ENGL 4384: Senior Seminar
Student Anthology

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# MAKE LIVE AND LET DIE: A BIOPOLITICAL ANTHOLOGY

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Make Live and Let Die: A Biopolitical Anthology

Introduction

FOR THIS SENIOR SEMINAR, our course theme was “Biopolitics.” We found it a hard term to define, although from the beginning of our discussions we recognized it when we saw it. And so, while we read and discussed plenty of other writers’ definitions of biopolitics, we decided to come up with our own:

The machine that is biopolitics is a veiled form of population management. Biopolitics categorizes, divides, empowers, and disciplines the body of the masses, and sustains itself by making individual bodies normalize themselves.

Throughout the semester we discussed literary texts with an eye toward uncovering how power sinks its hands into life itself by controlling, shaping, optimizing, and regularizing, from the large scale of population to the small scale of the individual body. We found our way into biopolitics through texts like Claudia Rankine’s Citizen and Indra Sinha’s Animal’s People, tracing the oppressive effects of power on the bodies of both those who are made to live and those who are allowed to die. For example, Animal’s People depicts how impoverished Indian populations were sacrificed in the aftermath of the Bhopal disaster in order to increase profits for a U.S. corporation. Citizen explores the psychic toll of racism on black people as a kind of social death that feeds white privilege. Other texts we read showed us how often the improvement of life for some involves the neglect and exploitation of others, from factory workers in China who produce our cheap electronics to the 1980s silence around HIV/AIDS that sacrificed queer bodies in the name of public health. We consistently applied these critical lenses to our own lives and political contexts. Our course theme was especially timely in the winter and spring of 2017, as we continually confronted how the incoming Trump administration was asserting its own forms of control over the lives of women, immigrants, people of color, poor folks, and LGBTQ communities. The essays in this anthology embody our hard work of thinking through and applying biopolitics to pressing political and social issues.

The first group of essays takes a look at biopolitics on TV, uncovering how popular culture both enforces and speaks back to the often invisible norms of celebrity, race, and gender that shape our bodily ideals. First, Ethan Smith takes up Beyoncé’s visual album Lemonade—initially broadcast on HBO—as a text that refutes a range of stereotypes about black women and
reclaims black femininity. Next Shandrena James explores the recent true crime series *The People v. OJ Simpson*, arguing that while celebrity status often insulates male athletes from being prosecuted for sexual and violent assault, in the series such protection conflicts with institutionalized racism toward black men in the criminal justice system. Rounding out this section, Brhi Russell investigates the show *The 100* as an example of “hands-off activism” where viewers are encouraged to be critical of biopolitical forms of control but to do nothing about them.

The next cluster investigates how gender and sex are used as a method of control over life itself, in both fictional and real scenarios. Andriana Collins-Brockman introduces this theme by focusing on the 2015 film *Spotlight*, arguing that the film depicts the Catholic Church’s control over the literal as well as spiritual life and death of its members. Michelle Marlow follows up by comparing two futuristic narratives by Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler, both of which directly depict control over sex as a way of producing (and reproducing) docile populations. Finally, Maggie Dillard explores the medical control over women’s bodies in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s classic story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” connecting its feminism to current threats to women’s reproductive health.

Following these literary and filmic readings are two essays that engage directly with current policies governing the exclusion and neglect of specific populations. On the global scale, Jordan West reads the legacy of American exceptionalism in Trump’s “America First” policy, interpreting texts like the executive order banning Syrian refugees that suspend human rights in the supposed interest of national security. Moving to a local scale, Shelby Hearn’s piece examines the diversity and inclusion rhetoric at the University of West Georgia, arguing that the administration’s policies and actions toward vulnerable student populations represent a self-serving PR move rather than a substantial commitment to supporting all students.

