

FROM THE *NOTA BENE* EDITORIAL BOARD

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society is proud to present the 25th edition of *Nota Bene*, the nation's only literary anthology featuring excellence in writing among community college students.

We are pleased to once again offer scholarships to outstanding *Nota Bene* authors. This year's Ewing Citation Scholarship has been awarded to the top overall entry, "Synthesizing American Educational Philosophy: The Liberal Arts Alternative" by Shannon Dawe, a member from Montgomery College in Maryland. The authors of four other standout entries have been recognized as 2019 Reynolds Scholars.

When we first published *Nota Bene* in 1994, we were overwhelmed with the response from members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and from the audience who enthusiastically read the book. Today we continue to see a fervent response to the call for submissions, and selection for publication remains a great source of pride.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We hope you will take note and be inspired by the good work of these exceptional authors. We are grateful for the continued opportunity to showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members and to affirm our commitment to the recognition and academic excellence of students seeking associate degrees and certificates.

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The *Nota Bene* Editorial Board

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AWARDS

The Ewing Citation Scholarship Award of \$1,000 is given to the author of the *Nota Bene* manuscript considered to be the most outstanding of all entries. It is named in honor of Nell Ewing, long-time Phi Theta Kappa staff member who was a driving force behind *Nota Bene*, beginning with its conceptual design and establishment. Ewing retired in 2012 after serving 26 years with Phi Theta Kappa.

The Reynolds Scholarship Awards of \$500 each are given to up to four authors whose manuscripts were deemed outstanding. These awards are endowed by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and honor the memory of the late Donald W. Reynolds, founder of the Donrey Media Group.

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SYNTHESIZING AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: THE LIBERAL ARTS ALTERNATIVE



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When people plan their higher education today, they generally look at it as the means by which they can get the degree that will secure them a job in the field of their choice. This narrow approach is a fairly recent development. A future career is an important concern, but it is not what students should primarily desire from higher education. Instead, we should seek a better understanding of the world in order to free ourselves from the confined viewpoints of our upbringing and develop our independence. Education through the liberal arts can provide this alternative, as it emphasizes the individual in his or her development as a human being who is necessarily a part of the broader context that we call culture. An understanding of the nature and purpose of liberal education provides an appealing alternative for students to the prevailing narrative that makes an eventual job the central focus of higher education. In this paper, I provide an overview of some of the leading theories on the topic of liberal education that have been advanced since America's founding and then present the elements of their various philosophies that I think provide a helpful framework through which to view one's education.

Section I: What Is Liberal Education?

There are many different answers to this question. The central factor that all agree on is that education is facing a crisis. This crisis and the surrounding debate stretches back to America's founding, including commentary from the author of the Declaration of Independence himself, Thomas Jefferson. A century after Jefferson, eminent educational theorists John Dewey and Robert Maynard Hutchins contributed to the discussion. Supplementing Dewey and Hutchins during the 1900s was scholar Michael Oakeshott, with more recent opinions coming from university presidents and other academics such as Michael S. Roth and Ronald J. Daniels. Each of these thinkers generally agrees that liberal education involves both the cultivation of an individual's understanding of his or her self in relation to the world and a connection to democratic citizenship as an expression of humanity. In other words, it is the education of individual freedom. However, how education should function to provide this in practice is contested. The major point of contention, broadly speaking, is how curricular choice and cultivation of the individual relates to civic engagement.

Section II: The Common Consensus

The liberal arts, which make up liberal education, originate in concepts dating back to antiquity. First conceived of in terms of the “trivium” and “quadrivium” during the Middle Ages, grammar, logic, and rhetoric made up the former and arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy comprised the latter. This short list would seem to make for a narrow range of studies. However, the areas they covered at the time were much broader than today. “Grammar,” for example, included literature, poetry, and history (Fitzpatrick, 2017, p. 9). It was understood that the liberally educated individual who is disciplined in these arts cultivates their character and in so doing comes to have the uniquely human capacity, rooted in morality, to exercise rational judgment in civil society.

This idea of liberal education drove Jefferson’s desire for universal, government-funded primary education, as well as his creation of the University of Virginia (Roth, 2014, p. 21). Jefferson idealized an educated citizenry capable of judging for themselves what it means to be free so that they are able to hold government officials to account and prevent violations of their own essential liberty (Roth, 2014, p. 23). He further tied education to morality through one of his key objectives for university education: “To form [students] to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves” (Roth, 2014, p. 27).

During the 1900s, Hutchins and Oakeshott advanced the view that learning and rationality are synonymous with being human and that study of the right subject matter teaches one how to live a human life embedded in democratic society (Hutchins, 1952, p. 50; Oakeshott, 2001, p. 22). Throughout his piece “The Great Conversation,” Hutchins made an appeal for everyone to acquire a liberal education. For Hutchins, this would lead people to “excellence...of man as man and man as citizen”; Hutchins argues that everybody ought to engage in liberal education throughout life because it leads to the realization of man’s potential as a free and independent rational being embedded in civil society and because it is tied to the democratic ideal (1952, p. 49).

Even John Dewey, who is often cast in opposition to Hutchins, agreed with the underlying principle of developing individuals for society. In “The Problem of the Liberal Arts College,” he stated that his conception of liberal education “would do for the contemporary world what those arts tried to do for the world in which they took form,” that being to “liberate” the student through developing an understanding of the world around them (Dewey, 1944, p. 393). Hutchins and Dewey further agreed on the need for what Hutchins called “the humanization of work,” meaning that people come to understand how their work is embroiled in and impacts the larger society (Hutchins, 1952, p. 53; Dewey, 1944, p. 393).

The same idea about the liberal arts also motivates current John Hopkins University president Ronald J. Daniels’ support for the humanities as an element of liberal education today. In an article published in *The Washington Post* in which he urges students not to pass up on taking humanities courses, Daniels (2018) credits courses such as introductory philosophy with laying the “foundational preparation for a life well lived” and leading to “development of better, more informed, more capable citizens.” Daniels not only touts the critical thinking skills that he claims are cultivated by the humanities, but he makes the further point, backed up by statistical evidence, that a degree in these fields is actually practical in addition to being important for personal development.

We have seen thus far that the unifying idea among proponents of liberal education in America is that the ultimate end of education is development of the individual for effective engagement with societal responsibilities. The much-disputed question is how an institution should foster that connection.

Section III: Where There Is Disagreement

The substance of this dispute revolves around the degree to which students should be directly engaged with society during their time in higher education, as well as how much

their curriculum should focus on strictly modern concerns versus older representations of what are viewed as perennial questions. Simplifying the debate, two sides are labeled by professor Timothy Fuller (2001) as the traditionalist and progressivist views (p. ix). On the traditionalist side, which includes the works cited here of Hutchins and Oakeshott, temporary disengagement to study eternal questions is favored as a precursor to turning one's attention to contemporary society. On the progressivist side, represented particularly by Dewey and Roth, constant engagement with society is coupled with attention to modern issues.

The traditionalists view liberal education today as including mathematics, the natural sciences, and the social sciences, but especially the humanities (Oakeshott, 2001, p. 21; Hutchins, 1952, p. 65, 70). Progressivists, on the other hand, think that no subjects are inherently liberal and that modern society necessitates including vocational concerns while prioritizing the sciences over the humanities. Dewey (1944) writes, "The rise of democracy... destroyed the very foundation of the traditional separation...between 'liberal' and 'useful' arts" (p. 392). Roth (1988) expands on this idea in referencing the need of "promoting the ever-expanding circle of the liberal arts" as part of what he calls "pragmatic liberal education" (p. 149). Roth's (1988) idea of expansion represents what Hutchins critiques as the modern doctrine of individual differences, by which he means that students tailor their degrees within a growing curriculum that has no common basis (p. 67). Where traditionalists, especially Hutchins, hold that the classic works of western civilization (which he called "Great Books") provide a unifying basis for people to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world, progressivists look only to extract from such works information that is practically relevant in today's society. Oakeshott and traditionalist thinkers view university as a time to temporarily separate oneself from society in order to wrestle with the perennial issues that these works raise before later entering into a specialized vocation. In contrast, Dewey thinks that inquiry needs to be directly connected to the ongoing society and that university should not be a "cloister" (Roth, 1988, p. 193).

Hutchins and those who support him are criticized for thinking that the means of a necessary education can be reduced to a list of books (Fuller, 2001, p. x). While those who hold a progressivist stance on this issue, such as Dewey and Roth, are not actually opposed to the books and do think they should be incorporated, they do not seek to understand them in the same way. In Dewey's (1944) words, "Books which are cut off from vital relations with the needs and issues of contemporary life themselves become ultra-technical," by which he means too far removed from contemporary concerns (p. 393). Hutchins (1952) characterizes the progressivist argument as saying that Great Books and an education focused on them are "outmoded" products of an antiquated time that are consequently not worth studying as they do not have answers to the questions of our more advanced democratic society (p. 51). He describes this as "sociological determinism" and counters it with the claim that the same major problems persist across time and the same characteristic viewpoints show up time and again (Hutchins, 1952, p. 52). Thus, they may not directly address modern problems, Hutchins claims, but are representative of the underlying positions that are present in every debate. For Hutchins, "Great Books" are worth studying because of the resultant understanding that the student will obtain. After reading and analyzing these works, he further claims, students will carry this knowledge and the accompanying way of thinking with them as they encounter problems in their own lives and will therefore be able to impact the greater society in an informed manner.

Each voice in this exchange offers valuable insights. The task now is to join them into a coherent view of liberal education and its proper objects of study.

Section IV: Reconciliation

Having seen the major points of agreement and disagreement, I think a solution can be found which strikes a balance between the ideals of moral development and practicality that are central to the debate over liberal education. I agree with Dewey (1944) that liberal education should be "liberating," but not that it follows from this that there are no subjects that are inherent to a liberal education (p. 391). Liberation should mean bringing one into

contact with countervailing views and serving to free one from preconceived ideas that have been formed by particular circumstances of upbringing. As such, students should not have entirely free choice in what they study. This is the fine line that needs to be toed in keeping education in accordance with individual liberty. On the one hand is the student's autonomy and on the other is what it is essential to know. Leo Strauss (1952) states this idea perfectly: Education is the answer to the question of "how to reconcile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license" (p. 37). Choosing only what they want to study means that students are not made to confront new ideas and seems analogous to the modern concept of social media platforms acting as "echo chambers" that only show you what you already like and agree with. I think Jefferson was right in insisting that students not choose their course of study right away, because it is through education itself that one discovers who they are and what they are suited for (Roth, 1988, p. 191).

In this journey of discovery, one needs to know where one has come from, where one is, and where one is going. In Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1837) words, "The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future" (p. 47). It is, therefore, necessary to study with the intent of understanding heritage and tradition with self-awareness and self-appraisal, and to do so with an eye to the future. It would help to suspend focus on vocation for some length of time to get a broad education that involves questioning oneself and society before making a choice to specialize, as people will spend the remainder of their lives engaged in the working world.

Overall, I think Hutchins' guiding philosophy makes sense. The reason for this is apparent in the conflicting views that he and Dewey have on the concept of truth. According to Dewey, there are no fixed truths, and as new evidence is discovered the world must adapt and use that as the basis of policy (Ehrlich, 1997, p. 229). He would have the education system teach all students based on this philosophy. In contrast, Hutchins says to study various books, some of which say there are fixed truths and others which say there are not. For him, each reader must decide the truth on this and every other issue. The broader perspective fostered by Hutchins' approach is more representative of the freedom of thought that liberal education is supposed to cultivate and what higher education more broadly should aim for. The essence is for each individual to take from the collective culture his or her own reasoned opinion of what is true and thus form a worldview that is reflective of oneself as an individual whose freedom is contained within the larger historical context of human thought and activity.

Section V: Final Considerations

In measures such as career aptitude tests in high school, we are raised with the one conception that the direction of our education is something we need to decide on early in order to channel ourselves into a particular career. It is unreasonable to expect this from young people who thus far know very little about themselves or about the world. Instead, we should seek to establish the groundwork on which students can become reflective individuals capable of making informed decisions about their futures. With the educational environment as it stands, this necessitates students taking the initiative to inform themselves about alternatives to the prevailing narrative surrounding higher education. Everyone should at least consider the possibility that there is such a thing as a better education than choosing what one likes or thinks will make them successful at the end of high school and pigeonholing themselves in that field for the remainder of their lives.

The beauty of liberal arts education is that it is up to each individual to consider and decide for themselves what is right, and this habit of mind can then be carried into the life and vocation of the beneficiary of these studies, for the benefit of the world.

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A STACK OF BODIES 10 FEET TALL ON A HILLSIDE WHERE THE SKYLINE SHOULDN'T BE



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March 2018
Rocklin, California

They came in the night, the engines. They came and killed a thousand lives.

Only a few days before, the Citizens for Tree Preservation had begun a lawsuit against the city of Rocklin, California. The citizens had been fighting so long to save this grove of live oaks on the corner of Sierra College Boulevard and Rocklin Road, trying to protect it from developers who envisioned high-density apartments in their stead. But the companies were impatient by this point, and the city, held back for years, was counting the dollars spent on fighting the voice of the people. I know this city because, ironically, I work for this city. And I know the way it believes dissident voices are a mere snag in the inevitable progression of money-generating expansion and so-called urban beautification.

I also knew this grove of trees. The oaks were tall and rugged, and when I stood up next to them I could not see the undulating hills. The ground was sheltered in underbrush, weaving vines of blackberry, and beds of wild grass. The grove was brilliant green and deep, earthy brown between the moss and the dried honeysuckle webs, the lobed leaves and shapely, shadowed trunks. Looking into its depths, I would never have known that there were apartments on either side of it. To me, the grove was a forest that went on forever, peaceably, into the hills and far, far away.

Then a few months ago, the developers put a chain-link fence around the grove. It was an omen, but I still held out hope the inevitable would not happen, that we could stop it, as I looked into the grove through its cage. But we humans tend to stake our claims before we kill something, and one night in March, they struck, the alliance of city and developer and cold-hearted cash.

The first shock was the skyline. It was blue where the dark, leafy shadows had been. I could see the faraway hills and surrounding apartments, and the grove space suddenly looked so much smaller than it had been before.

And then I saw the carnage — the reckless, formless, naked bodies of mighty, fallen oaks. It was a silent, damning image burned into my mind, captured in the crashed moment when these lives were felled. I saw ragged bark, gray and tangled into the roots of their neighbors. I saw branches reaching up into the sky, crawling out on the ground, sideways and twisted and broken. I saw, captured in an instant, a chiaroscuro of Dante's underworld, seared on the canvas before me behind that metal chain-linked cage. They were still green, the fallen, cut off from their roots. They would live for a while, drawing on the water still flowing up xylem and into leaves.

But the next day, metal caterpillars came to collect the still-breathing bodies. Two of them crawled over the massacred hillside, the burr of their engines loud against the open sky. With their metal arms, they collected the condemned, hoisting the trunks into piles and rows. With their metal teeth, they dismembered branch from trunk, root from leaf. In a day, the stack of bodies had reached over 10 feet tall. These once-stately giants were now stripped, bark exposed to the sun, emaciated with the loss of their crowning canopy.

I was sickened, thinking that someone would sell that stack of bodies, greedy for the green made from trees like these. Someone would sign a sheet of paper for the transaction, made from the fiber of trees like these. And sometime soon the bodies would be hoisted out again, away from my sight, and brought to some factory somewhere, someplace, to be mashed and pulped and killed yet again.

But today, they lie there, in an awful pile, unburied and unburned, stacked high in hideous rows. And I am horrified for the loss of innocent lives, angry at the heartless cruelty that takes the once-unsullied beauty from our world.

HAMILTON: WHO TELLS YOUR STORY?



LUCY KESTERSON

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The stories human beings tell each other are powerful. Anthropologists say the “imagined communities” of nighttime storytelling expand our imaginations and our historical and cultural contexts; improve our relationships through increased empathy and social healing; and engender the development of trust and cooperation across communities (D. Smith et al., 2017). The stories people hear throughout their lives affect how they view themselves and others. From traditional myths and legends of larger-than-life heroes to the latest human interest story on the nightly news, the perspective through which people hear stories can have a powerful impact on their thoughts and feelings about their world.

The Broadway musical *Hamilton: An American Musical* (referred to as *Hamilton*) is one such story; its perception can provide significant effects on worldviews, both intellectual and emotional. The play itself emphasizes a striking concept: “You have no control [over] who lives, who dies, [and] who tells your story” (Miranda, 2015). Developed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton* is a biography of the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States of America. The narrative is presented through deliberate multi-racial casting and multiple musical genres, including hip-hop. Former President Barack Obama has said of *Hamilton*, “It’s a story for all of us, about all of us” (D’Orio, 2017). This paper looks to examine the real-world impacts of that story.

Literature Review

1. History

In the article “Alexander Hamilton: The Wrong Hero for Our Age,” published in the Spring 2017 edition of *The Independent Review*, Brian G. Smith, Distinguished Professor of Letters and Science in the Department of History and Philosophy at Montana State University, draws heavy parallels between the real Alexander Hamilton’s distaste for “common, ordinary

people," the study of "great men" in history, and the exclusive nature of the Broadway show as "upper-middlebrow," and condemns them all elitist. While he uses exclusively glowing language to describe *Hamilton* and acknowledges its "egalitarian" political ideals, Smith (2017) describes Hamilton himself as "too brutal in his quest for power, fame, and certain ideological goals." He evokes the Black Lives Matter movement when explaining that historians have moved to "writing a more inclusive history" and "abandoned" scholarly focus on the more commonly known revolutionary heroes such as Hamilton (Smith, 2017). Finally, Smith (2017) references the cultural appropriation of jazz as it was incorporated into Broadway musicals during the 1920s and compares this appropriation to *Hamilton's* use of rap music. In using this analogy, he implies the play's enduring legacy will be in middle-class white people acknowledging the music genre, rather than any lasting political or ethnographic impact. Along with the question of the appropriateness of Hamilton as hero, "The Wrong Hero for Our Age" asks if the form of the narrative itself — that of *An American Musical* — is exclusionary and contrary to Hamilton's ideals.

