *Boston Herald*, Richard Baker, the program director of the mobile prevention team at Victory Programs, "cited the explosion of fentanyl in the state, saying the drug requires much more frequent injections, which leads to sharing of dirty needles" (Cohan). In addition to addiction and death, one should also analyze the effects from the opioid crisis, such as the increase in exposure and spread of HIV and HCV in Massachusetts.

In the IV drug use community, the public health concern related to the crisis is the increase in exposure and spread of HIV and HCV. The drug users who inject their opioids may not always have access to clean syringes and may have to share with another individual, not knowing the other individual's health status. This puts them at risk for contracting HIV or HCV. In 2018, Massachusetts Department of Public Health Infectious Disease Medical Director, Dr. Alfred DeMaria, cited developments of HIV infections in the populations of…"injection drug users, in which there has already been lots of transmission of hepatitis C." The article "Studying the Opioid Epidemic in Rural New England" highlights a federally funded study at UMass Medical School— The National Rural Opioid Initiative—covered in 2019. Lead investigator, Dr. Peter Friedmann, believes that because of the increase in risk of overdoses and HIV or HCV infections, New England is facing "the biggest public health challenge" in decades ("Studying"). There are several solutions that have already been

put in place to help slow the number of opioid related deaths, but problems persist.

When the opioid crisis started to affect Massachusetts, many wanted to find out how and why it happened. Many also wanted to find out what can be done to stop it. The opioid crisis does not only impact drug addicts; it affects mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, as people are dying or contracting infectious diseases that have lifelong consequences. There are several reasons why the crisis happened. Two major causes are the introduction of OxyContin and the excessive prescribing of the drug in the 1990s, and the introduction and use of Fentanyl. It is important to examine the effects the crisis has had in Massachusetts, such as the increase in the spread of HIV and HCV. Once each cause and effect are analyzed, solutions can be explored, created, and implemented to bring the opioid crisis in Massachusetts to a halt.

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Frankenstein

In Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Romantic horror fiction novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* written in 1818, an up-and-coming obsessive scientist named Victor Frankenstein creates a being, be it a man or otherwise, out of human materials and body parts. Victor brings this gigantic male Creation to life and then immediately abandons him, fleeing from his parental duties and scientific responsibilities. From that point forward, Frankenstein's Creation is forced to survive without basic knowledge or direction. Although some readers may quickly conclude that Frankenstein's living Creation is always just a "creature," born as an adult from the start of his given life, a more careful reader might conclude that Frankenstein's being evolves from a more "human creation" to a "creature" and then into what some would call a "monster,"—and only becomes such because he is abandoned by his maker, Victor. This reading makes Frankenstein's Creation a more complex and complicated character which reflects the human experience and mirrors human nature.

Is Victor Frankenstein's Creation a creature, a monster, or a man? Throughout the novel he is all three, evolving into each category and blurring the lines between them, showing a complex identity. Victor also addresses his Creation by all three of these labels: man, creature, and monster. However, despite Victor's efforts to disassociate from his immoral actions of creating an eventual murderer, a close examination of the text reveals that Victor initially intends to create a human man. Frankenstein's Creation is referred to as a "man" when he is first presented to the reader. More specifically, in the beginning of the novel, Sea Captain Robert Walton writes to his sister Mrs. Margaret Saville about seeing the Creation, which he describes as "...a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature…" (Shelley 14). Later, after picking up Victor, Robert asks about the Creation's mode of transportation over dogsled and refers to the Creation as a man. He asks, "And did the man whom you pursued travel in the same fashion [as yourself, in a dogsled]?" (Shelley 16). At this stage, Frankenstein's Creation is introduced as a "man." Furthermore, when Victor later recalls gathering body parts, he states that his intention had been to create human life—a (large male) being. He says, "It was with these feelings that I

began the creation of a human being. As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large" (Shelley 37). This point in the novel, right before he brings his Creation to life and realizes his stunningly unethical actions, is the last time Victor acknowledges his Creation as human.