The final section in our anthology asks: if biopolitics is about optimizing life for some, then what other lives are deemed worthless and disposed of in the process? Wesley McMahan introduces this idea by showing that the disposability of plastic is connected to the construction of third world populations as disposable, since these are the people who are most poisoned by the production and afterlife of toxic throwaway material. Ashley Elliot takes us back to futurism by exploring the literal production of disposable bodies: a population of clones whose lives are sacrificed for the health of the “normal” population in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go*. Wrapping up this section, Melanie Swisher looks at the current implications of Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” by demonstrating how England continues to “consume” Northern Ireland in the age of Brexit, withholding their autonomy as a population.
Taken together, the pieces in this anthology offer a wide-ranging view of the reach of biopolitics into the life-worlds of bodies across time and space. As an invisible form of power, as our definition states, we agree that the first way to resist biopolitics is to identify it. These essays do just that: they point to the ways that our social and cultural norms discipline us, positioning our bodies into recognizable populations in order to better control us. We find resistance in speaking back.

Dr. Matt Franks
May 2017
TELEVISION
(BIO)CULTURE
**Lemonade: Reclaiming Black Female Identity from Biopolitics**

By Ethan Smith

**Beyoncé’s 2016 Album Lemonade** tells the story of the adversity that black women can face in a society that is known for disenfranchising them. The album gives accounts of how black women need to handle a multitude of identities that include race, culture, and sexual identities; however, the album also gives accounts of instances of how black women are victimized within systems of stereotypes. Black women unfortunately have to deal with two sets of stereotypes, which are the stereotypes of being a woman, and the stereotypes of being black. These stereotypes have been used against black women in order to control the general public’s perception of black women and their roles. Beyoncé utilizes her own accounts of how she endures being a black woman knowing that issues about stereotypes surrounding femininity and race suppress her to show that these stereotypes affect all black women and not just a select group of them. Through the course of her album, Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* calls attention the issues of being a black woman in society that use stereotypes to classify people, and seeks to not only call attention to the biopolitical structure of stereotypes but also to reclaim the tainted identity of being a black woman.

Within the music of Beyoncé’s album, she seeks to ensnare the listener’s attention to the subject matter of stereotypes that the black community faces. Within the idea of stereotypes it can be seen how the idea of marginalizing groups of people relates to the ideas of biopolitics. Michel Foucault defines biopolitics as “strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority over knowledge, power, and the processes of subjectivation” (Foucault). The definition of biopolitics is to look at how human life uses power and sovereignty seeks to utilize authority over people and how they live their lives. Stereotypes fall into this system due to what they seek to do. Stereotypes are used to control the gaze toward people belonging to different backgrounds (gender, sexuality, race, culture, etc.) and create stigmas that marginalize these groups that cause them to only be viewed by these standards. These two ideas fit together because biopolitics is all about finding a way to assert authority over groups of people and subject them to being controlled. The person that seeks to disenfranchise another group makes the stereotype so that way said group has to live with the stigma that disenfranchises them of their identity, and the only thing that identifies this group is the stereotype. In doing so, in populations need for power over subgroups of populations the stereotypes creates an identity.
that people will find difficult to escape from. Within *Lemonade*, Beyoncé seeks to make the stigmas that marginalize black women apparent by trying to deconstruct black female stereotypes through the use of imagery in her lyrics that show how ridiculous these stereotypes can be.

In the album’s song “6 inch”, Beyoncé calls attention to the stereotype of working black women and how lazy they are, otherwise known as the “Welfare Queen”. Within the song, there are moments in which Beyoncé and the band The Weekend mention utilize images of a woman enjoying what is considered luxuries for people who have a substantial amount of money. Then just when the song is about to close Beyoncé sings,

Stars in her eyes  
She fights for the power, keeping time  
She grinds day and night  
She grinds from Monday to Friday  
Works from Friday to Sunday (Lines 31-35)

The lyrics depict a woman that works not only a traditional workweek, as well as a weekend as well. The lyrics also state that the woman is ambitious in the sense that she “has stars in her eyes” meaning that she has her eyes on her goals, and she will not let anyone stand in her way, even if that means she has to work seven days a week. This image of a working woman complicates the stereotype of the Welfare Queen. The Oxford online dictionary defines a Welfare Queen as an informal, derogatory insult in which a woman is described, as “a woman perceived to be living in luxury on benefits obtained by exploiting or defrauding the welfare system”. This term mainly associates itself with black women because this stereotype relies on two more stereotypes to help prove it. In Ivy Kennelly’s paper “That Single-Mother Element’ How White employers Typify Black Women” points out this problematic idea. She recounts how black women undergo more stereotypes than their white female coworkers or their black men stereotypes, because of the intersectionality of the stereotypes that persecute them. She states,