2. Dramaturgy

"Toward a More Perfect *Hamilton*," published in the Summer 2017 issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic*, was written by Marvin McAllister, a specialist in African American and American theater, drama, and performance and an experienced dramaturg. McAllister admits to not having personally seen *Hamilton* and relies upon the soundtrack, YouTube clips, and a published libretto, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, to construct his dramaturgy. McAllister (2017) attempts to discover if "there room for ideology in a Broadway musical" by specifically focusing his dramaturgy on the race-conscious casting of the show and its inclusion of hip-hop in the musical score. McAllister (2017) argues that hip-hop is the perfect form to present the heroes of the American Revolution, stating that rap artists "[craft] originary myths or histories." In his view, *Hamilton* is successful in "[creating] racial and rhetorical room" through its use of "performed whiteness... and racebending [sic]," but falls into what he calls an "aspirational conformity" where the show doesn't quite live up to its promise to "produce new possibilities and identities" (McAllister, 2017). As an example of this deficit, McAllister, like Smith, cites the lack of actual ethnic minority stories, specifically those of enslaved African Americans. Conversely, McAllister asserts and recognizes cultural identities felt by audiences experiencing *Hamilton's* narrative. He uses Miranda's performance as Hamilton as illustrative of transcending the character's origins as opposed to Leslie Odom Jr.'s racially "transgressive" Tony Award-winning performance as Aaron Burr (McAllister, 2017). As a dramaturg, he assumes the power of performance to have real-world influence, even without the privilege of seeing the performance. He believes the generations to perform *Hamilton* in the future will "improve on the revolution" and present an even more egalitarian racial narrative (McAllister, 2017).

3. Sociology

"*Hamilton's* Immigrant America" is an article from 2016 by Philip Kasinitz, Presidential Professor of Sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center, and published in *Contexts*, a journal published by the American Sociological Society. Kasinitz begins the article by juxtaposing two seemingly disparate events that occurred on the same day: Donald Trump's winning the Indiana Republican Primary and *Hamilton's* nomination for a record 16 Tony Awards. He goes on to tell of middle school students at a sing-along who "already had the score memorized" despite the sold-out nature of the show (Kasinitz, 2016). Like Smith and McAllister, he looks at the use of hip-hop and multi-racial casting. Kasinitz (2016) calls *Hamilton* indicative of the "demographic transformation" occurring in America today and asserts it is the story of the founding fathers that is appropriated, rather than the use of hip-hop. He notes *Hamilton* is an immigrant story and resonates with audiences as such. In Kasinitz' view, *Hamilton's* characters are "deeply meaningful for our time" and the "story [of the American founding fathers] belongs to [newcomers and outsiders] as much as to anyone" (Kasinitz, 2016). Lastly, Kasinitz (2016) notes that tickets to *Hamilton* have been given to school groups and a nightly lottery in "record numbers" to ensure its accessibility and "some audience diversity." According to Kasinitz, *Hamilton* is representative of an ethnographically diverse United States.

Discussion

Hamilton, with its color-conscious casting and inclusion of multiple musical genres, represents a subversion of racial divisiveness and a direct espousing of pluralism in America. Already one of the highest-grossing Broadway shows, there is no question *Hamilton* is a resounding financial success, nor that *Hamilton* is steeped with awards and accolades. In addition to its Tony and Olivier awards, the play has received a Grammy Award, the Pulitzer Prize, an Edward M. Kennedy Prize, Kennedy Center Honors, and the first George Washington Book Prize awarded to a theatrical production. In 2018, Miranda won the Rosetta Lenoire Award for “outstanding artistic contributions to the universality of human experience in American theatre” (Actors’ Equity, 2018). As can be seen from the writings of Smith, McAllister, and Kasinitz, the question surrounding *Hamilton* is if those awards are simply elitist accolades, or if they reflect accessibility and a “universality of experience” for all Americans. This paper asserts that *Hamilton*’s enduring cultural impact will be based upon the values the play espouses, specifically the power of storytelling to enable empathy and understanding across diverse communities.

Educational and Socio-Political Impacts

1. Educational

McAllister and Kasinitz both briefly mention school children’s exposure to *Hamilton*; and indeed, *Hamilton* has been used in high school and middle school classes. Gilder Lehrman and the Rockefeller Foundation have created a *Hamilton*-based history curriculum called EduHam (Nereson, 2016). Like the play, EduHam’s capstone project asks students to create narratives — monologues, raps, whatever they choose — based upon primary sources about any part of the Revolutionary Era of American history (Nereson, 2016). In this way, the curriculum addresses Smith and McAllister’s concerns about the lack of ethnic minority stories in *Hamilton*. Gilder Lehrman estimates more than 100,000 students will complete the curriculum by the end of 2020 (Nereson, 2016). A New York City high school teacher believes “the story speaks” to his students who are largely the children of immigrants (Schonfeld, 2016). Meanwhile in California, an eighth-grade teacher — whose students are primarily low-income and Latinx — believes *Hamilton* provides her students with “a chance to see themselves in our country’s history for the first time” (Schonfeld, 2016). The narrative *Hamilton* is teaching future generations of America is built on inquiry and belonging, essential elements to the development of cooperation and trust.

2. Socio-Political

Hamilton has also intersected with current American representational politics, proving both unifying and divisive, but certainly relevant. After all, while *Hamilton* tells the story of an American immigrant, as the founder of Wall Street and the American financial system, Alexander Hamilton is the father of the one percent. Indeed, former President Barack Obama says of the show, “It doesn’t feel distant. And it doesn’t feel set apart from the arguments that we’re having today” (Nereson, 2016). During the Obama presidency, *Hamilton* was praised by both Democrats and Republicans alike (Nereson, 2016). This goodwill was tested after the presidential election of 2016: when then-Vice President-elect Mike Pence attended *Hamilton*, the actor playing Burr, Brandon Victor Dixon, addressed the politician with prepared words from the entire cast, “We, sir, are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights. We truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us” (D’Orio, 2017). Pence accepted this entreaty with silence while the remaining audience roared with approval for the cast’s remarks; this exchange is available for repeated viewings on YouTube from multiple news sources. While President-elect Donald Trump demanded an apology from the *Hamilton* cast, Pence was conciliatory and called *Hamilton* “a great show” (Face The Nation, 2016).

3. Empathy and American Identity

Hamilton increases empathy and personal ownership of American identity. Marginalized groups in America see themselves in *Hamilton*. In discussing feelings of connection to early American history through *Hamilton*'s groundbreaking casting, Aaron Burr's original Broadway actor, Leslie Odom Jr. — whom McAllister describes as "the darkest founding father" — implies "the production presents the audience with an opportunity for a kind of radical empathy" (Nereson, 2016). This connection is not only felt by the actors playing the parts, but by *Hamilton*'s audience; an African American high school student told their principal, "*Hamilton* made me realize that this is our country, too" (Schonfeld, 2016). Empathy is integral to healing the racial division in the United States. *Hamilton*'s narrative engenders community; it represents a means to owning American history for all groups.

Conclusion

Like the fireside stories of human ancestors, *Hamilton: An American Musical* is told in a way that expands imaginations and historical and cultural contexts. It increases empathy and social healing and engenders the development of trust and cooperation. As Miranda says, "[Storytelling is] the oldest thing we got going... if the robots take over, we're still going to tell each other stories in the dark" (Schonfeld, 2016).

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LESSON OF SILENCE



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Face to face, heart to heart
Our eyes met, our eyes smiled.
Hands to hands, we held hands,
I hear your voice from your hands.
The hands that worked so hard
Tenderly knitted each strand
Of hope, to make your house
A home.
Sweeping and brushing away
Shames, wiping down
Loneliness, pruning the thorns of
Anger, watering down
Tears, sowing the seeds of
Patience.

Grandma, how did you
Make it through this life
Without sounds? Tell me.
If we both could sit down
In awe, listening to pieces of Chopin's.
Closing our eyes, mesmerized.
Flowing in his complete sets of
Nocturnes
Then I, taking a bow to
Your grand applause. You, grandma.
The only one stood up.

Grandma, how did you
Laugh at life when I could only

Sigh in life
When your entire passages
Read so unfair, full of despair.
That night your arms, folding
In your solitude with God
I envied you, wondering what
you'd ask.
When speech was mute
And sounds were still.
God must have made
your heart from steel.

Loud speakers boomed, once upon
A family feast, music and laughter.
You stood by the desk,
Reading people's faces.
Memories to share, numbers to update.
With loud ecstasy you couldn't hear.
Yet the wrinkle on your face
disappeared
As you clapped to the music I loved
You and the rhythm were one.

You taught me silence is a must.
So I could breathe,
Listen, and create.
Until the day God calls me home,
grandma
You and I, we'll have a long talk.

TO CARRY THE SUN



SAVANNAH BARNES

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Mississippi*

It was a hot afternoon in Halstead, Kansas. Despite the sun facing me, I tilted my hat forward a bit to keep the beams out of my eyes. Boss was inside the railway building, hanging up a poster on the public board. He needed more hands for the cattle drive this coming spring. Boss, Elijah, and I couldn't possibly handle the drive to Abilene by ourselves; it was some 80 miles from the ranch. Boss and I came up because everyone will be traveling soon enough before the snow rolls in. Speaking of the railway station being popular for travel, it seems like everyone in Halstead was here today. There was Wyatt Porter, who was the banker, probably coming to meet with big names from the East. Josiah Fessler, the snake oil salesman, was even in the crowd. There were so many familiar townfolk, and there were even some Pinkertons.

"Come on, Abigail. The train will be here any moment and we need to get a good seat," a lady sniffled as she briskly walked past with her daughter in tow, who was whining and grumbling. Some folks from the crowd looked at them as they walked to the end of the platform. It was Miss. Harriet and Abigail Daily. Their family owns the general store in town, now that I think about it. Harriet's husband was a good man. I could always buy a decent jar of pomade for cheap with him. Of course that was until he keeled over from cholera last Tuesday.

A loud whistle pulled me out of the thoughts on the Daily family. I turned my head to watch as the Stourbridge locomotive came to a stop at the platform. Men and women rushed to get into the cars for a good seat or to leave the rail line with their luggage at their feet. I don't understand the difference in the cart seats. Of course, I was content with sitting on a wooden bench like I am now. Boss came out as the train began to depart from the platform.

"Alright, Beau. The poster is up on the board. I saw where Ms. Abbott is looking for a rider to take her and her son to Newton. They got a new schoolhouse built up there." Boss's boots clunk against the rickety boards. By where the sun was sitting in the sky, I'm guessing it's a little past five.

"Yes sir. Elijah said that Newton was upgrading their little town since the new railroad got built," I say with a hum, leaning my head back with my hand on my hat so it doesn't fall off. A small acknowledgement toward the man behind me. Boss nodded down with that gruff and familiar chuckle.

"Elijah seems to know what's going on in every town from here to Dodge."

"Momma always said he was a social butterfly." I tilt my head forward again, the sun making all that rests on the skyline black and brown.

"Nosy is what I call it." Boss clicked his tongue before he pulled out a cigarette.

It was about 10 minutes later that Boss finished his cigarette and our small talk was done. I was still sitting on the one railway platform bench. "Well, son. I'm going to head back up to the ranch. Ole Maude gets cranky if she doesn't get her oats before a lengthy ride. I'll see you back at the ranch in the morning." I nodded with a smile. Maude was Boss' old mare that he used to bring into town. She was getting up in years so she wouldn't be going with us on the cattle drive. She'd stay back on the ranch with Boss' old lady. The older man tossed down the cigarette butt and stomped it out with his dusty riding boot before he turned to head back into the building.

I had this feeling that I should stay for a while. The sunset was always pretty from over the plains. Elijah would be so jealous that I was sitting out here while he was putting the steers away back at the ranch. It's been so busy lately what with all the cattle being unsettled by the change in temperature. Maybe after the drive, Elijah and I can catch the train back to Wichita to see Momma. We haven't seen her since she remarried Mr. Grissom. The poor bastard. Since that first train stopped by, there hasn't been anymore. It must have been the last one for the day. I kind of see why. Some months back, a rail cart had been boarded by a gang. Four guards on the rail had been killed, and the gang had gotten away with a ton of banknotes and bonds from some big name from Baltimore. Passenger trains stopped running at night afterward.

While I sat there fiddling with my hat, the station seemed to slowly become more and more desolate. I was the only one by the time the big clock struck seven. The street lamps were the only lights save for the sun, which was a reddish orange color by now. It was beautiful. I was busy enjoying my alone time with the natural view of the horizon until a figure came into my peripheral vision. It was a lady. I didn't recognize her from town. She must have come on the train from Caldwell. Her clothes were much cleaner than what anyone else wore here in little old Halstead. All black and sheer velvet. She must of felt me staring, because she turned to look at me not long after I noticed her. It kind of scared me, so I quickly looked away with a sniff.

Women who wear all black were always widows and always crying. This mysterious woman wasn't crying. I shifted a little on the bench, tightening my grip on the rim of my hat. The whittled boards of the bench creaked beside me.

"Chilly night isn't it?" Her voice was silvery. Pleasant and almost honeyed.

"Yes ma'am."

"What is a young man like yourself doing at this deserted bench? Suspicious to law men, you know?"

"Oh, I'm just sitting and watching the sunset." I nodded my head forward. I didn't really want to make eye contact with her. For some reason, her gaze was piercing. It wasn't easy to keep eye contact, even though I wasn't being a proper gentleman those city slickers seem to care about being.

A moment or two later, the lady held out a small apple toward me. "Want one? These are mighty fine apples." She hummed, grinning as she watched my face.

"Sure, it would be rude to turn down such a fine snack. You know, Ms. Baker once told me that an apple keeps the doctor away." The fruit was really ripe, an odd thing since all the orchards don't do well in the coming months before the big snow. I looked it over, brushing it against my cotton flannel. A habit of mine really, since it doesn't clean it. Elijah always fussed over me for doing it. He's more like momma than a brother.

The lady giggled as she pulled out a secondary apple from her small hip satchel. "Is she an old Belle of yours?"

"What? No, I mean — she's just an old friend," I sputtered, flustered and red at the mild accusation. I looked down at the ground. That is when I noticed the lady didn't have a suitcase by her feet. I wondered why she was even out here at the railway station.

"Pardon me, ma'am. What are you doing out here so late?" I asked slowly, trying to sound more educated than the simple working cowboy I am. I have no idea why I'm even trying to impress the strange woman. "The last train came by about two hours ago."

The woman in black smiled, tilting her head. "My train will be arriving soon."

Well, that was confusing. What did she mean by that? I thought that trains stopped running by six since last June.

Before I asked her what she meant by that, she asked a question of her own. "What's your name, young man?"

"My name is Beau. Beau Tenbrook. What's your name?"

"Lilith. Lilith Abaddon." It surely was an odd name that made me chuckle.

"My apologies, Miss Abaddon. I've never met someone with such a name around these parts," I say, waving my hand in a small apology.

"Oh, it's alright Mr. Beau. I've never met a Tenbrook before." Lilith finished her apple, joining in with my chuckling.

Once we paused our fond bantering, I finally asked about her train ride. "How do you know your train is coming? How do you know you haven't missed it? It didn't say there were any more locomotives on their way to Halstead past six." I set my hat between us on the bench because of all my fiddling.

"I know when I can hold the sun in the palm of my hand." She stopped to look at me, which made her laugh. The utter confusion must have shown on my face.

"Look. All you have to do is hold your hand out toward the horizon. Once the sun rests like this apple core here, then you would be carrying the sun in your palm." As she spoke, Miss Abaddon outstretched her arm. I slowly copied, stiff in my movement since I was still trying to process what the hell she was talking about. It wasn't until I noticed the sun was almost in the same position of the apple in my hand that I understood what she was saying.

"That's a funny way to run a train schedule," I sputtered, putting my hand down while she tossed the apple core off the platform. Some deer would probably come munch on it, so it didn't matter where she left it.

"Yes, a funny train. It's my train, nevertheless."

"Where does it stop?" I asked, curious about this funny little train that this woman in black travels on.

Lilith smiled and spoke with that honeyed voice, "A place for those lost souls and what lone cowboys sing about. Fields of forget-me-nots and marble." What a mysterious woman. She speaks of a place that sounds like the one the preacher man in town sings about.

It was only when the sun touched the horizon line that a train rumbled up to the station. It looked different than the average Stourbridge locomotive. This one was sterling silver and pure black branding. There wasn't a name I recognized on the engine side. It was intimidating. The lady smiled, adjusting the little Khopesh pin on the lapel of that fancy velvet coat of hers. It looked as sharp as an Arkansas toothpick. The only reason I was able to name the little ornament was because Elijah read me a book about Egyptian culture. I can't read to save my life; however, I can pick out a few words like "help wanted" and "saloon." Lilith Abaddon stood up and dusted off her cotton twill skirt. I stood up as well out of habit. I guess I was going to be nice and help Miss Abaddon bring on a suitcase, but then I remembered she didn't even have a suitcase with her.

"Well, Miss Lilith. It sounds like you're going to a place far from here." I said, moseying up to the train cart behind her after I picked up my hat. She turned around to make eye contact. She was so interesting, I didn't want her to leave. I swallowed down my curiosity while I waited for her to answer.