Frankenstein's Creation only becomes a "creature" from the viewpoint of Victor himself once the Creation opens his eyes. As Victor later describes this moment to Robert, "…I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (Shelley 41). In Victor's eyes, his Creation is a creature "distinct from a human being" ("Creature"), based solely on the Creation's hideous and frightening appearance. This moment is also when the lines for Frankenstein's Creation are blurred, with the Creation morphing from creature to monster, again according to Victor's first-person narrative. Victor flees from his home, abandoning his Creation and then returns shortly after. As he later recalls "…the creature whom I had left in my apartment might still be there, alive, and walking about. I dreaded to behold this monster; but I feared still more that Henry would see him" (Shelley 44). At this point in the novel and in the early life of Frankenstein's Creation, he has already been called a "man," a "creature," and a "monster." This evolution demonstrates the layered multiplicity of the character.

Once Frankenstein's Creation is on his own and left to his own devices, his innately human survival instincts and unfortunate unguided judgments kick in prompting him to undergo several stages of transformation. Gladys Veidemanis writes about the Creation's evolving identity in a 1986 article titled "Frankenstein in the Classroom." Veidemanis writes that the middle section of the novel, Frankenstein's Creation's narration, has three analogical layers that are significant. Veidemanis explains, "On one level the monster replicates the history of human evolution, extending himself first through sensory awareness, then through the discovery of fire, thereafter, moving on to emotional, moral, and philosophical enlightenment" (63). When Frankenstein's Creation is slung into the world after being discarded by his maker, he is left to his own devices. This is also when the Creation begins to become a creature, animal-like in behavior, by foraging for food and shelter. As Veidemanis writes, "On a second level, the monster is revealed as a natural Adam whom the creator has repudiated,

leaving him solitary and abhorred" (63). Then, he finally reaches his last stage of transformation, by murdering a child, and becomes a monster as well. As Veidemanis reveals, "On the third level, the monster is equated with Lucifer, the fallen angel, though doomed to banishment without the companionship Satan was privileged to enjoy" (63). He evolves into each stage of man, creature, and monster until he is all three, his first truly evil deed complete and unable to ever be revoked. Before Frankenstein's Creation commits murder, he does nothing to deserve any evil labels. He frightens the local villagers and the De Lacey family innocently and without malice and is rewarded with reactions of fear and anger. The one label or title he should have is the one he never receives, and that is a given name.

From the novel, we can assess that names were particularly important to Shelley. Captain Walton's sister, Margaret Walton Saville, has the same initials as the author herself. More relevant, Victor Frankenstein's younger brother who was murdered by Victor's own Creation, is named William. William is not only Shelley's father's name but also the name of her son who passed away at a young age. So why didn't Shelley ever give Frankenstein's creature a name? In her own words, Shelley stated, after watching a stage adaptation of her novel at London's English Opera House, that she liked the playbill's description of the creature as "---." "This nameless mode of naming the unnamable is rather good" (qtd. in Baer 206). In other words, Shelley knew that by not giving Frankenstein's Creation a name, she was passing on the responsibility to readers to figure out for themselves the layered various principled dilemmas woven throughout her novel and essentially leaving readers to fend for themselves with these moral conundrums. Ulrich Baer writes about the Creation's namelessness in her Afterword of a reprint of the *Frankenstein* novel published in 2019. As Baer writes, "Not using any word forces readers or spectators to choose for ourselves between the weighted terms 'creature' and 'monster' and thus to take a moral position that the novel, or play, does not resolve" (Baer 206). Frankenstein's Creation does not have a name and thus he begins his new life without a sense of humanity or identity. Without a sense of humanity or identity, and without the guidance of another human being, how can one expect the actions of a grown man?

The irony of Frankenstein's Creation being nameless is that over the years, as the novel has become a staple in popular culture, the Creation has adapted into less of a man and more into a

creature and a monster with a given name, Frankenstein! Although many modern readers may have more sympathy for the Creation and argue his humanity, "[l]ate twentieth century critics, when they look at Frankenstein's Creation, no longer see a monster, as earlier generations did; they now see a creature" (Lipking 419). The name "Frankenstein" has become more synonymous with the Creation, the creature, the monster, than with the man Victor Frankenstein himself. In the end of the novel, as Victor lies dead, his Creation pronounces to Robert, "Farewell! I leave you, and in you the last of human kind whom these eyes will ever behold. Farewell Frankenstein!" (Shelley 194). Frankenstein's Creation paves his own complicated path by forging through his horrific life and then eventually breaking free of Victor and leaving on his own terms. Therefore, it can be concluded that Frankenstein's Creation is a complex and complicated character that readers cannot fully define. These are, curiously, also all the qualities that a human being possesses.

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