Not separate from some white employers’ images of women and blacks, but still distinct, are their typifications of Black women. Some white employers stereotype women workers as mothers, regardless of the women's actual parental status. Many also typify Black workers as having a number of negative attributes, such as laziness, poor education, and a tendency to lie. (Kennelly 179)

Kennelly states that black women have to deal with two sets of stereotypes. One set of stereotypes comes from being a woman, while the other set of
stereotypes comes from being black. They are made to look like they are lazier than their black male counterparts not only because they are black, but also because they are also supposedly single mothers as associated with their white female counterparts. White employers then use this stereotype to help taint the black female image by establishing that they are poor workers as well as poor mothers thereby shaping the image of the welfare queen which makes black women look like they are lazy workers who want to use funding to help them live the way they want. Beyoncé, however, discredits these notions by making it clear that she is not happy with these notions. She sings that black women can be just as powerful in the workforce regardless of the preconceived notion that white employers think that black women have a terrible work ethic. She proves that not only do they have a better work ethic, but that they work just as hard. Throughout the course of this song, Beyoncé uses “6 inch” to prove that working black women are not lazy and they can do the same amount of work as their male employer if not more, and in doing so she is able to reclaim one of the many aspects that are associated with the black female identity from the biopolitical system of stereotypes.

Beyoncé’s song “Sorry” deals with the idea of how men can have a sexual liberation but women cannot, which leads to the idea for the stereotype of the Jezebel. Within the song Beyoncé is describing a relationship in which the man has had an affair with another woman, or multiple women. She sings,

Now you want to say you’re sorry
Now you want to call me crying
Now you gotta see me wildin’
Now I’m the one that’s lying
And I don’t feel bad about it
It’s exactly what you get (Lines 34-39)

Within the lines of the song Beyoncé confronts her partner, presumably her real life husband Jay-Z, and calls out his cheating ways. She implies that he is cheating through the use of her partner crying and apologizing, along with the fact that she is no longer going to succumb to his cheating ways. She states that since he is not being faithful to her there is no sense in trying to continue this relationship, so she decides to go out and embrace her sexual identity now that the person she was with has ultimately destroys the relationship as well. She implies that she will now go out and explore her sexual identity, and she will not feel about since her partner essentially destroyed the relationship the two have spent time building and maintaining. She even says that it is exactly what you get since he thought it would be a good idea to go out and cheat on her, and now he must face the same consequences. Unfortunately, the person that was in a relationship with the
speaker is shaming them for not being faithful and going out with their friends and meeting a new romantic or sexual partner. This aspect belongs to the biopolitical stereotype of the jezebel. The jezebel is a racial stereotype defined by Carolyn M. West, as sexually promiscuous and immoral black woman (West 294). West continues her definition when she states, Jezebel “…was used to rationalize these sexual atrocities. This image gave the impression that black women could not be rape victims because they always desired sex” (West 294). In other words, it can be seen that black woman live under the assumption that the only thing that they want is sex and the freedom to have sex when and where they want, as well as having a sex drive that is constantly needing to seek some kind of satisfaction. Men have used this excuse ever since black women were a part of the slave trade. With the idea of the Slave Trade making black women looking promiscuous, they are able to control their sex lives. They are able to control how they are perceived and who perceives there sex lives so that way they can use it the way they see fit. Members of bigoted, supremacist groups would then use this system and then make excuses that black women have tainted them into sleeping around with various women. The man in this song does the same thing. He identifies her with the Jezebel character to shame her for going out and exploring her sexuality instead of remaining faithful to him even though he is caught not staying faithful to the person he is with. He classifies the speaker as the perceived jezebel caricature to make sense as to why their relationship fell apart, and her sudden interest in her sexuality. Beyoncé however does not succumb to this notion. She states, that while she does go out and explore her sexuality, she does not become unfaithful to her former partner. She is the one that chose to remain faithful, while he is the one that chose to go out and sleep with other women. In this way she destroys the Jezebel character and shows that women do not intentionally go out to have sex for the sake of having sex, it is the men who label them as promiscuous who try and make themselves look better who label women as jezebels. By making this statement, Beyoncé uses her song to help reclaim not only her black female identity, but her sexual identity as well.