"Don't worry, I'll be back one day."

"What if I wanna hop on this train one day to meet you there? Does this train go to other places as well? I do ride out to Abilene often," I asked while I began fiddling with my hat. I have no clue as to why I was adamant about going. Something about this mysterious woman made me curious.

She smiled, taking my hat to reach up and place it on my head. "You're a funny man. You still have some years before you should ever ride this funny little train." I made a face, confused by how she worded that.

"Well, how much are the tickets?"

The woman in black laughed in sanguineous way, patting my shoulder, which was oddly comforting. "Less than a two-bit whore, Mr. Beau."

"Huh?"

"Those who push up daisies don't normally pay to head to the great beyond."

Lilith Abaddon tipped my hat over my eyes much to my chagrin. Leaning back and fixing the chapeau, I watched her board the train. She waved toward me, "It was fun Mr. Beau. One day I'll be back to see you off. Don't leave Abilene so soon next spring. I'll be there at the station."

"How'll I know you will be there, Miss Abaddon?" I asked, confused but excited at the prospect of meeting the woman in black next year.

"Tut tut, Mr. Tenbrook. All you have to do is carry the sun." With those as the final words, I watched as she disappeared into the black train cart. Moments later, the train began to move. I remained on that Halstead platform until I couldn't hear the rumble of the wheels on the tracks or see the dimly lit lanterns of the caboose.

ABUSIVE GENDER ROLES: GENDER NON-CONFORMITY IN THE EYES OF PSYCHOLOGY



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By the time children are old enough to speak, they understand the role differences between boys and girls. They recognize that boys should be strong and dominant whereas girls should be soft and emotional. These specific gender roles are taught by their parents or from different people through social interactions outside of home. In today's society, people are beginning to observe that more children and young adults are not conforming to their specific gender roles. When children do not conform to their gender roles, they are subject to discipline by their parents or possibly bullying from peers at their school. This could potentially have a negative impact on children's lives, especially if conforming to their gender is not who they are. This discipline can be verbally abusive, causing changes in their psychodynamic and sociocultural perspectives of life, or it can be physically abusive to a point where living or finding psychological help is not the answer anymore. Gender conformity has a negative impact on the mental processes of children and young adults.

Although it is important to understand these differences, people still oppose the idea of gender non-conformity. Some parents consider that young people should conform to their gender because they believe that their children will have to face discrimination or, for example, a boss will not hire them because they are too feminine to be a male or too masculine to be a female. In a more transparent term, the parents are trying to protect their child, and they want their children to live happy lives. Others look at gender conformity through the biological perspective. Allan Johnson, author of "Why Do We Make So Much of Gender?" discusses biological factors drawn from patriarchal societies and the limitations of that opposition. He states that it causes problems by "making it seem as though sex isn't any way social, but rather exists as a concrete biological reality that we're simply naming in an objective way" (Johnson, 2016, p. 545). Most people look at the ideas of gender conformity through religious factors. Those people believe all biological and social differences were established by God. They believe that if these God-given rules are broken, that person will not be accepted into Heaven. All of these factors are relevant in viewing the character traits of other people; however, it overlooks the thoughts and feelings of children at the individual level. It also overlooks the fact that the rate of children being extruded from their homes

and the rate of suicide in children is increasing, which cannot be easily fixed by something as vague as religion.

Even before children are born, they are faced with gender roles. People usually associate the color blue with boys and the color pink with girls. Generally, if the baby is a boy, the parents prepare a room full of blue toys, blue beds, or even blue wallpaper. The same concept also goes for girls; a room prepared full of pink. Even something as subtle as putting gender into colored categories can create future problems. The risk of abuse for children who do not conform to gender roles starts from the household. Michelle Healy from *USA Today* researches abuse from gender non-conformity at home. She says, "One in 10 kids display gender non-conformity before age 11 and, on average, are more likely to experience physical and psychological abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder by early adulthood" (Healy, 2012, p. 1). This statistic was gathered from the online journal *Pediatric* and shows that gender non-conformity starts when children are young and still living with parents. She also quotes lead study author and research associate at Harvard School of Public Health Andrea Roberts who says, "The abuse was perpetrated mostly by parents or other adults in the home" (Healy, 2012, p. 1). This abuse can cause many problems in the psychosocial development of children. This could impact the Trust versus Mistrust stage of development spanning from birth to age one, according to psychologist Erik Erikson (Carpenter and Huffman, 2014, p. 265). In this stage, infants learn to trust or mistrust their caregivers and the world based on whether or not their needs, such as food, affection, and safety, are met (Carpenter and Huffman, 2014, p. 265). Abuse from gender non-conformity will potentially affect the affection and safety of children. If these essential needs are not met, this will directly affect the development of a coherent and stable self-definition, as well as the desire and formation of lasting and meaningful relationships through adulthood.

Every child has a different understanding of gender conformity. When children are in public schools with a few hundred other children with a few hundred different understandings of gender roles, it is not uncommon to see bullying among those children. Some of those parents establish, to their children, that gender non-conformity is wrong and is not acceptable. Those children will take that information into play at school when they see other children not conforming to their gender and will bully those children because it is what is, to them, established as wrong and unacceptable. This poses a problem because it neglects the concept of individuality. The children who are bullied are being deprived of their self-esteem because they think that who they really are is wrong and is not acceptable; therefore, those children will try to conform to a different identity in order to save themselves from condescending remarks from other people. According to Katie Lucibella (2003), *Teen Ink* author, "individuality is endangered" (p. 44). This dysphoria and bullying can reoccur from elementary schools to high school. For example, C.J. Pascoe, author of "Dude, You're a Fag," researches a common term that is used among students in high school and what that word really signifies. Pascoe observed people's social behaviors through different social groups at a high school in California. She quotes one of the students who said, "Since you were little boys, you've been told, 'Hey, don't be a little faggot,' " (Pascoe, 2016, p. 577). This establishes the fact that gender roles start at home from parents and are brought into the world of high school. Pascoe (2016) then interviews multiple people who said, "To call someone gay or fag is like the lowest thing you can call someone. Because that's like saying that you're nothing" (p. 577). With this information, it can be concluded that the word "fag" is not particularly a term used to insult homosexual men, but it is a term used to make fun of things or other people that deprive someone of their masculinity. In other words, it is making fun of someone because they are not conforming to their specific gender roles because it is different from what is taught to them by their parents.

Making fun of someone for gender non-conformity can eventually lead to role confusion. Psychologist Erik Erikson expands this concept in his fifth stage of psychological development. Children will want to conform to a different identity in order to stop gender-typed bullying.

According to the cognitive-developmental theory, this willingness to want to conform is called a gender schema — a mental image of how someone should act based on internal rules that govern correct behaviors for boys versus girls (Carpenter and Huffman, 2014, p. 269). The cognitive-developmental theory states that social learning plus active cognitive processing of gender role information creates and builds these mental images that result in gender-typed behaviors such as boys playing with trucks and girls playing with dolls. However, this does not show the child's true feelings about gender schematics. These gender schemas are only self-defense mechanisms, not the child's true feelings and true character traits. This causes a problem with the development of a stable self-identity, which spans back to infancy and gender-related abuse from parents. This abuse is a type of parenting style known as authoritarian, where parents are rigid and punitive, while also being low on warmth and responsiveness (Carpenter and Huffman, 2014, p. 261). This type of parenting has a negative effect on children. According to Siri Carpenter and Katie Huffman (2014), children with these types of parents tend to be easily upset, moody, aggressive, and often fail to learn good communication skills (p. 261). This is when future problems such as gender dysphoria, which is the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex, the failure to establish meaningful relationships, and even teen suicide start to arise. The goal of lifespan development is to live a successful and happy life, but authoritarian parenting prevents children from developing proper lifetime skills, which is becoming more of an eminent problem.

Gender is one of the easiest and most manageable ways to classify psychological and biological differences among humans, but it is not the only way. It is wrong to think people act certain ways or dress certain ways because they have certain body parts and a few more biological differences. These characteristics are what create and establish the sex of that person, not particularly the gender. On the subject of religion, people say God created people this way and they should be happy with how he made them. The complication with this idea is that it is not going to change the way people feel about themselves. For example, a boy who feels like his personality does not correlate to the stereotyped male identity is not going to change the way he is simply because another person says, "God created you this way and he did it for a reason so you should not want to act like a girl." Instead, that boy is going to feel that he is worthless, which could lead to isolation and depression, eventually leading up to attempts of suicide. These views of gender non-conformity are pertinent but fail to reach out to the true feelings that children have about themselves.

Parents or other people who have experienced a child being abused or bullied need to become advocates for the safety and protection of gender non-conforming children. Parents also should raise awareness to other parents who have disciplined their children for doing something that is not specific to their gender and have noticed differences in their child's mood. It is imperative that people understand the diversity among young people in order to empathize with the many problems these people face. It is also not fair that these children have to face a life of self-hatred and isolation because people never realized the disparity in the way other people process their thoughts and emotions. If people could open their minds to these differences, there would be a decrease in the amount of bullying in school, a decrease in the amount of domestic abuse, and a decrease in the teen suicide rate.

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TO BE FREE



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Like a shot from an Abrams Tank, the voice boomed, “All rise!” I stood from my rickety, worn, wooden chair and faced the balding, octogenarian judge but avoided his gaze and looked down at the desk. The traces of sweat left by my hands disappeared slowly like hot breath on a cold window pane. I took a deep breath to suppress my anxiety and was assaulted by the rank smell in the air. It was the same proprietary blend of fear, grief, and body odor prevalent in every courtroom sentencing hearing; an almost palpable pheromone proliferated by the human body under extreme duress. The likely source of this smell was the courtroom audience, specifically the men and women in orange jumpsuits lined up against the wall.

“Please be seated, the Honorable Thomas Wilson presiding.” I took a seat back in my chair, feeling my heart rate spike to double its normal rate. I forced myself to look up and saw eyes as powerful and as striking as I have ever seen staring back at me. The mouth below started moving, and somewhere off in the distance I heard, “Will the defendant please rise?” With the cold serenity of a man about to answer for his actions, I rose steadily to my feet.

“Due to your plea of guilty, I sentence you, the defendant, Andrew John Todero, of 20 years of age, to 23 years in a state penitentiary, with 21 years suspended, and three years of supervised parole after your release.” Judge Wilson kept speaking after that, but I did not hear a word he said. The room blurred. I could no longer process the stimuli received by my sensory organs. A middle-aged policewoman tugged my coat sleeve, and I held out my hands. As the metal handcuffs clicked over my wrists, I glanced back at my dad in the third row of pews. He had folded up today’s *Wall Street Journal* and was already walking briskly toward the door. I didn’t want to make eye contact with him; to see his somber face would have drained me of the hardened resolve I built around my heart in anticipation of this event. I was about to enter the true concrete jungle, where the strong survive and the weak become prey. Led by the policewoman, I left my sorrow in the courtroom and walked across the street to Rockingham-Harrisonburg Regional Jail.

After being stripped of all my personal belongings — and everything that made me feel human — I was handed a plastic bin of bare necessities: toilet paper, toothpaste, a toothbrush, a comb, a bar of soap, five stamped envelopes, a pencil, bed linens, and a

spare jumpsuit. After I mentally inventoried my new possessions, I rode an elevator to the third floor. I stepped out of the elevator in my striped jumpsuit with wrist and ankle shackles, dangling like fresh meat above a lion's den.

The institution was comprised of two separate floors, each consisting of a north and south wing for housing units. The living space in each wing was divided into quarters by thick concrete walls. These quarters were the individual subsections of the housing units and colloquially known as either "pods" or "blocks." The pods were arranged to resemble a semi-circle so the guards keeping watch in the center had unobstructed views for every section. Each pod had roughly 12 to 13 cells with two men sharing every cell. Usually, three of the four pods were minimum or medium security, with each wing having one maximum-security pod. I classified as a minimum-security offender.

Including myself, there were approximately eight of us that had been booked and rode the elevator together. Once we arrived, everyone in the third level's north wing stopped what they were doing and examined us through the windows. As the inmates swarmed to the glass, some were overwhelmed by happiness to see a friend, and others immediately started yelling threats at enemies they recognized. Since I was unknown, nobody reacted either of those ways to me. They studied me intensely, as if they were trying to categorize me. I kept my back to the wall and returned eye contact at the people staring at me. I knew this was an animalistic encounter, one predator analyzing another animal to determine if this creature would fight or flee.

As the door opened to my assigned pod, I was overwhelmed by the terrible stench. The pod had the same odor as the courtroom, only magnified 10-fold. It was as if it seeped from the walls. The room was large and utilitarian to the smallest aspect. There was a small TV, several metal picnic and round tables, and two showers in the corner of the room. "Welcome, Jailbird!" an inmate yelled. I ignored him, I ignored all of them. Holding my head high, I entered my assigned cell. The cell was exactly how I had envisioned it: an outward locking door with iron bars, a toilet made of steel with a small sink above it, and a small bed area with an army green, nylon mattress no thicker than a college textbook. I set up my belongings in a way that felt organized, put sheets on my bed, then stepped outside my cell to quietly gather intelligence on the situation surrounding me.

I stood outside of my cell door and unsuccessfully attempted to block out the noise. The air was filled with obscenities. Nothing but people bragging about themselves to anybody willing to listen. The way they ostentatiously talked about the women they mistreated, the material possessions they owned, the crimes they committed; it boiled my blood. But the worst thing, more so than the smell and noise, was the clock: you see, there wasn't one. I looked high and low but there was no clock, and I would soon learn that the lights never shut off. Later, I would come to see this as the cruelest of ironies: a man indebted to the State in time is forbidden to keep it. Overwhelmed by my new surroundings, I retreated to the inside of my cell.

Back in my cell, I sat around pensively until dinner was served — a hearty combination of four slices of white bread, two slices of cheese, and a snack pudding. I threw myself down on my bed in desperate search for comfort, disappointed to find it did not exist. I repositioned my body several times, then closed my eyes and tried to fall asleep. That is when I began to sing softly, just low enough so anyone standing outside my cell could not hear it. I sang for the wonderful life I had squandered and the enormous regret that consumed my heart. I sang for the courage to face my fear of being completely alone. I sang for my father, mother, sister, and brother, in hopes that the damage I caused could be forgiven. I sang to transcend my horrific reality and transport my mind far away. I knew, then, why the caged bird sings. Like me, it sings to be free.

SHOULD YOUNG CHILDREN BE ALLOWED TO MEDICALLY TRANSITION?



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While the LGBT community has been gaining mass amounts of positive recognition throughout the past two decades, arguably the transgender community has been making the most strides in becoming moderately normalized into mainstream society. However, some argue that certain steps have gone too progressive when it comes to the topic of transgender children.

Doctors Mildred L. Brown and Chloe Ann Rounsley (1996) state in their book *True Selves* that by the time they were enrolled in primary school, roughly 85 percent of their clients had experienced gender dysphoria, the psychological phenomenon that indicates a person is transgender (p. 30). Due to such studies, some believe that children who experience gender dysphoria should be able to transition via methods such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) so they don't have to undergo worse issues during puberty and can "pass" better as their preferred gender when they become adults. However, these statements defy proper knowledge due to children lacking the mature intellect to go through with such life-changing medical decisions and the absence of scientific evidence to support certain medical claims.

One of the main issues with the argument that young people should be able to transition comes from the fact that the concept of gender is often very fluid in youth. An article written by Jesse Singal (2018) reported that while researchers were studying the gender psychology of a group of children around ages 3 to 5, several believed that if they had gender-specific preferences while playing or dressing, that meant they were the opposite sex — such as more than a few believing that a boy became a girl if he simply were to put on a dress. Brown and Rounsley (1996) highlight once again in *True Selves* that it is natural for children of one sex to be curious or envious of clothing items, toys, and activities specifically dominated by the opposite sex, but that can and should not be mistaken as a child experiencing a gender identity disorder (p. 47-48). Since a child's brain and traits are continually growing, an article by Ryan Anderson (2018) mentions that "between 80 and 95 percent of children who express a discordant gender identity will come to identify with their bodily sex if natural development is allowed to proceed." So, if a child's mindset can change so radically within just a few years, is it wise to put them on medications that can permanently alter their bodies?

Due to hormone therapy becoming a rapidly growing new practice within the past few decades, there are few long-term studies that show how damaging the effects of the medication can truly be. As Sheila Jeffreys (2015) states in "Helping Transgender Children Transition is Child Abuse," the few amounts of research that have been observed point to damages in bone health, increases in cancer risks, and irreversible sterilization. Even puberty blockers (medications that are taken by prepubescents to delay or even fully stop the process of puberty) have been recently causing detrimental harm. Jazz Jennings, a public transgender teen figure who has been the youngest documented case of a child expressing gender dysphoria, told ABC's Nightline that due to her receiving long-term amounts of puberty blockers since pre-adolescence, her genital growth was lacking the necessary requirements for bottom surgery and the procedure had to be performed using tissue from her peritoneum (Spargo, 2018).

A popular argument for the transition of children is that being on hormones at a younger age makes it easier for them to "pass" as the gender they wish. However, there is little evidence to suggest that a person who starts HRT at 10 passes better than someone else who started HRT at age 16 or older, as HRT will drastically alter a person's appearance regardless of age due to most human bodies responding positively to hormone medications. It is also worth mentioning that a taboo fact in the transgender community is that some adults deeply regret the irreversible transition decisions that were made with help by their therapists and physicians. Dr. Thomas E. Bevan (2017) estimates in his book that roughly 1.3 percent of transitioned adults have regretted undergoing hormone therapy treatments and sex reassignment surgery; so while uncommon, de-transitioners are not an impossibility (p. 148). These patients who have undergone numerous processes of hormone therapy and surgeries to relieve what they thought was gender dysphoria often are now looked back on as untreated trauma or other various mental conditions (Singal, 2018). So, the question is asked: If adults look back on these treatments as mistakes they must now de-transition from, should we continue to allow children to possibly misdiagnose their state of mind?

While the idea of children transitioning is well-meaning in nature for their mental and physical health, what are the psychological and medical implications of allowing them to permanently alter their bodies in ways they may not fully comprehend, such as sterilization? It is also easy for children to misunderstand their feelings about their gender identity, as they may still be naïve on the complete concepts. With medications like puberty blockers being recently invented and tested on patients long term, the implications of these procedures have not yet been fully realized. The argument for children transitioning also relies on the somewhat improbable principle that the child must know without a shadow of a doubt that they are transgender and not merely experimenting with their gender, as some fully grown adults have made the mistake of transitioning that they can never reverse.

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UNDER THE STARS



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There are many factors throughout my life that have contributed to who I am. The paths I've followed, the choices I've made, and the goals I've set are just a few pieces of my life that have been influenced in one way or another by the same things that influence most all of us.

I've spent much time in reflection, analyzing myself, trying to understand how I ended up in the places I've been, the places I am now, and determining where I want to be and how I might get there. I've realized two certain conclusions: one is that certainty is irrational, and the other is that life maintains a tragic balance and, because of that, we seldom appreciate what we have until it's gone. This well-known sentiment is perhaps one of the most influential aspects of my life.

I was born on the night of the Perseid Meteor Shower to my teenage parents, Kenneth and Lilly, and my brother Timmy was born three years later. My parents were nearly clueless as to how to raise children, but they were kind to us, and they loved us and each other. Timmy and I had little discipline or structure, and we spent our youth being barefoot, wild, and free. We looked after ourselves mostly, and at times I felt like a mother to him, but at all times, he was my best friend.

I believe that for a while, though poor, we were as rich as any millionaire. School was just a temporary distraction from real life. Our boundaries were made of tree lines and dirt roads and our days were spent exploring them. Our nights were spent on the couch with our dad watching reruns of the original "Star Trek" series. Sometimes he would take us on the roof with him, where we'd lie back and look at the stars, wondering out loud to each other about what or who could be out there in the universe. Often, my birthday would conclude on that roof, watching hundreds of shooting stars streak across the atmosphere as I was told how special it was to be born on such a night.

It seems so long ago now, but this part of my life is my foundation. It was the beginning and most important part of my construction. Without it, I would be someone else.

My beginnings, the stars, and my family are the biggest pieces of me, I think; or at least, they are the hands that shaped most of who I am. Being poor and raised in the country throughout my childhood and adolescence taught me to be humble and strong. It made me resourceful, resilient, and gracious. I learned from my parents to be kind and giving, even when I had little to give, and I learned that people change, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. I never went to church, but the stories my father told me from the Bible gave me my Christian beliefs and, ironically, the strength to carry on when he passed away. Our tradition of watching the night skies together built something in me that produced wonder, intrigue, and a profound awareness of being part of something bigger than myself. Later in my life, it even saved me.

As the years passed, I watched my father struggle to support his family on minimum wage; and when an accident at his work left him disabled, society and the system abandoned him. He spent years being turned down for disability even though he was blind in one eye and had no use of his right arm. When he was finally approved, he received a check, but before he could do anything with the money, he passed away at the age of 42. His last moments were spent in a hospital with my brother and me by his side, and he used his final breath to tell Timmy and me that he loved us, he would "see us later," and then he was gone forever.

Seeing my father die in front of us, one moment here, gone the next, caused my once happy, smiling, little brother to slip into depression and PTSD. I had found the one thing I could not protect him from, and for the second time in my life, I felt truly helpless. Timmy's dreams and ambitions dwindled. He lost his faith in God and along with it his faith in humanity. He needed help, but he was young and unemployed. No mental facility would treat him, and he was at the mercy of emergency room temporary fixes with medication that only seemed to do more harm than good. I was finally able to have him committed after talking him down from the ledge over the Henry River Bridge. They kept him for a while and then discharged him on a regimen of powerful medication. He was okay for a while, but soon it was obvious he'd developed an addiction to the meds. He was taking more than he should, and after the effects wore off, he would slide back down into his depression even lower than before, and so he began self-medicating with illegal drugs and alcohol.

"It was the look on his face," Timmy said to me once, speaking about our dad. "The terror in his eyes when he realized he was about to die." It was inescapable and haunted us both, but it tortured Timmy. I tried to help him, to be there for him, but it was beyond my control, and the only people that could help him had dollar signs in their eyes instead of compassion. More drugs were their answer.

Timmy became a different person when he was abusing his meds. He was violent and suicidal. His addiction was destroying him, and so I found myself once again at the courthouse, pleading with the magistrate to order his commitment so he could get the help he needed. I told him about his addiction and drug abuse, and that I was afraid he was going to hurt himself or someone else. The police took him to the hospital where a "professional" evaluated him and decided he didn't need to be committed. He sent Timmy home and increased the dosage of his meds, and a month later, my sweet little brother was gone forever, just like dad.

The night of his funeral, I drove back to our old home where we began so happy and free in life and climbed up onto the roof, this time not to watch the stars, but to scream at them. I was so angry. I demanded God to explain why he had taken my father and brother from me and why he didn't help them when they needed him the most. I stood on that roof top screaming as loud as I could, cursing God and demanding answers until my voice was gone.

Exhausted and defeated, I lay down and watched the sky from behind my tears in silence. I looked to the empty spot where my little curly-headed brother once lay beside me. I

imagined his ice blue eyes and the kindness I could always find in them, and I wished over and over again I would wake up and find this all to be a horrible dream. Finally, I whispered to God that my hope was running out. I told him that I wasn't strong enough, that I was giving up, and that I needed to know if there was a reason at all for anything. I needed to know if he was really there. I asked him to show me.

This moment is a defining one. It echoes with me even today, and if I close my eyes, I can still see that night sky and the brilliant way it lit up for me. I can clearly recall the explosion in the atmosphere as one solitary meteorite collided with it, and the gleaming trail of star dust following behind, stretching far across the horizon. Before I could even close my lips after the words had escaped them, my "sign" had been shown to me in a collision of combusting elements. That night I found I was strong enough after all; and more importantly, I found purpose.

My father once told me that sometimes bad things happen to good people, and the reason God cannot save them is because one of his greatest gifts to us is free will. To stop the bad things in this world, he would have to take back that gift from us. I had never really understood what he meant until that night when everything became so clear to me. It wasn't God that took my father and brother from me, or that failed them when they needed help. It was a system made not to support one another but to divide us into colors and classes.

I remembered the cold irony of having to use my father's disability money to pay for his funeral and final expenses. I remembered that despite working long, hard hours for most of his life, nearly everything he owned could fit into one small box. My father had rights, and among them was the right to live. My brother had that same right, and he had the right to receive the help he needed, but instead he was pushed aside because he was poor. Their fates were nearly sealed just by being born to the wrong class; their relevance had been pre-determined.

I decided I wasn't going to be part of that. I would not spend my life relying on a system of strategies designed to exploit the underprivileged. I wasn't going to fall for the widely accepted belief that in a country so rich and powerful, it's normal for a person who works every day to go without shelter, healthcare, or education, or that a retired man who is diabetic won't get his insulin if he can't afford his deductible. That a single mom working two or more part-time jobs is not eligible for Medicaid because she makes more than \$400 a month, or that millions of people are living in poverty because they don't try hard enough. I decided I would stop the cycle for my children and myself; and after I succeeded in that, I would find justice for Timmy and my dad, and for everyone else that had become a victim of that same cycle.

I began this life in a different world than now. Times have changed and though I have lost, I have gained much. Though I'm no longer where I was, I still keep strong ties with poverty, and I see often that people still live as I did so long ago. These circumstances and experiences in this personal reflection are the things that have driven me and shaped me. They have given me determination and the courage of my convictions. I've always said that wisdom is rarely acquired willingly, but if we're lucky, it's acquired slowly. For some of us though, it happens fast, and in a matter of minutes, we are beyond our years. These are the people that not only climb mountains but move them, and I intend to take my place among them.

For most, our customs shape us — our churches, the schools we go to, the places we grow up in, our achievements, and our mistakes. That all played a part in who I am, but more than that, it was the love and closeness I was so lucky to experience with my family. It was the loss of them that gave me the ability to appreciate and live life fully, and it was the injustice of that loss that gave me passion and determination to change things.

Perhaps, out of it all, it was that glimmering moment on the roof all those nights ago, when in the blink of an eye all the hope I'd lost had been restored to me. There, after all, really is a reason for everything, no matter how hard or life-altering. Some people spend their whole lives trying desperately to find themselves, searching every corner of the earth for meaning and purpose. I found myself on a rooftop under the stars, where I had been all along.

Essentially, the experiment placed particles in a chamber and smashed them against other particles at high speeds, causing tiny lines or “running tracks” that appear similar to when superhero “The Flash” has run through a particular stretch of road or distance, which can be seen and photographed, even though the actual particles themselves cannot be seen or “observed.” So, if someone cannot actually observe the particles in the theory, how were scientists able to predict the results of the particles? Well, in order to accept this theory as “truth,” the interpretation of the theory is that it assumes that these small particles exist. Since it makes the assumption that these un-seeable particles exist, they use that assumption of truth, not literal truth, to create calculations for experiments. This experiment is being accepted primarily because the instrumentalist view of scientific truth also includes the pragmatic theory of truth — allowing room for this assumed truth means the theory gets the scientist what he or she wants.

An assumed truth, with the pragmatic view that the belief will get the end result, is considered “truth,” although it is not literally true. Some of the most brilliant minds in the world are in the field of theoretical physics; for this reason, individuals rely on much of the accepted knowledge assumed about the world and even the universe based on theories that have been invented and tested by theoretical physicists. Despite the brilliant minds at work in this field, there is no literal truth with the instrumentalist view of scientific truth; it is all based on potential or assumed truths. The issue here is that there is no room for literal truth, strictly assumptions of truth for theoretical predictions.

The correspondence theory states that a concept is true when it corresponds to an existing fact (Velasquez, 2014, p. 403). A scientific truth can only be true if it correctly corresponds with another fact. According to “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” while the correspondence theory does not work for truths related to morality, it can work for the science domain (David, 2016, section 5). Even though the theory appears to work for scientific truth, if only the sensory experiences are included in what is considered true, it must be assumed that the present reality is completely true and real.

When looking at the standard theory of matter through the perspective of the realist, it states that the “assumed” entities like photons, bosons, and gluons and neutrinos are understood from the standard theory of matter. Realists believe “if it is rational to accept a theory, it is equally rational to believe in the [actual and literal] existence of the ‘theoretical entities’ ” (“The Realism vs. Anti-Realism Debate,” n.d.) expressed by the theory, even though the entities cannot be directly observed. The major flaw with this theory is easily seen since the scientific community is constantly changing and evolving, so stating that something is actually and literally real before having sound evidence may return and completely undermine the original scientific theory.

The conceptual relativist view states that theories cannot be verified by observing the real world independent of one’s own theories; truths can only be accepted if they fit in with the beliefs and theories that are already established. So, when communities of scientists accept certain theories and information that form a “conceptual framework,” then it is considered true — this is the view of the conceptual relativist. So in the view of the conceptual relativist, any new scientific findings or theories are true only if they fit in with the accepted conceptual framework (Velasquez, 2014, p. 426). This coherence theory of truth claims that truth is dependent on how it fits in with the system of beliefs that are already accepted. In this instance, the conceptual relativist accepts the standard theory of matter based solely on the fact that it currently agrees with the conceptual framework that is in place today. If this framework changes in the future, then it no longer can be accepted as true.

To state that the coherence theory is true contradicts many theories in history and science. Coherence and conceptual relativists do not guarantee truth; instead they leave the potential for false beliefs to produce a system of acceptance, which can lead to pseudoscience — the exact opposite of what science aims to do, which is provide truth about the world.

While having communities of scientists agree on the foundations and a “framework” of theories, research, and ideas does provide some validity, it also goes against itself in many

ways. At one point the most brilliant minds in the world believed the Earth was flat and the universe revolved around it; this was so accepted to the point that to say otherwise could have — and did — land people in serious trials of heresy. This is the explicit view of the conceptual relativist on scientific truth. Accepting scientific truth based on accepted facts appears to be the most direct and realistic way to present and accept scientific truth. Despite the inability to actually and physically observe theoretical properties, the realist view assumes that all theoretical properties are fact. So, the primary issue with the realist view is that it states that properties that are not observable are considered necessarily true. For example, the Copernican theory (Velasquez, 2014, p. 432) originally stated that the sun is the center of the universe, based partially on what is observable and what is theoretic, only to be disproven and restated with new research. The theoretical properties of the sun being the center of the universe have been disproven, therefore suggesting that theoretical properties cannot be accepted as necessarily true. The instrumental view of scientific truth does not even concern itself with actual truth, but more with whether a theory works out in the end, creating theoretical or “pretend” properties that cannot be seen or observed. Sometimes these theoretical properties prove the experiment wrong; even the actual properties of the theory express that, if certain properties are assumed, then an outcome can be predicted, with little to do with actual truth, only accuracy for a projected outcome.

The question of which view of scientific truth is preferable does not have a concrete answer — even philosophers and scientists are divided among these theories, down to the point of truth being subjective and not objective. Since even truth is subjective, then there can be no single theory that is capable of telling the full truth about the world.

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CHOCOLATE BOX



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Upon the chocolate box you stand
Held aloft by chained hands
Shivering shards of shells
March through yards to cells
They're doing you a favor
Two cents an hour of labor
And that's if they're lucky
Most of them work for free
You keep them off the street
To keep your products cheap
No votes for this absentee
No incentive for release
No choice in the air they breathe
Crafting shoes for your feet
Victoria's secret we all know
A cold stone killer made her clothes
Slavery is alive and well
And yet still those products sell
But these brands just make me itch
When it's caged humans that keep them rich

THE MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE IN TEXAS



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“American women are more than three times as likely as Canadian women to die in the maternal period, and six times as likely to die as Scandinavians” (Martin & Montagne, 2017). This statistic, found in “The Last Person You’d Expect to Die in Childbirth,” a collaborative journal article by NPR and ProPublica, is shocking to read. Everywhere else in the developed world, maternal deaths are decreasing, whereas, in the U.S., they are increasing. Particularly in the state of Texas — after 2010, the maternal mortality rate (MMR) has doubled within a two-year period to levels never seen before in the U.S. (MacDorman et al., 2016). This paper will analyze the demographics of women specifically affected by this issue and the pre-existing factors that contribute to fatal complications during the maternal period. Then, it will evaluate the causes of death in comparatively healthy women during or after childbirth. Additionally, it will address and explain the inaccuracy of past-recorded MMRs in Texas.

Though women of all races, ethnicities, and income levels die of pregnancy and childbirth complications in Texas, maternal mortality is disproportionately more significant among women of color, specifically African American women, and low-income women living in rural areas. An all-inclusive reason for the increasing maternal mortality rate is the increase of women conceiving at an older age (Mathews & Hamilton, 2014). In a study by Line Elmerdahl Frederiksen et al. (2018), the conclusion stated, “Women older than 40 years have a higher risk of chromosomal abnormalities, miscarriage, and birth before 34 weeks of gestation than younger women. Several factors increase the risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, but advanced maternal age drives a high proportion of the total risk score.” This study done in Denmark and another in Australia conclude that a higher maternal age has a modest contribution to complications during the maternal period (Morris et al., 2018; Frederiksen et al., 2018).

Another reason for the increased MMR is unplanned pregnancies. Due to the spontaneous nature of these pregnancies, usually at an older age, women are unable to address pre-existing medical issues such as obesity, heart disease, and high blood pressure, which may increase the risk of complications. But even in the event of planned pregnancies, many women cannot afford health insurance. Thus they are likely unaware of any medical issues they may have; even in the event of being aware, they cannot afford to treat them. These

dilemmas specifically affect women of low income and those living in rural areas, most of whom happen to be women of color, especially African American women (Martin & Montagne, 2017).

African American women are victim to the highest MMRs in Texas due to their increased chances of suffering complications like postpartum hemorrhage, fibroids and preeclampsia, uterine rupture, spontaneous coronary artery dissection, and peripartum cardiomyopathy during the maternal period. Black women are three to four times more likely than white women to suffer from these fatal complications (Gallardo, 2017).

The lack of prenatal care services offered through the state of Texas may also impact the MMR. This causes many mothers to forgo pregnancy checkups and prenatal vitamins and care, as they cannot afford private care. The lack of state-offered prenatal care services may be linked as a cause of Texas having not only the highest MMRs in the U.S., but also one of the higher infant mortality rates. Supporting evidence for this claim is the lower maternal and infant mortality rates in most other states where some form of prenatal care services is offered (Cooper, 1992). However, "Enhanced Surveillance of Maternal Mortality in Texas," a recent study by Larissa J. Estes et al. (2012), comes to a different conclusion. Their research states, "There is no significant statistical association between prenatal care variables and insurance rates with maternal mortality rates in the sample researched in any time frame" (Estes et al., 2012). The two opposing studies create an uncertainty about whether the availability of prenatal care services has a significant ability to reduce the chances of fatal complications during the maternal period. Ultimately, although it may not be very significant, it does still play a role and should be considered as one of the factors that may have caused high MMR in Texas.