The album continues its deconstruction of the biopolitics of stereotypes with the song “Don’t Hurt Yourself” and the perceived Jezebel caricature again. This song focuses around a female speaker and how the man is not putting forth any effort with the relationship. She also goes as far as stating that she is much stronger than him, making her the superior partner in the relationship. She states,

I am the dragon breathing fire  
Beautiful mane I’m the lion  
Beautiful man I know you’re lying
I am not broken, I’m not crying, I’m not crying
You ain’t trying hard enough (Lines 26-30)

She begins by comparing herself to items that are considered dominating and powerful. Lions and Dragons are considered forces that have a dominating presence, and by proving that she is like these two forces she is able to prove how powerful she truly is. This is to show that she is the backbone of the relationship between the two partners. In lion prides it is the lioness that does the hunting to provide for the pride, while the man lion lounges around during the day heavily relying on the lioness to provide for him and the rest of the pride. Her comparison stresses the fact that she is the provider of the relationship. She is the person who attempts to make everything work, and she is even more powerful than the man. While Beyoncé does not go out to kill savannah animals every night to provide for her family, the comparison to the predator makes sense. It is to also show that she is not letting the lack of trying from her partner discourage her or her attempts to find a successful relationship. The dominating forces of the lion and the dragon are to also show that she is persistent in making sure that she is powerful enough to make sure that she is not dependent on other people. This comes from the aspect of the lines that stresses that she will not stay in a relationship where someone is not putting forth the effort to make the relationship work. In this instance she makes it clear that she will not let this man hurt her. According to Corey Miles’s review “Beyoncé’s Lemonade: When Life Gave Us Lemons, We Saved the World” Miles makes it apparent that black women have been stigmatized by black men when he says,

While the first half of Lemonade focuses on themes of betrayal and infidelity committed by fathers and husbands, it highlights a larger historical pattern of black men failing to see the ways in which they marginalize this other half of the black population. Black solidarity has historically suppressed the voices of anyone outside of the dominant black male heterosexual paradigm. Black women have had to relinquish aspects of their identity to exist in harmony with black men. (137)

Miles makes it apparent that people of their own race have stigmatized black women, so it has been harder for black women to have a voice within their own community. With this idea in mind, Beyoncé then takes the idea of black women being sexually promiscuous along with being silenced by black men, and states that they are not silent but actually stronger than their male counterparts, hence the idea of the lioness and the dragon. By
making sure that the speaker sets herself apart from the man that has hurt her and makes sure to empower herself and disempower him, she is then able to reverse the stereotype and show how men are portraying their own insecurities on women and help create the stereotype of the jezebel. Beyoncé is able to escape the stereotype of women who seek empowerment from relationships that is created by a biopolitical system that seeks to make black women weaker than other women, and victim of the jezebel caricature from their own race as well.

Another instance of Beyoncé destroying stereotypes that hurt black women is through her song “Daddy Lessons” and how she handles the stereotype of how black women make terrible mothers. In this song, Beyoncé tells the story of lessons that the speaker learns before her father passes away. These lessons are meant to teach that women need to not let people try and take advantage of women. She recounts the time right before he dies and she recounts the different lessons that he taught her so that way she can protect herself and her mother and sister. He says to her,

He said take care of your mother  
Watch out for your sister  
And that's when daddy looked at me...  
With his gun, with his head held high  
He told me not to cry  
Oh, my daddy said shoot (Lines 14-20)

Within these lines the speaker’s father makes it known that the daughter, who is possibly Beyoncé, must act tough in the face of adversity. She must assume the role as a protector that is not afraid to act upon violence if it is necessary. She has to become a this person through various acts of protection so that way the women of her family will not succumb to various forms of violence from men. He then insists that she be able to protect herself and the other women in her family. These lessons that her father teaches her are lessons that typically go against the mainstream ideas of what femininity is. Stereotypes often portray women as victims, especially women of color. Instead of being passive and obedient of men, the father that teaches these lessons insists that one must do what they have to do to make sure they stay safe. In this instance Beyoncé begins her disenfranchisement of stereotypes as by stating that women need to take care of one another. They do not need the protection of a man in their life to make sure that they can take care of themselves. Her father also goes as far as to say,

My daddy warned me about men like you  
He said baby girl he’s playing you
He’s playing you
My daddy warned me about men like you
He said baby girl he’s playing you (Lines 62-66)

Her father also makes it apparent that men are not to be trusted, because they have taken advantage of women for a considerable amount of time. He insists that his daughter learn to take care of herself so that way she can stand up to men who like to take advantage of women through various means. By restating the lessons that the father in the song states, Beyoncé is able to make it apparent that women should not face abuse from their male counterparts. They should instead seek protection and empowerment from other women so that way there is a bond between women that seek to make sure that women will not succumb to the physical, emotional, or mental abuse from men and the attempts at hurting women.