Although most of the factors leading to complications have been identified, the glaring question remains: Despite all the medical and technological advances, why can't professionals save Texan women from dying during the maternal period? The main reason is the immense variety of different medical complications that kill women during the maternal period. The lack of a singular complication makes it difficult for healthcare professionals to look for specific signs.

A key cause of all the preventable maternal deaths is that hospitals focus more on the baby than they do on the mother. Clear evidence for this is a recent report by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (2014) showing a historic low in the infant mortality rate in the U.S. Yet, the maternal mortality rate continues to rise. Doctors and nurses are not around to detect dangerously high blood pressure levels in a postpartum mother when all their attention is on the newborn baby.

Racial disparity exists in this trend as well. Because most black mothers are of lower-income backgrounds, they, as well as their babies, are particularly subject to poor care in healthcare facilities. Nina Martin and Renee Montagne (2017) write in their collaborative article, "The hospitals where they [black women] give birth are often the products of historical segregation, lower in quality than those where white mothers deliver, with significantly higher rates of life-threatening complications." Therefore, the infant mortality rate is also the highest among non-Hispanic black infants (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2018). This mimics the high MMR among black women.

Although the fact is that MMRs in Texas are very high, recent studies have shown past data to be slightly inaccurate due to a form-filling discrepancy. A study done by Marian F. MacDorman et al. (2018), "Trends in Texas Maternal Mortality by Maternal Age, Race/Ethnicity, and Cause of Death, 2006-2015," states that the large increase in Texas MMRs is a "statistical mirage caused by misreporting on death certificates." In 2006, Texas introduced a checkbox on the death certificate form, which reported whether the deceased was pregnant or had been pregnant within the last year of their lives. The researchers explain that this checkbox was incorrectly ticked, without the knowledge of the underlying cause, enough times to cause the MMR statistics to become inaccurate. However, even after eliminating

these questionably reported deaths, the researchers found an increase of 36 percent in MMRs between the periods of 2006-2010 and 2011-2015. “That increase and the large and persistent racial and ethnic disparities warrant concerted actions by clinicians and policy makers,” the study concludes (MacDorman et al., 2018).

In efforts to improve the current use of only death certificates to calculate MMR, Larissa J. Estes et al. attempted to use non-traditional methods to determine the true MMR in Texas. In their study, they define their method of “enhanced surveillance methods” as those that “include the linking of live birth and fetal death records to death records of women of childbearing age plus the expertise of and systematic review by maternal mortality review boards” (Estes et al., 2012). Their method identified 3.5 times the number of possible pregnancy-associated deaths recorded by state methods during the years 2001 through 2006. Thus, the results confirm previous studies on enhanced surveillance: maternal deaths have a potential to be incorrectly reported. These two studies contradict each other on the true MMR in Texas, but they both establish that the method of recording maternal deaths in Texas is inaccurate and needs to be greatly improved.

There are many things that can be improved regarding maternal healthcare to decrease the MMRs in Texas. One way is to tackle the unconscious racial bias embedded in the healthcare system as it affects the quality of care in plain and indirect ways (Martin & Montagne, 2017). “In the more than 200 stories of African American mothers that ProPublica and NPR have collected over the past year, the feeling of being devalued and disrespected by medical providers was a constant theme,” write Martin and Montagne (2017) in their article. Additionally, Seema Mohapatra states in her paper, “Black Pain Matters: The Need for a Health Justice Approach to Chronic Pain Management,” that healthcare professionals are unable to suitably recognize or treat chronic pain in black women. She suggests changing medical training to remove the racial bias in professionals so they may provide black women with proper medical treatment (Mohapatra, 2015).

By providing Texan women with accessible and affordable state-provided prenatal and maternal healthcare, the risk of complications due to pre-existing conditions may be decreased. Although the effect of prenatal healthcare is inconclusive due to contradictory studies, improving it may still prove to be beneficial, which is enough reason for the state to work on it. And, despite the intimidating list of improvements to be made, Texas is actively taking steps to address its high MMR. In 2013, a bill was passed to establish the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2017). This review board will help identify the true MMR in Texas. Additionally, it will help improve prenatal and maternal healthcare for Texan women of lower income backgrounds.

The state of California is a good model for Texas to follow regarding decreasing previously high MMRs with the aid of a maternal mortality review board. In 2010, many hospitals in California adopted standardized maternal care protocol “kits” to prevent deaths by hemorrhage. Shockingly, by 2013, those hospitals saw a 21 percent decrease in fatal complications from maternal bleeding in the first year (Martin & Montagne, 2017). Likewise, the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force in Texas may also see progress in MMRs by requiring hospitals to adopt similar standardized care protocols.

Results of such changes in the law and in the medical training of healthcare professionals can take years to see. So, the state must do its best to continue to improve every avenue that may save the women of Texas.

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THIS ISN'T AN INNUENDO

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ungrazed grass wishes an
animal would frolic in its
beauty,
swaying in the wind,
daring you to dance among
the roots and the smell
of outdoors
and with the goosebumps that
linger
when foreign objects gently
skim your leg.

THE LAKE



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I drift asleep, cradled in the smiling arms of the New Mexico sun. But I am far away. I am *there* again. Everything becomes disturbingly clear, in a certain technicolor sharpness only achievable by the human mind. My life plays out in front of me. The tans and ochres of the desert fade away. The vision blurs, just a little, until I rotate the control knob in my mind. Everything resolves again in sharp focus; like it wasn't 40 years ago.

What is real, anyway? Hell if I know. All of it. None of it. It couldn't be real. Families in nice neighborhoods don't really market their children to disgusting men, do they? No, of course not.

My life has always felt like a series of scenes in a terrible script, where the camera never really stops; not even when you leave the room of nightmares. It always feels like someone is watching, directing the scenes, even when the bad people are dead and the roomful of childhood anachronisms is far, far away. It all comes back, like it happened yesterday. I reach out my hand and grab the doorway into my past, *one more time*.

+ + +

The screen door bounced against its frame, rattling and grumbling, until I slapped the handle with my hand. The door slammed into place, glaring back at me. But I didn't see, I was already running across the backyard. The sun was warm on my face and I could see the water, sparkling like a million diamonds, waiting for me like an old friend.

Lake Huron was too cold to swim in most of the year. But once the mercury started reaching up the thermometer, I would wade into the cold, slimy water. We had to wear old tennis shoes because of the rocks and chunks of random debris mixed in with the muck. You never knew what you would find: a sparkling piece of beach glass, polished smooth over decades of tumbling amid the sand and mud; a tin can, rusty and fragile, barely clinging to life. *Where*

did you come from? Half a shell, missing its owner, gave me a lop-sided smile. A chunk of driftwood, on its way to some other party, waved a little hello. Then goodbye, as it floated away. *Where are you going?*

The old couple, who lived at the shore year-round, told me about the storms. The once-every-few-decade storms. Storms so intense that the waves crashed against the base of the cliff, hundreds of feet from the beach. The ones whose force claimed entire wells, dragging them out into deep water. "Be careful," they said. "There's a well out there without its cap, so don't fall in!" This warning only made the lake that much more intriguing. Like the forest. Like any place I could escape to for a few minutes of sanctuary. Where the others did not follow. But not in the dark. *That was their time.*

Sometimes we went out in the little boat. The outboard sputtered to life and we would skip over wavelets, until it wasn't safe to go out any farther. We'd cast our lines and maybe get one or two little perch. The neighbors had a bigger boat and would come back with a bigger catch. I cringed when I watched my friend's father clip a live fish to a board and quickly slit open its stomach. The perch flopped and struggled, its life flooding away as it stared at us. I had seen that look in the eyes of the victims before they hurt them. Desperation. I wondered if I looked that way when they hurt me. *Don't scream. Don't let them know.*

The waves lapped against the shore while I rested on a large towel. The sun was starting to sink behind me, opposite the water. But there was plenty of light for now. In high summer it stayed light until almost 10. A flight of small birds flew overhead, a sudden burst of activity.

Then it was quiet again. Softly, the waves kissed the beach. The water whispered and sang, a special concert just for me. Come join us, sang the carp as they shattered the calm surface. They left only ripples, vanishing back into the murky water. I thought I could still hear their whispers. *Come join us. They can't hurt you anymore.* I sifted through the fine sand, sparkling bits of history falling between my fingers. I climbed the short road up to the house and slammed the screen door. It would be dark soon.

Somehow, I was not afraid. I learned to lock away the fear. Every bad thing went into a little box, hidden away. That way I could still enjoy the sunshine. I could almost hear my great aunt's voice whispering to me: *You'll always have the sunshine, little poulaki.* The darkness couldn't penetrate my hopes and dreams. I wore my hope like a warm coat. It protected me. I learned to forget the demons, until I fell asleep. Then, would the nightmares remind me.

+ + +

The white-capped waves broke as they struck the cottage. Wave after wave, unrelenting. I watched the water crash against the glass window panes. They did not break. The waves overtook the house. The walls still stood. I ran out the front door. The car wouldn't start. The water was rising. There was no one else left. I watched the waves overtake the little house. The flood encompassed everything. The car. Me.

I woke up, shivering and shaking in the darkness. I pulled my blanket closer and drifted back to sleep.

+ + +

The nightmares about the lake don't come as often now. They've been replaced by other terrors. Nightmares about being buried under musty leaves in the fallow earth, witnessed only by the mottled birch and spikey pine trees. Sometimes I dream about the burning, or the needles.

But the ones about the big lake rising up are still the scariest. The extreme power and relentlessness of the waves; the impersonal death under muddy, murky water. *Where no one would ever know.* But I know. *I know why I am here.* I am here to tell the story, for those who can't speak. I write because my voice is still strong. They tried and tried, but they could not silence my song. I sing because I can. *And the monsters will never stop me.*

I can almost hear the clickity-clack of celluloid flapping against a slightly rusted metal frame as the reel spins down. I reach far back into my memories and turn off the shy light of the incandescent bulb, watching as the glow of the filament slowly fades away. *Walk away. Walk away. No one is watching anymore.*

ABANDONMENT OF THE ELDERLY PARENTS: BLISS OR NUISANCE?



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Abstract

In this paper, I evaluate the communal standards, monetary insufficiencies, and mental influences leading to the abandonment of the elderly parents by their children, and how industrialization accounts for the mounting age breach and psychological fence between the coinciding generations, in the light of Cooper's "Burdens and Blessings." It also analyzes the cumulating old home population, attributing to the escalating over-all inconsiderateness, and how it destroys the current and impending humanoid cerebral civilization, with the aid of "Global Family Decay," "Kids Come Last: The Effect of Family Law Involvement in Parental Alienation," "Motivating Adult Children to Provide Support to a Family Caregiver," and "Understanding Young Adults' Reports of Contact with their Parents in a Digital World: Psychological and Familial Relationship Factors."

Keywords: social norms, financial inadequacies, psychological factors, age gap, mental barrier, general insensitivity, blessings and burdens, global family decay

Abandonment of the Elderly Parents: Bliss or Nuisance?

Ever since John Jr. had exiled 80-year-old John Sr. to the dreadful nursing home in the hopes of reconciliation with his ex-girlfriend — who had broken up with him because he was unable to show up on the last four dates, as he was driving around his disabled father to therapy sessions — he was the talk of the town. He was blamed for being insensitive, uncaring, spoiled, and ungrateful — the attributes associated with the kind of conforming brats who abandon their parents when they need their children the most, and a cause of escalating numbers in the nursing and old home population in the United States. The cumulating old home populace is a consequence of the mounting age gap and mental barrier between the generations due to industrialization, as it is characterized by conforming to the financial inadequacies, social norms, and psychological factors dictating it.

Financial and Familial Stability: What is at Stake?

The fiscal shortcomings have resulted in an inability to support one's own family and birth family — and nursing homes, on the other hand, have provided a more affordable and reliable solution — thus contributing to the disastrous conforming and pecuniary repercussion of the industrialization. According to Cooper (2015), "My friend is a political progressive who frequently laments capitalism's creative destruction and its dissolving effect on traditional bonds of family and community" (p. 7). With decreasing income and increasing financial burdens, it is almost impossible to provide for two families, which has forced people to imitate, conform, and consider the options of nursing and old homes for the elderly. He also says, "...as a general rule, people will do what they have to do, and not what they can afford not to" (Cooper, 2015, p. 8). It stresses the importance of financial stability to bring families together, which have drifted apart ever since industrialization, because if one cannot afford to support two families, they would likely obey the social norms, reject their parents, conform, and contribute to the increasing old home population. Eventually, this mass conformation will lead to a familial element where alienation is a prime trait, and the elderly merely a forgotten, exiled kin.

Social Norms Versus Morality: Rebellion or Conformity?

Social norms are a precursor to the abandonment of the elderly, as industrialization has provided new communal guidelines and any hinderance, therefore, is rebelled against to preserve what is considered normal and entitled. Cooper (2015) writes, "...goal number one for his old age is to avoid saddling his children with responsibilities that might mar their ability to live their own lives" (p. 7). This clarifies his friend's conforming view of his parents as a burden, especially his mother as "difficult," and how he would not burden his own children with his load by earning as much money as he could in the next 10 years. It shows how people who live with old and sick parents are deprived of a usual social life and are expected to conform to their needs and wants, instead of living their own lives. He further says that even though his friend desperately loves his children, "...he can't imagine his children ever caring for him" (Cooper, 2015, p. 7). It scripts the ongoing industrialization of the next generation, when children caring for elderly parents would become exceedingly unusual, to the point where it will be scarce and disconcerting, and they will adapt and not expect it. Unthoughtful accumulation of the approved traits is only the beginning of an elderly exclusive society — that is, conformation to those norms and not the material shortcomings is the cause of the communal depletion.

Parental Alienation: Divorce Redefining 'Family'

Psychosomatic barricades could also be credited to industrialization, as children grow up conforming and detached from their parents — either due to parental alienation or high-conflict divorces — resulting in feebler parent-child bonds, diminishing families, easier relinquishment, overall thoughtlessness, and emotive, private, and psychological turmoil of the individual. According to Society (1995), "The idea that the family is a stable and cohesive unit in which father serves as economic provider and mother serves as emotional care giver is a myth" (p. 3). Industrialization, particularly in the United States, has made trends like unwed motherhood, divorce, and feminization of poverty common, causing families to decay because of weakened ties due to a frailer working parent-children relationship. Furthermore, this weakened bond has caused families to grow aloof and unresponsive, which eventually results in mental barriers caused by age gap and an easy and conforming desertion. Familial instability, a high divorce rate, and a lack of any new social policy has led parents to neglect children due to parental burden; and later, children neglect them as they age, leading to a common household and economic crisis, which is a conforming outcome of the poor parent-child interaction. Giancarlo and Rottmann (2015) maintain that divorce affects children in psychological terms, where the favored parent alienates the rejected parent by withdrawal and ambivalence mechanisms, resulting in parent alienation syndrome (p. 28).

Thus, the parental alienation causes in most cases — fatherlessness, distorted parenting styles, and unconscious but conforming alienation, which encourage suicidal behavior and

personality disorders — could be attributed to the mental and emotional gap between the child and rejected parent and ultimately leads the individual into psychological and familial turmoil, characterized by living a disturbed life. High divorce rates are a gradual result of the industrialization; therefore, parental unity is a key factor in ensuring healthy parent-child communication under all circumstances with both parents.

Adult Children Caregivers: The Ultimate Role Reversal

The growing dependence of the elderly on adult children instead of spousal caregivers and felt obligation have traumatized family roles due to the demands of the recipient care, caregiving factor, and role reversal placed on them, which has resulted in conforming to social embedment and well-being, leading to depression due to a lack of social support. Stein, Osborn, and Greenberg (2016) claim that higher the handled responsibility, scrawnier the family associations, and maturity is marked by interdependence and not individuality from one's parents (p. 1804). The technological barrier — an outcome of industrialization — explains why parents become less involved in children's lives as they age, resulting in the failure to satisfy family roles due to infrequent contact and conformity to a working life dictum that can be traced back to the overuse of virtual over real communication and eventful lives. On the other hand, spousal separation has become more customary than ever, ensuing in pressure on adult children to care for the ageing. This felt obligation has resulted in a parent-child age gap and rebellion of the children against outdated rubrics of a familial unit. Gopalan, Miller, and Brannon (2013) argue that the ageing are now relying more on adult children due to the aftermath of industrial divorces, where the latter face the demonstrative corporeal, socioeconomic, and emotional fatigue placed on their shoulders by the multiple role factor and results in the neglect of the parents (p. 345-346). The subjective well-being of the adult children is thus compromised due to the workload and lofty expectations, especially the psychosocial fitness, where the aspects dictating the sum of care required surpass the psychological disposition that leads to the constraint on their social and personal life, which leads to the emotional regret, general insensitivity, and, thus, cessation of the care. More explicitly, the fiasco to meet their parent's hopes leads to feelings of depression and regret, which questions an adult child's conformity to old-fashioned responsibilities. The transition of parents into those of demanding roles instead of nurturing roles psychosomatically upsets a child and causes an upsurge of anger and anxiety. This further leads the child into rebellion because of the switch in attachment and parenting styles.

Conclusion: An Alternate Outlook on and of Life Before Industrialization

The trending social norm of conforming to the general insensitivity of children's rejection of the elderly parents is due to weakened family ties and parent-child interactions because of industrialization and has resulted in an age gap and mental barrier between the two generations. The financial and psychological factors, divorces, parenting styles, and depleting spousal relationships also contribute to the abandonment of the elderly. Thus, the monetary, cerebral, and communal factors are attributes of industrialization that have led to mental fissures and the generation gap. However, the issue should be researched further and probed for possible scientific causes like genetic factors, hereditary and developed attachment disorders, or evolutionary socialism so a better solution could be suggested.

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CHRISTMAS IN A BOX



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Faith means that everything will work out. It does not mean a religious conviction; faith means pulling from an infinite well of beliefs. For me, it was my mother who gifted me with belief in faith. When the recession of 2008 hit our nation, it did not spare my husband and me. We watched our income dip by 50 percent. To pay the bills every month, we cut back on everything, including meals. My inner faith that everything would work out kept me going.

During that time, I paid every single bill and gave thanks that we still had a roof over our head. Even though we were hungry most days, we kept putting one foot in front of the other. When my husband finally found work in December of 2011, my soul took a deep breath.

As with most employment, an employee must work two weeks before getting their first paycheck, and so it was with my husband. His first paycheck arrived just before Christmas, and we felt that our belief that everything would work out was beginning to reveal itself. With that first paycheck, we were able to buy a little Christmas dinner. During the previous three years, we only ate one or two meals a day to stretch our income as far as possible. This dinner was going to be our Christmas gift to one another.

When I arrived home with a few bags of groceries on Christmas Eve, my beloved husband met me at the door and insisted I set down the groceries. He led me into the living room where an empty Christmas tree awaited — pinned to it a white piece of paper, scribed in his handwriting, “Merry Christmas.” The lump in my throat blocked my speech; I hugged my husband as my tears of the last few years finally let go. I learned he bargained with the man in the Christmas tree lot over the last tree. My husband said he felt I needed a tree to decorate for Christmas.

Throughout the evening, I reflected on when my inner faith first took root in my soul. My journey took me back to 1977. I was 7 years old; my brother Terry, 6, and my sister Nomi, 5. We lived in a single-wide trailer in New Hampshire.

“Come here, I need to speak with you,” Mom said peeking around the doorway of my bedroom.

I looked up from the book I was reading, saw Mom's pursed lips, and wondered what I did wrong. I bookmarked my place, laid the book on the bed, and followed her down the hall into the living room. My brother and sister were already sitting on the couch.

"Sit down." Mom pointed to the empty place on the couch, perching herself on the edge of the coffee table facing us.

I glanced over to my brother, who sat on the other end of the couch. He returned a silent shrug. My stomach curled. I squirmed back trying to move away from the uncomfortable feeling but found no relief.

"There's something you children need to know," Mom went straight to the matter. "Santa won't be coming here for Christmas."

"Did we do something wrong?" I asked.

"Oh, no," Mom tried to smile. "See, the thing is, there are so many kids this year that do not have much at home, so Santa needs to pay extra attention to them."

I looked over my left shoulder to the Christmas tree sitting in the corner. Gram and Gramp bought it for us after we shared Thanksgiving dinner at their home the week before.

"But we got a Christmas tree for Santa," Terry said.

"I know we did. Santa's list is so full of other children in need this year; don't you want to help Santa?"

"How?" Nomi asked.

"Well, if you are willing to give up your toys, then other children, who do not have it as good as us, will be able to have a Christmas. Santa received an overwhelming amount of requests from poor children this year. Santa needs your help." Mom looked at each of us individually, "If you help him, then this is a good deed. Can you do that to help others?"

My heart filled with warmth as I began to realize someone else needed our help. Mom was always big on helping others. Every year before Christmas, she would make us pick out at least two or three toys that we were willing to donate. We placed them in a cardboard box and rode with Mom to the local church.

I was still mulling over everything Mom was saying in my 7-year-old mind. "So, you mean if we give up our Christmas gifts, someone else who needs it more than us can have a Christmas?" I asked.

"Right, honey," Mom smiled big this time.

I looked over at my younger brother and sister; we nodded at each other.

"Is it possible that Santa could get so much help that everyone will be able to have Christmas?" I asked.

"Anything is possible if you have *faith*," Mom spoke reverently. "No matter what is happening to you, remember always to have faith that everything will work out. When things occur that you do not understand, you must be patient, keep the faith, and answers will be revealed in time."

We all sat silently trying to absorb this intangible "faith."

"So, do you kids want to help Santa?"

"Ok, Mom." My sister jumped up and wrapped her arms around Mom for a hug. "Come here you two." Mom held out her arms to Terry and me.

A few days later, I returned home from school to find Mom sitting at the kitchen table drum rolling a pencil over several pieces of paper.

"What are you doing, Mom?" I asked.

"Working on the grocery list," she said, head still bent over the pages.

"Oh," I said, sitting in the chair next to her.

There were three long columns printed in her tiny handwriting on one page and meals planned on the other. I sat quietly beside her reading each list and noticing that there were spaces between certain sections. Above the list, old grocery store receipts laid upon the table. A hum vibrated from Mom as she continued to tap the pencil, and I fidgeted in my seat while ants danced in my stomach.

"Why is this empty here?" I asked, pointing to the space that broke up one column on the grocery list.

She remained silent staring down at the pages, yet not looking at them. "Mom, why are there spaces in the columns?"

"Huh?" Her head finally came up, looked at me then back to the paper. "That's the end of the produce section," Mom finally replied.

"Why are you making a list?"

"It allows me to follow my list in the order of how I go through the store. It's more efficient that way."

"Why do you have the prices written down by each item?"

"We must know how much we're spending before we go," Mom said, grabbing for one of the old grocery lists.

"Why?" I wanted the hum I felt from her to stop. It always made me feel prickly, and there was no escaping it once it got too loud.

"Times are a little tight right now with your father being out of work," she bit the end of the pencil.

At that point in my life, it was an adventure to load up into the station wagon and head off to the big grocery store. The cart grew with groceries as we finished each aisle. Mom leaned into the cart handle, leveraging her petite five-foot height to push it up to the check stand. I watched the total add up as each item was packed into paper bags. I would hold my breath as the checker told my Mom the amount. She would hunch her shoulders, dig through her big purse — that held everything — and come out with money. She would carefully count each bill out and then return to the purse to forage up the exact change.

"Are we going to be ok?" I wondered about the next shopping trip.

"Yes, now go do your homework."

Her hum had climbed another notch, and I was out of the chair and down the hall to my room.

During that shopping trip, we stayed beside the cart, and when one of asked for something that was at perfect eye level for kids, Mom would reply with a quick no. After several attempts of asking, Mom snapped at us, "Do not ask for anything else this trip. We don't have it." Her silence was loud. That trip the cart did not grow very much, and Mom easily pushed the cart up to the checker. I noticed the total was half of its usual amount, yet it made Mom mad. She muttered under her breath as she dug in her purse for the payment. This time she emerged with colored money.

You would think that my curious nature would know when to be quiet, especially when Mom was upset, but I went ahead and asked, "Why do we have money that is colored?"

Mom harshly whispered, "Be quiet."

I remained quiet all through the loading of the groceries into the back of the station wagon and for the first 10 minutes of the drive home. "Mom, why is the money colored?" I just had to know. I could feel that something was not right.

She inhaled a deep breath and let it out. She shifted in her seat and stared ahead. For the longest time, I did not think she would answer me.

"It's welfare money," Mom said.

"What is welfare money?" I had never heard of it before.

"It's when you don't have enough, and some people help you out," Mom answered. She sank lower in her seat. Tears shimmered in her eyes.

"We don't have enough to buy groceries?" I was trying to wrap my child-knowledge around this adult problem.

"No, honey, not right now, that's why we got some help," she spoke quietly. The rest of the journey home was in silence.

Christmas week finally arrived, and school break began. We started our day over breakfast, like any other day, but then Mom would hand out chores. Once those pesky responsibilities were out of the way, the day was ours. My brother and sister usually opted to stuff themselves into snowsuits and play outside in the single digits. Myself, I liked to be in the living room, close to the woodstove, reading a book.

It was after dinner, and I moved to the couch to continue reading my book when I heard a knock on the back door. I couldn't imagine who it could be; perhaps a neighbor stuck in the snow. Placing the book on the couch, I walked into kitchen, peeking around the corner to see who was at the back door. The back porch light illuminated a woman bundled in a gray parka, a wool hat covered most of her brown hair, and a big box balanced between her mitten hands.

"This is for your family," the woman began.

"What?" my mother responded.

"I'm from one of the churches in town," the woman continued.

"Ok," Mom said warily.

"We were told that your family could use some help this year." The woman shifted from foot to foot, adjusting the weight of the box in her arms. "Please take this small offering. It would mean a lot to us if your family had this." The woman did not wait for my mother's response; she stepped forward and gave Mom the box.

Mom automatically took the box and gave a quiet, "Thank you."

"I must be off," the woman said. "There are more homes I must deliver to before the night is through," and with a turn on her heels, she disappeared into the winter night.

On Christmas morning, we children woke in the early hours of dusk to find a stocking at the end of each of our beds. Since Nomi and I shared a room, Terry quietly walked down the hall and joined us in our room.

"Why do we have stockings?" Terry asked.

"I'm not sure," I said.

"Let's see what we got," Nomi smiled.

We looked through our treasured items: a new toothbrush, pair of socks, a comb for Terry and hairbrushes for Nomi and me. We found foil-wrapped chocolates at the bottom of the stockings. We were excited that we had received gifts and were still coming up with all kinds of ideas as to why. I began to think about what Mom had told us about faith. We waited a very long hour before we could not take another minute and finally woke up Mom and Dad.

"Guess what happened?" Terry said holding up his stocking high in the air.

"What do you have there?" Dad asked.

"Santa came," I said.

"He did?" Mom's smile reached her eyes.

"Yeah, look!" My sister climbed between my parents, placing her stocking on the bed.

Giggling, Terry and I joined Nomi. Mom and Dad shifted themselves into sitting positions, made room for us, and smiled at each other. They let us show them each of our stockings, exclaiming over each item. Dad finally said he needed coffee. Mom told us to wait in our rooms until breakfast was ready and then we could come out.

When she called us to breakfast, we got our next surprise. Dad was sitting on the couch, a steaming cup of coffee in his hand, a huge grin on his face, and Mom stood by the tree. We all stopped and looked at Mom, at Dad, and back to Mom. Wrapped presents lay under the tree. Some with green, snowman, candy cane, or red gift wrapping, bows, and ribbons. We stood still, not believing our eyes.

"Santa came?" I said.

"He sure did, honey," Mom said.

"Why?"

"You all must have had a lot of faith, and Santa was able to help everyone out this year, even the ones that were willing to give up their Christmas presents to someone else," Mom said.

"We did it!" Terry said.

Dad grinned, "Yes, you all did. Now, shall we see what Santa brought?"

As a 41-year-old woman preparing dinner for my husband, it struck me how brilliant my mother was in her execution of teaching faith to three small children during that one Christmas so long ago. Her inner strength is something I still admire in her today. For my husband and me, Christmas morning did not reveal surprised stuffed stockings at the end of our bed. But that morning, my faith that everything does work out anchored deeper in my soul as the lights twinkled from the Christmas tree and my husband smiled at me over a cup of steaming coffee.

CATALYST: HOW COLLEGE IS CHANGING THE CULTURE INSIDE PRISON



PATRICK LARMOUR
Cerro Coso Community College
California

Hello. My name is Patrick Larmour. I'm 33 years old, and I've been in prison for half my life.

During this time I've seen some crazy things. I've watched guys get stabbed, shot, and even killed. I've witnessed people die from overdoses and suicide. I've seen shackled prisoners forced to defecate into plastic bags, brutality at the hands of guards, and had my jaw shattered by a fist I never saw coming. And my experiences are by no means unique; that's just how prison is.

Or was.

Recent changes to California's laws are gradually altering the violent, screw-the-consequences culture inside prison. New legislation such as Proposition 57 are giving prisoners the chance to earn time off their sentences by attending self-help groups. New "Programming" yards are promoting good behavior by offering new incentives. And while these changes have been great, there has been one program in particular that has revolutionized the culture inside prison: college.

Believe it or not, college has transformed the way many prisoners are now serving their sentences. Where "doing time" once meant gambling and getting high to avoid boredom, it now means hurrying to class, meeting with study groups, flipping through textbooks, or cramming for a midterm. For those of us enrolled in college, idle time is a thing of the past. We're simply too busy to waste time with prison politics or petty arguments.

Most notable is the social dynamic college has created in prison. In the past, inmates who gave up gang activity in favor of education were labeled as useless and targeted for acts of violence. Now, inmates who excel in their studies are actually being recognized with an elevated status on the prison yard. These inmates have become the go-to guys for advice on everything from Native American studies and standard deviation formulas to the ever-hated APA format. Furthermore, prisoners who have never before interacted — such as rival gang members or members of different racial groups — are now greeting each other on the yard

to discuss test scores or to organize group projects. It is an unbelievable transformation.

Seen from the outside, this new college society has elevated itself above the childish politics and mindless brutality that has for so long saturated our prisons. Younger inmates are seeing this and beginning to follow suit, choosing to associate with positive mentors to attain a higher status while in prison. The fact that they are becoming educated, learning responsibility, and associating themselves with an educated crowd is simply a natural by-product of wanting to fit in.

Conversely, the so-called “old-school convicts” who have earned their status through intimidation, violence, and criminal behavior are beginning to lose their influence among the inmate population. These stereotypical “shot-callers” now seem outdated and somewhat ridiculous in light of the evolving prison culture. Their hate-filled doctrines are losing their momentum and are attracting only a dwindling number of recruits. Much to their frustration, these cancerous individuals are being regarded as irrelevant among the inmate population as their status continues to plummet.

Yet despite these changes to prison culture, some guards still seem critical of offering college in prison. They seem to think it's a waste of time and taxpayer money educating violent felons. Some even go so far as to hassle professors or to openly criticize inmates as they're waiting for class. And perhaps they have good reason to resent college: statistically speaking, earning a college degree while in prison slashes recidivism rates by over 80 percent. Talk about a threat to job security.

All jokes aside, the majority of guards are supportive of college programs. Many of them show interest in our work and even provide feedback on our projects. College has opened a new door for positive dialogue between staff and inmates, one that centers on educational topics instead of the usual prison gossip. For once, guards are getting the chance to see us doing something constructive with our time. My hope — and my belief — is that higher education will continue to elevate the quality of interactions between guards and prisoners, thus reducing prejudice and animosity on both sides of a very deep rift.

Furthermore, I believe the effects of college will be felt far beyond institutional walls. As it stands, prisoners are labeled as felons and disenfranchised from society. Our criminal records prevent us from participating in many of the freedoms an average citizen enjoys: we cannot stay out past curfew; we cannot vote; we cannot venture outside the county of our parole; we cannot hold certain job positions; we cannot have contact with law enforcement...the list is endless. It therefore comes as no surprise that many parolees feel discouraged from partaking in a “normal” existence upon their release and soon reoffend. After all, if we are not allowed a place in society, why would we ever try to conform to its standards?

Again, college is giving us that opportunity. Earning a college degree in prison will not only increase our opportunities for meaningful employment upon our release; it will also give us the confidence to seek out a better social environment with which to associate ourselves. I cannot tell you how amazing it is to hear my fellow prisoners discuss their plans to attend universities upon their release, apply for management positions, or to even open their own businesses. For once, a normal life has become a real possibility for many prisoners, and we are working hard to make that dream a reality.

For this, I wish to say thank you — on behalf of the incarcerated members of Phi Theta Kappa — to the educators, the policy makers, as well as to the taxpayers who made these college programs available. You have given us a chance to return to society as better people with brighter futures, and we plan to repay you by being better sons, better fathers, better husbands, and better neighbors.

Thank you.

FINISTERRE



RACHAEL LANE-STEDMAN
Clackamas Community College
Oregon

"Take a good rest, small bird," he said. "Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish." — Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea

Modern Spanish buildings are not warm or beautiful. They are not built of stones and textured with age and history. They are built of cinderblocks and concrete, straight and square and white. The town of Finisterre is filled with these. They line the narrow main street, one after another. One of these is La Galeria, perched at the edge of the ocean and witness to the daily coming and going of the fishing boats from the harbor, the bus station and its deliveries, and the wanderings of the locals who are passing time, passing by. La Galeria is a bar owned by Roberto. He has lived in this town all his life and is one with its movements.

There is a type of movement here that is unique, and that is the arrival of pilgrims. In this sense, the word "pilgrim" refers to a walker of a road, and in this place that road is called the Camino de Santiago. This path starts in the mountains on the other side of Spain and leads all the way to this town, where it ends. Every day, people walk into town who've been walking for weeks to arrive here. Some pilgrims walk this path because of their faith, some for adventure or challenge, some for clarity. Many pilgrims stop walking when they reach the cathedral in the city before the coast and don't walk all the way to Finisterre, but some do. And if they come into town, they find their way to La Galeria, as I did. And then, after a day, they leave on the bus for a new adventure. Their guidebooks tell them that Finisterre doesn't have much to offer in the way of textured buildings and beautiful cathedrals, that everything worth seeing can be seen in a day.

I was one of the pilgrims who had walked across Spain for clarity, to find answers to questions, but I didn't find them while walking as I thought I would. I never stopped moving for long enough. It was only when I sat down quietly for a rest that I made myself available enough for the answers to find me. They found me in Roberto's bar.

The walls of Roberto's bar are painted many different colors and filled with old pictures of the town. They are lined with shelves that hold hundreds of jars, each jar holding a stone and carefully labeled, telling where it came from. This room is a library of the life of Finisterre,

the intersection of all these paths, these places and people. Roberto welcomes them all. He listens to their stories and asks them questions, makes them a coffee and makes them laugh. The pilgrims give Roberto a chance to see the world from his bar, and he gives them a story to tell about a place they visited and a man they met there. The local people come to his bar, as do the teenagers. They want to see who else might be there, or to show Roberto an assignment they are proud of from school. Luis comes in every day. Roberto's attention makes him feel important. He appreciates his jokes. And Manolo comes too, during his break from work. He is a mechanic and a man of few words, but he likes to see Roberto and share with him a thought or two. An old man comes in to write. And Lito, the wealthy store owner, likes to come to play cards. Roberto is the only person he can find in town whose intellect matches his own. Families come in on Sunday after church, pushing strollers and greeting friends. And I come every morning for a coffee, to hear small and simple conversations, to look out at the fishing boats from the window of the bar, and to hear laughter. Roberto's bar is where I can observe people with a sense of belonging, a feeling I am in need of.

Day by day, my morning coffee leads to conversation, and the conversation leads to questions. How did I end up here in this town on the furthest edge of Spain? Why did I stay? What was I looking for? I fumble with my answers, trying to explain about travel and experiences and taking the road less traveled. Roberto listens, but he buys none of it. Unlike me, he has chosen to stay in his place and has worked to make it better, has gained wisdom unlike the kind I am working toward. It turns out that his wisdom is what I have come for.

"You have to get off the bus sometime. Any place will be good if you are good."

I spent that winter and spring in Finisterre, this little town of 3,000 people on the westernmost point of Europe, a tiny corner of the world that is hard to get to, unless you're on foot. On Sundays, I dressed in my best and went to church so I could listen to the music of tambourines played by the young people. I sat with my notebook and a cup of tea in the corner of the small castle that served as a community center on the edge of the ocean, while old ladies gathered to make lace and young boys played basketball in the same room. In the evenings, I walked through town next to the water, where I could see Roberto's bar lit up from the road down below, full of all the colors and stones and voices of the people who've come and gone, like a lighthouse to the lost.

I borrowed all of these treasures that belong to Finisterre and its people. I borrowed their roads and their rituals, their festivals and their rain, their poetry. And when summer came, I had to give them back and go. I left a small stone from Idaho on a shelf in the bar as a trade for that jewel of truth I had pocketed and boarded the bus with my backpack just like all the pilgrims do. I couldn't take anything else with me. It wasn't mine.

MY BEST FRIEND



MALLORIE KELTZ
Labette Community College
Kansas

Flashback to a summer's day. The sun was shining off my 5-year-old blonde head of hair as I was running around the backyard of my childhood. The smell of fresh air and flowers teased my nose. I heard my dad walking toward the backyard. He was wearing his normal carpenter clothes consisting of a ball cap, worn t-shirt, and jeans with holes that told of a man's hard work and dedication. He came to me and my mother with his soft smile telling of the puppy he just went after for our elderly family friend. My ears seemed to perk up at the sound of the word "puppy." I looked up at him pleadingly with my young, big brown eyes as I asked him if I could have a puppy, and my lips curled up into a smile as I heard the word "yes." Now that I think of it, I might as well have been asking him for a best friend, because that is what the puppy became.

Riding along with my parents down a dusty back road, I held both of these beautiful, female blue heeler puppies. They were sisters. As they slept in my cradled arms, slobbering in good sleep, I knew that I had to choose which puppy I wanted. The puppies were similar in appearance. One had a white spot on her furry forehead and the other one had a black spot in the identical location. I chose the puppy of the latter description. I had to think of a name for this calm puppy. Ideas swirled through my mind. One idea caught my attention. At 5 years old, one of my favorite shows on television was "Big Comfy Couch." In the show, the main star had a doll named Molly. I then decided that should be my puppy's name.

Molly and I were the best of pals. I would run around the grassy yard with squeaky toys in hand, and she would always joyfully chew on them. I taught her to give me her paw, which she continued to do without command into her later years. She always had a way of making my family of three laugh. It was a chilly winter day. I was pushing my short arms and legs back and forth in the cold, white blanket of snow on the ground making a snow angel. As I jumped up, I peered over my perfectly made snow angel. Molly wanted to be a part of the angel, too, so she scooted her hindquarters across my perfect snow angel.

Molly and I essentially grew up together. As I grew older and bigger, so did Molly. Through thick and thin, she was always there to make me feel better. She was there with me through

the deaths of family members, friends, and pets, and when one of my parents was diagnosed with cancer. She was there for me when I grew out of my training wheels, lost my first tooth, went to my first school dance, and competed in my first speech contest.

As an only child, it was nice having a companion always with me. She filled the voids of loneliness I sometimes felt. Even as old age crept on her, she still tried to be a part of my life, with her love for belly rubs and furry hugs. I was there when she was aching from her long-lasting hip pain, and she was there when I felt emotional pain my junior year from friendships crumbling apart.

Growing up was in no way easy, for me or her. What made it easier was having a best friend who would never leave my side.

The summer after junior year wasn't an easy one. My mind distracted itself with worry and endless anxiety when I really should have been paying more attention to my furry best friend. Her 12-year-old bones and muscles had become weak. Her big brown eyes still held a sparkle, but they were tired. She started lying down more frequently and slept her days away. I would find myself staring out a window to see if her chest was moving up and down. She was in pain as her calluses became worn, but she still wanted her belly rubs. Her days of youth had long-since deteriorated into her old weakened self. We took her to the vet and tried everything we could to take away her pain. I was now feeling pain, but instead of in my bones like Molly, it was in my heart.

I started out my senior year in 2016 by taking a picture with my favorite dog. I was told that she might die any day now. I chose not to believe that fully. Even then, I became worried throughout my first days of my senior year that she may die when I was at school. Sadness crept inside of me more and more each day. I felt a deep misery that I tried to push back. Emotions can't be bottled up for too long, though. Eventually there will be a release.

Days passed quickly with the new school year — as quickly as emotionally straining days can be. Labor Day weekend soon came. I usually enjoy Labor Day weekend, but this year was different. Molly was due to be put down on Labor Day. She was in too much pain. It wouldn't be right of us to make her go through such aching misery. We bought her special dog food for her last days. She barely touched it but was able to consume a little without it being too much for her to handle.

I had to go to a bowling party for my FFA chapter that Saturday. I hadn't told any of my friends of my best friend's destiny. My FFA advisor came up to me with his signature wide grin that night asking what I was doing for Labor Day weekend. I told him the gut-wrenching details while doing my best to hold back the tears that burned in my eyes and the lump in my throat. I finally had surpassed the numbness I subjected myself to in trying to forget what was happening. That night I felt so alone and depressed. I faked more smiles than I could count. As soon as one of my friends dropped me off at my car, I climbed in and let teardrops stain my cheeks and trickle down my chin. It took 30 minutes to get to my house from there; I wept every single second it took to get home. I stayed up past midnight that night trying to forget the pain that my heart felt.

I woke up the next day thinking I had at least one full day to spend with my best friend. That wasn't the case. Molly was in excruciating pain. Her callus bled and she couldn't even lift herself. She whimpered soft cries out of her black mouth. I broke down. Lying before me was my best friend since I was 5, and she was dying. Her eyes were glassy with pain as her body lay rigid. Her breath was uneasy, and she panted heavily. My sobs became loud as I felt myself dying on the inside. I took many pictures with her that day so I could have something to hold on to. I hugged her many times, though lightly because of her pain. Devastation found me that day and didn't spare me. My eyes were swollen and my nostrils burned with the grief that poured out.

The sound of my dad's white truck came closer. I never despised a sound so much before that moment. It was time to say goodbye to my best friend. Even through the pain, she smiled her panting smile not knowing this would be the last day she would see me in this

life. I screamed out a weep as my dad drove away with her. My makeup that I didn't take off from the night before was running down my face. My flip flops had a stain from a patch of blood on her leg. I sat in my bathroom bawling like a baby whose mom was taken away from them. I felt grief on a deep level and cried consistently for days upon days afterwards. I lost my best friend.

I regret the time I didn't spend with her smiling eyes and her wagging tail. Even now I still feel a deep sorrow for this death, which even the love of my new dog can't take away. Now I just spend all the time I can with my dog, Russell, who is an adorable mixed Sheltie with a smile and big brown eyes that remind me every day of my best friend who earned her wings in heaven.

AFTER THIS

DOROTHY BEARDSLEY

*River Valley Community College
Vermont*

My name is unimportant.

My life, the span of nine decades.

Never would I imagine,

My life would amount

To this...

Lonely walls echo of seasons past:

Bedridden, forgotten,

Save for my trusty dog, *Okay*,

A lone friend and an army of strangers.

My mind eye conjures

Memories of my glory days.

A tux and a white dress;

A promise of until death us part

Teaching lessons to awaken minds,

Reading the classics,

Bold red marks on a pupil's page.

A bell to signal a class to end.

Life lessons on an old gym floor,

A blur of red jerseys,

The smell of sweat, squeak of sneaks,

Or the echo of a bouncing ball.

Memories are all I have left,

A lifetime lived and lost.

My body is failing me,

Sleep overtakes me.

Emotions dance in the outer edges:

Melancholy for the past,

Fear of the unknown,

Anticipation of love-filled reunions.

My wife, my sweet love, gone now

But lives on in my memories.

She waits for me

Wherever, whatever happens

After this...

IN MILES PER HOUR, THE SPEED OF LIGHT IS, LIKE, A LOT

VICTORIA ORIFICE

*Asnuntuck Community College
Connecticut*

I am better than I once was, and stronger too.

The life that I used to live is long-since gone.
It died, went away, got lost on its way to some far-off star.

I am weak, but I am brave, for all my cowardice.

I believe in a hope that lasts lifetimes and never dies,

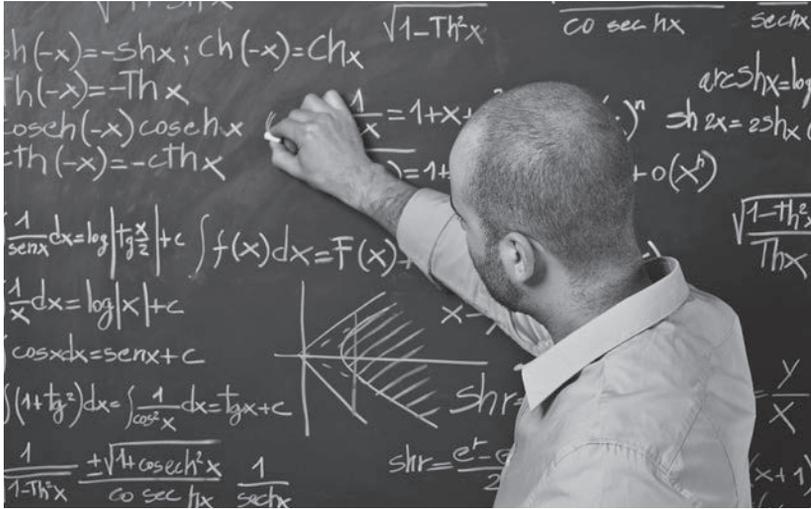
...until it does,
and it too is gone
like it never existed in the first place.

And maybe that's just how it's supposed to be:

the painful juxtaposition of the impermanence of is,
the permanence of was,

and the forever of each moment
as it slips away from us
like so much
stardust.

THE MATHEMATICIAN (A PETRARCHAN SONNET)



FAITH EVANS
College of Southern Nevada
Nevada

His words are soft and low, all prearranged,
 cascading through the hall to meet my ear.
 The prelude to a symphony premiere,
 A courtly, algebraic serenade.
 While I, next door, forgetting sleep shortchanged,
 endeavor to restrain heart's cavalier:
 would clash, would parry any brigadier
 His voice: mankind's ambrosia, worth wars waged.

Yet, when he rounds the wall with parted lips —
 a geometric inquiry in hand —
 I trip on unsaid words along the floor,
 and blame the fact that he's my eyes' eclipse!
 Both ears usurped, heart's helm wholly unmanned;
 I'll freely cede; the siren's won this war.

FACES OF HOMELESSNESS



KARISHMA PATEL
Georgia Highlands College
Georgia

On my first trip to the shelter, I almost stopped and asked my dad to turn the car back home, but a compelling urge to confront the faces of homelessness subdued the waves of fear that thrashed against my stomach. I tapped the address of Stewpot Community Center into my touchscreen GPS. At first, we weaved through streets lined with flashy commercial signs and alluring fast food restaurants. As we entered the downtown, these were substituted by neo-classical architecture, pristine lawns, and seamless parking lots. Men in crisply ironed suits strutted briskly across the streets. A row of lofty columns bolstered the domed rooftop of a government building. The structure towered over a platform that spilled into a staircase. The edge of the stairs cut into a wall where "SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI" was engraved in silver letters.

After we departed from downtown, we wound down side roads for only a few minutes, but the ominous shift in the atmosphere was unmistakably clear. Cracks and potholes littered the neglected roads; the bright, enticing store advertisements vanished. Instead, graffiti marked the sides of abandoned buildings and passing trains. People wandered aimlessly beside shabby houses, their tattered clothing smeared with dirt. A derelict abandoned house, now devoured by vines, faced the intersection. According to the GPS, we were only hundreds of feet from our destination, but I insisted to myself, "This can't be the right neighborhood... Can it?"

I didn't expect luxurious estates in a gated community, but I was unaware of the severe extent of poverty in the outskirts of metropolitan Jackson and the dire need for Stewpot Community Services. Stewpot reaches out to over 650 impoverished people in central Jackson. Most of them live in the neighborhoods encompassing Poindexter Elementary School, where more than half of the population is swamped by poverty.

According to Stewpot Community Services, nearly all of the residents in this area are black and one-third of them are children. As I was climbing out of the car, my dad told me that he didn't want to leave me there alone. He warned me to take my cell phone with me and return the GPS back into the glove compartment, where it would be concealed.

As we ventured across the parking lot and toward the building, I stopped to ask a man unloading boxes if I could go upstairs. His dreads dangled beside his dark, thin face and he blinked at me through bloodshot eyes before asking, "Are you makin' a donation?" I shook my head and explained I wanted to speak to the director. He mumbled something that I didn't hear and led me up a rickety staircase. I wrinkled my nose at the trace of alcohol that lingered closely behind him. I kept distance between us while looking over my shoulder to make sure my dad was still there. As I followed him, I wondered if he misunderstood me and was taking me to the wrong staff member.

Finally, we reached the food pantry, a musty, open room with dark paneled floors. Sunlight filtered through two large, dusty windows on the opposite wall, and circular wooden tables were scattered across the room with several foldable chairs stacked on top of them. The hint of tenderness that manifested in this dated room made it almost inviting. On one wall, a bible quote was painted in cloudy white letters against a sky blue background, and patches of reds, purples, yellows, and whites were stitched onto a homemade quilt that hung next to the quote. The man passed the steel serving counters and stopped in front of a door that read "Volunteer Director: Tara Lindsey."

The director wasn't in her office, so he offered to inform her that I was waiting. I thanked him sheepishly, ashamed, because I had judged him so rashly and assumed that he didn't know who I was looking for. Tara Lindsey was a stout, friendly woman with a rich, jovial laugh. She fumbled with a stack of papers, lightly tapping it against the desk as she answered my questions. "Working here keeps me humble, it keeps me grounded." She glanced up briefly, immersed in thought, "I'm really thankful, because I know, for the Grace of God, that that could be me or my family living in a shelter."

Ms. Lindsey told me about a heavy-set black man that used to sleep out on the porch near the center. He refused to take baths, so his afro had branched out into dreads that twisted wildly in all directions. During the summer time, he always asked Ms. Lindsey for the water bottle or popsicle that she carried. "I was a little timid of him just by the way he looked," she admitted. "So, I would give it to him, but I would never look at him." He was once a normal working person, until somebody broke into his home. The burglar brutally attacked him, raped and then murdered his wife, and killed his only child in cold blood. The trauma triggered a nervous breakdown; his mental health deteriorated and, eventually, he became mentally ill. "For me to judge him before," she broke off into pensive silence. "It could have been me. It could have happened to anybody."

"Fast-forward five years later," she chirped, gesturing her hands forward as she spoke, "We finally got him committed to taking his medication; he's doing very well. Whenever you see him now, he's clean cut and will hold a conversation with you."

"Sometimes, all they want is a smile or a conversation," she shrugged, "They're just like you and me."

By seeing not only humanity, but a trace of herself in the homeless people that she has worked with, Ms. Lindsey has penetrated the barrier of discomfort that alienates most people from the homeless population. Stewpot Community Center operates a food pantry, a clothing closet, three women and children's shelters, one men's shelter, and an opportunity center where people can bathe, clean their clothes, and even find employment. They also provide voluntary chapel services, behavioral counseling for mentally ill clients, a legal team to help people who've committed misdemeanors, a clinic that performs all services excluding emergencies, and after school programs for the youth.

Stigmas of homelessness define people's perception of shelters and the people that they serve. "We've had some people come in and say, 'Oh, it doesn't smell bad!' Well, what's it supposed to smell like? We work with what we have. We wish that we had more resources to do things with, but we try to take the best care of what we have and our clients take pride in it as well," said Christie Burnett, the director of Stewpot's Opportunity Center.

When I asked her about the general stereotype that most homeless people are reckless, money-hungry bums, she quickly debunked the myth. “The majority of homeless people are homeless either because of a bad decision, or they lost a job, or became mentally ill. They’re things that are sometimes beyond their control,” she clarified. The same warmth I found in the food pantry pervaded this small building, which staff members and clients refer to as “home-base.”

“We can’t be a home, obviously, but we can try to help provide things that you would use if you had a home. We have fun around here. Sometimes it’s interesting, sometimes it’s scary. Sometimes we have lots of addicts and mental folks. It’s wonderful to see the good sides of those people.”

Ms. Burnett told me about the connections that she’s formed with some of the regular clients at the center. “We like to say we’re a big, dysfunctional family. All kinds of funky looking people, pretty people, and we just do it together.” She told me about one guy that she encountered the other day. He was in her face, aggressively cursing her out, but she didn’t feel that she was in danger. “I had about four of my clients, I know in a heartbeat that if anything would have happened to me, those guys would come in a heartbeat. We are a family,” she declared. “That’s very different from what most people think.”

The center’s operations revolve around nurturing relationships with the people. “Many people don’t think you can have a relationship with a homeless person, but that couldn’t be further from the truth.” Ms. Burnett encourages staff members at the center to prove to their homeless clients that they are all the same at heart. “If they’re painting, we’re going to be painting too,” she beamed.

According to Ms. Burnett, personal connections become meaningful when homeless clients feel it is safe to invest trust in them. “If we have a relationship with our clients and get to know them, then we can speak for their lives in ways that we couldn’t if it’s just, ‘Hey.’ So, we try to get their names and get to know about them. We want to know them, we want them to know us.” Being praised for their resilience, work ethic, or talent is a phenomenon for most homeless people, who are too often avoided by the general public and pushed into shadows by municipal governments.

According to a report conducted by the National Coalition for the Homeless, 188 cities nationwide have gone as far as prohibiting panhandling, food-sharing, or sleeping in public spaces. In many ways, when they are not being harassed, homeless people fade into the dark corners of the world. Stewpot helps them cross the threshold into visibility. “We have guys that can sing out of this world, we have guys that can draw. We have amazing artists. We have guys that are gifted in painting, tiling, lumber, and carpentry. You wouldn’t believe it. Most people think that homeless people just sit around and do nothing or that they drink and use drugs. That’s not true. They’re people just like you and I. They’re fun to be around, they work hard, some of them just have had some bad luck,” she explained.

For some, bad luck is an understatement. One homeless 21-year-old had been sleeping in his car for a year and a half before he came to the center. His mother was an addict and he had never known his father. His grandmother originally had custody of him and his sister, but when she died, he was utterly deserted. Someone took his sister into their care, but no one wanted to take him. One night, while he was sleeping, someone jumped him and broke his jaw. The hospital released him after discovering that he had no insurance and sent him to the opportunity center. “We see things like that all the time, things that would break your heart. No 21-year-old should be homeless, on the street, without parents,” she sighed. “But in the matter of days and weeks, we were able to find someone in his family that would take him. We found him some place to stay until they decided. It’s just the little bitty things.”

At Stewpot, steps to success are small but monumental for the people who’ve made them. “We rejoice in the little things,” Ms. Burnett affirmed. From taking medication to cutting hair to getting employment, these modest changes can redefine lives. Christie Burnett shared another illuminating story, this time about her 6-year-old son, Jamison. While most parents

try to shelter their children from the world of homelessness, Ms. Burnett invites her wide-eyed child to explore it by letting him come with her to the opportunity center.

“He’s been at Stewpot since he was little, but he walks in here and he knows everybody by name. They know him. These guys are some of his best friends. They’re like his family.” In the wintertime, the staff is sweeping the cold stone floors of the center and setting up cots to save 60 homeless people from catching hypothermia in their sleep.

At a table in some corner of the building, Jamison is engrossed in a card game with a crowd of homeless people. “He’s learning that these people are no different. We have some of the best discussions; he’ll ask, ‘Well, why did this person use drugs? Why did they bring drugs up here and now, they can’t come back?’ Yesterday, we had a talk about a lady that threatened to kill me and he just said, ‘Well, they’re just sick in the head mommy, and we still have to be nice to them and love them.’ ”

In a world that treats homelessness and the mental health issues that can lead to it as taboo subjects, discussing her work at the Opportunity Center with her young son at home is a courageous decision for Ms. Burnett. If a 6-year-old can contribute to these discussions, why do we steer away from them? Why don’t we dissect issues such as the on-going prevalence of substance abuse among the homeless population?

When we skip these conversations, we miss that there is an abundance of drug houses coupled with a lack of grief resources for the homeless. Until we talk about them, we remain oblivious to these issues, and the vicious cycle is repeated in the next generation by the children in these same households. “Children will accept anybody unless they’re told not to. With my son, there’s nobody that he won’t talk to,” Ms. Burnett smiled.

As I settled back into my car, I thought about how I would be returning to a home tonight, while some people would turn to Stewpot. Some of them would never be able to get a job, because of their criminal background history or their mental illness. There is no “easy-fix” for homelessness, but maybe if we unlocked the 6-year-old Jamison within us, we could end the stigmas against it.

WE'LL BE AT THE PIER TONIGHT

GEOFFREY ALEJO

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The rods slant,
against the rail,
Sheened and static.

The lures are adrift,
Wayward from resisting the waves stained by
the late night sky

Your instructions were locked in my mind:
Remain at my post.
Do not agitate the rod.
And if something snags,
I won't ask you for help.
Reel everything in without
asking for your help.

Nothing methodical.

I'm slouching,
In contrast to the rods, which remain like soldiers.

You were a soldier,
decamping the slums of your youth.
A life of scarcity would be locked in the rearview.
Your tales from the ship still weave into our daily talk,
recited like the words to your favorite song.
Do not stress that the story has remained unchanged for the last two years.

I'm hunching.
These fish wander too much.

You have also been wandering around these past few weeks.
Your treks blur in reasoning, yet you set your foot on the
Streets like an untouched canvas.
Do not stress if you get lost. I have learned which bench is your favorite.

I am restless.
You haven't slept much either.

In the times that you're awake,
Your silence seems similar to how you were in the past.
I guess now your silence is like the ocean beneath us.

There's an ocean in my head but it is absent from silence.
A war is in my mind but I'm no soldier.
I am aware my words will be a puzzling sound someday,
But I will sustain the "Hi Dads."
I realize one day my face won't tinge with familiarity,
So I'll introduce myself to a new friend.

My name will denature to "stranger,"
And that stranger has a story he would like to share with you.

When life was my post, I remained apathy. When seeking strength was my rod, I may have flung it over the rail. The clashes of the ensuing years from living like a dialectic renegade found me nowhere, no methods. I remain. Strength is the infant when patience is the father.

Speaking of which,
I don't mean to ask for much help but could you offer a quick minute of patience?

My grip is steady, but my mind somehow cannot reel in.
Just somehow let me know if you can stand up and walk over.
I caught a fish.



THE FIRST THREE WEEKS OF PHYSICS 1510



KERRIE R. BARNEY
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I walk through the physics classroom door, and everything I know...is wrong.
Simple words I've known for decades suddenly have new meanings.
Moving with velocity doesn't just mean moving fast.
One can accelerate while slowing down.
And I could circle the world a thousand times without being displaced at all.
Then there are the deeper mysteries,
Secrets of motion that, like Doyle's Dr. Watson,
I've seen my entire life but never before observed:
The mind-boggling fact that a bullet shot and a bullet dropped from the same height will hit
the ground at the same instant,
As will a feather dropped alongside its heavy brother anvil.
I am in the process of a sweet undoing
Of realizing that so many of my former assumptions simply are not true
And sometimes, it seems that this new world inside my physics textbook
Never will make sense.
But there is a beauty hidden within this confusion.
I'm learning that all the great scientists started out this way.
That every world-changing insight was chiseled from ignorance with the same two tools:
The ability to accurately observe what is,
And the strength to discard what is not, even when you'd like it to be.
Unlike Sir Isaac Newton, I may never stand upon the shoulders of giants.
But I will at least manage to clamber onto their shoe tops.
And my view will be improved for evermore.

BLOCKBUSTING, REDLINING, WHITE FLIGHT: KANSAS CITY'S COLORFUL HISTORY OF OPPRESSION THROUGH GEOGRAPHY



HUNTER SMITH

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Saturday night, my parents watch a black gay man dance a jazz number with a young white woman on “So You Think You Can Dance.” Sunday night, they go to a house church that is 95 percent white. Our media is multiracial, liberal, tells us that “Love is Love” and everyone should be themselves. Our reality does not reflect these sparkly, televised images. I grew up in Leawood, an area that was historically under racial deed covenants. I can count on one hand the number of non-white families that live in my neighborhood. As a culture, we love to present the best side of ourselves. As a city, that means neglecting a racist, oppressive history.

“And the black man, too, is free. The gates of a bright future are open to him...” In a speech in 1865, Missouri Governor Thomas C. Fletcher declared freedom for the slaves of his state. This paved the way for Kansas City as an “exoduster” destination. The “exodusters” were former slaves fleeing oppression from the South after the Reconstruction. Roughly 15,000 to 20,000 individuals fled north. According to Sherry Lamb Schirmer, approximately 5,000 to 7,000 exodusters ended their journey in Kansas City, perhaps due to lack of funds needed to travel further (Mattox, 2004). However, that is not to say that Kansas was not a desirable destination. As a free state, located centrally north of Mississippi and its bordering states, Kansas was accessible and historically safe. In 1879, a rumor spread that all of Kansas was set aside for former slaves. This falsehood ignited the migration of exodusters in 1880. John Solomon Lewis, a sharecropper who traveled from the South to Leavenworth, Kansas, wrote in a letter, “When I landed on the soil [of Kansas] I looked on the ground and I says this is free ground. Then I looked on the heavens and I says them is free and beautiful heavens. Then I looked within my heart and I says to myself, I wonder why I was never free before” (Herb).

Upon arrival in Kansas City, most Black Americans filtered into one central neighborhood: Steptoe. The origin of Steptoe’s namesake is still highly contested over a century and a half after its creation. The original proprietor of the land was Henry Clay Pate, a Confederate sympathizer and, later, a colonel. One of this section’s three streets was named Steptoe, which historians speculate may be in honor of Edward Jenner Steptoe. E.J. Steptoe shared

Pate's birthplace, Bedford, Virginia, and fought in both the Indian and Mexican Wars. It is very like Kansas City to name an African American-dominated neighborhood after a general from a slave state. Regardless of their eponym, the Steptoe-ians worked diligently to better their city and neighborhood. In 1866, Civil War Veterans of the 62nd and 65th Colored Infantry Regiment founded Lincoln University. Two years later, Penn School was created to serve African American children from first to seventh grade. The Penn School, closed in 1955, is recognized as the oldest school for African Americans west of the Mississippi. Additionally, the community supported two churches: The Saint Luke African American Methodist Episcopal, 1879-2003, and St. James Baptist, 1883-present. The children of Steptoe grew up surrounded and supported by these efforts. As of 2004, Jane Harris still lived in the home her grandparents built on Steptoe Street in 1907 and attended Penn School, Lincoln High School, and Lincoln University. The citizens of Steptoe often referred to it as a "little island." Today, the island has been overcome by the rising tides of gentrification (Mattox, 2004).

Jesse Clyde Nichols was an original culprit of African American displacement in Kansas City. He is the innovator behind the Country Club Plaza, the beautiful shopping center known for Christmas lights and fountains. In 1912, Nichols unveiled his plans to turn Brush Creek Valley into "a Spanish marketplace magically transported to Kansas City." The press called it "Nichols' Folly," believing the successful businessman had lost it. Not only was Brush Creek a swampy marshland surrounded by a pig farm and a quarry, the land was also sold out in parcels by mail order. Nichols slowly acquired all the rights and began work. However, Nichols also had to remove an entire, predominately black, neighborhood and park. Approximately 100 homes, a grocery store, and an amusement area dubbed "Razor Park" were located on "a 30-foot cliff on Main south of Ward Parkway." In the *Kansas City Star*, Darryl Levings (2018) writes, "These were probably the last African Americans — other than live-in maids, cooks, and chauffeurs — to reside in these neighborhoods, segregated for a half century by deed covenants."

In addition to large-scale shopping centers, J.C. Nichols also created housing developments. Nichols established the concept of homeowners' associations (HOAs) in his neighborhoods, with the purpose of enforcing racial deed covenants. While he is not the creator of HOAs, or racially biased covenants, he was one of the most effective in their enforcement. He began development in 1906 with Bismarck Place. He continued creating new neighborhoods, including Sunset Hill and Mission Hills. These neighborhoods all had racially biased HOAs. The Supreme Court decision *Shelley vs. Kraemer* in 1948 determined that racial covenants were unenforceable; 20 years later, the Fair Housing Act decreed that covenants should not continue to be written and applied. However, Nichols' HOAs required strict procedure to change the deed. A notice to amend was to be filed five years in advance of the deed restriction's renewal date, which only occurred every 20 to 25 years. Then, all members of the HOA must unanimously agree. Due to these practical problems, racial covenants continued to bar any non-white individual or family from residing in these neighborhoods (Turner, 2013).

In an effort to reclaim the Plaza, Steve Kraske (2017) of *The Star* believes "we should remove [J.C. Nichols'] name from the spectacular J.C. Nichols Memorial Fountain, which stands at the Plaza's east entrance." While he acknowledges Nichols' contributions to Kansas City, calling him a "visionary," he also identifies him as a "racist" (Kraske, 2017). Due to Nichols' actions — the creation of restrictive housing deeds — Kraske (2017) states erasing Nichols' "most visible...commemoration" is necessary at this tumultuous time. Quoting New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, he says: "We must always remember our history and learn from it, but that doesn't mean we must valorize the ugliest chapters. Great nations...must confront the sins of the past and evolve to meet the demands of a changing world" (Kraske, 2017). Kraske's call to action echoes those of student groups and activists in the South who are demanding the removal of confederate "heroes." Unfortunately, not many Kansas Citians even acknowledge Nichols as anything other than an innovative housing developer. The truth in his history is still fuzzy for many (Kraske, 2017).

The families barred from buying property in Nichols' developments were then pushed into racially segregated neighborhoods by New Deal-era redlining. The Home Owner's

Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration both prevented millions of foreclosures. However, they established the process of redlining: “the practice of denying credit to entire neighborhoods based on the race or ethnicity of the residents.” African Americans and Latinos were forced to rent or purchase lower-value homes. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, many people of color were centralized in Southeast Kansas City. When highway construction displaced many of these residents, blockbusting reared its head in Kansas City. The blockbusters persuaded white residents to view the influx of minority homebuyers as “a harbinger of crime and decreasing property values.” Kansas City Public Health states, “Blockbusting agents would create a sense of urgency among Whites to sell at deflated prices, only to resell to African Americans at inflated prices.” This is white flight: white homeowners leaving when people of color buy property in their neighborhood. It is an indicator of decreasing property value, increasing taxes, and decreased access to public services (Walsh, 2017).

White picket fence, 2.5 kids, backyard, dog...the Nuclear Family-Apple Pie-American Dream requires home ownership. Home ownership is the primary way the middle class acquires and passes on wealth. Without the same access, minorities will be susceptible to a perpetual wealth disparity. A 2009 nationwide survey found that the median wealth of white families was \$113,000, while for Hispanic families it was \$6,325 and \$5,677 for African American families. In addition to wealth discrepancy, Kansas City families are also accessing vastly different school systems based solely on location (Walsh, 2017).

“Most cities have a school system. Kansas City has a system of schools” (Moxley, 2018). Housing location affects school district boundaries, and Kansas City’s school districts currently exist in a state of disorder. Instead of absorbing small districts into the citywide district, Kansas City has left districts like Center as their own entities. This results in small pockets of majority-white, higher-affluence students attending different, better-funded schools than neighboring students. Additionally, the charters are misplaced. Kansas City’s charter schools are serving areas of greater affluence instead of lower. According to Amber Northern, senior vice president for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which built an interactive map comparing poverty and charter school location in Kansas City, “You’ve got an 8.1 percent poverty rate in one census tract and three charter schools in it. You’ve got one with a 45 percent poverty rate and no charters in it.” Charters are placed in Kansas City in middle-income neighborhoods, instead of lower-income, where they are actually needed. A city-wide standardized district needs to be put in place to give all students the greatest access (Moxley, 2018).

In Kansas City, housing is divided on a definitive line. Troost Avenue separates Kansas City in such a striking manner that it is viewable on census maps. East of the avenue is predominately black; west is predominately white. “Widespread disinvestment in the area east of Troost Avenue” is cited by Kansas City Public Health as a result of white flight. Highway 71 Parkway’s placement, in the middle of this area, was highly controversial. Originally, it was supposed to follow the streetcar tracks along Brookside Boulevard (Walsh, 2017). But then the city and the Missouri Department of Transportation started to buy properties for the future freeway location, and they left them vacant. Since this led to “higher crime, disinvestment, and confusion,” eventually a major lawsuit was filed against the city in 1973. Compromises were made, and the highway became a parkway. Finally built in 2001, the parkway still exists as another dividing line in Kansas City (Moxley, 2018). Whether Highway 71 or Troost Avenue is used as a marker, west Kansas City is markedly healthier, more highly educated, and wealthier than the east (Walsh, 2017). Desegregation can only occur as a city and if white flight reverses.

Although long-since absorbed into the modern hipster attitude of Westport, the memory of Steptoe carries on through St. James Baptist, Lincoln University, and the descendants of the original residents. As a city, we must honor that memory. Whether we let the “horse-y fountain,” as all my favorite people call it, continue to bear the name of J.C. Nichols or not, Kansas City has bigger obstacles to tackle. To fully desegregate our city, we must start with the school system. Unifying the KCMO school system would provide a better quality

education for all students. With the foundation of this education, these students could pursue careers that would allow them to achieve greater wealth. However, this is not solely the responsibility of people of color. If white families move east of Troost, into what the blockbusters called "dangerous" neighborhoods, the effects of white flight should reverse. Increased property value and greater access to public services will lead to greater equality across racial lines. As one of the most geographically segregated cities in the United States, I believe we have work to do. But we are not lost. Remember, as John Lewis Solomon said, Kansas is "free ground."

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