An important aspect of *Lemonade* is how she handles the subject of black motherhood and how Beyoncé attempts to reclaim this identity from the biopolitical system of stereotypes. According to Dorothy E. Roberts’s “Unshackling Black Motherhood” there is already a preconceived notion that black women will automatically be bad mothers, because it is assumed that they will either neglect their current children by having more children or that they will get their children involved with criminal activities. At the end of the song “Daddy Lessons” there is a little girl that speaks up and says to Beyoncé, “Good job Bey” (Line 76) The little girl that speaks up is Beyoncé’s actual daughter, Blu Ivy. The reason that Blu makes a cameo within the song is so that Beyoncé can teach the lessons that she has learned from her father and pass the lessons along to her daughter. Passing the lessons along to her daughter not only shows that she cares about her daughter, but it also shows that there is a maternal instinct within the speaker of the song. This maternal instinct seeks to protect children with lessons that the mother learned as a child. While the lessons throughout the song start off as paternal, once the song is over and Blu speaks up the lessons within the song are maternal lessons. This idea helps disprove the stereotype that surrounds black motherhood. Beyoncé proves that black women are just as capable of being good mothers just like white women. By doing this, Beyoncé is able to help liberate herself, as a mother, and other black mothers from a system that seeks to put the label on black women that states that black women will make horrible mothers.

In the album’s final track “Formation”, Beyoncé seeks to take the stereotype of black women who do not like “black features” and strive to seek beauty standards via “white features”. The song “Formation” talks about embracing black identities in a society that does not fully embrace black identities. Within the song there is
a lyric in which Beyoncé notes physical characteristics that she admires. She sings, “I like my baby heir with baby hair and afros/ I like my Negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils” (Lines 7-8). She embraces physical characteristics that have been deemed “black”. According to Kevin Ball’s film review of the music video for “Formation” in his article “Beyoncé’s ‘Formation’” he states,

“Formation” calls for an ambivalent course of coordinated political action, drawing on the “gear” of black hairstyle and dress as cultural technologies for building a new consciousness in the territories of the everyday. Different black hairstyles are depicted in the video, from the “nappy hair” and “afros” extolled in its chorus, to the extensions, perms, and cornrows that we see across its various scenes. These black styles are represented in a nonjudgmental way, celebrated as shades of the black quotidian impressed upon the exigencies of Katrina. (Ball)

Ball’s critique of the film suggests that the portrayal of the various types of hair is to represent that while there is a variety of “black hair” they are all beautiful. Beyoncé also makes it apparent that each hair type be worn by different actresses to show that “black beauty” is not just one particular style of black is beautiful. The idea Beyoncé’s of that stresses the importance embracing the idea of love for features that are deemed “black” shows that the stereotype of black women not embracing their own features is a false one. It shows that black women adore the features that define them as beautiful and that there is no point in adoring features that strip away one’s identity. The idea of celebrating desiring “white” physical features over “black” physical features is dismantled due to Beyoncé’s use of depicting various forms of black beauty and how beautiful it can look.

Through Beyoncé’s Lemonade, it can be seen how Beyoncé takes stereotypes that affect black women and proves that they are wrong. She makes it known that these stereotypes are nothing more than biopolitical tools meant to control the perception of black women. With the discrediting the effectiveness of the stereotypes one can only ask, if we know the dangers of using these stereotypes then why do we continue to strive to continue to use them and use them to hurt people?

WORKS CITED
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HAVE YOU EVER had that dream of making it to the big leagues? Did you ever imagine yourself on stage or in arena filled with fans watching you performing what you loved best? Almost every child dreams of becoming some form of celebrity. You idolize them, by hanging posters in your room, or buying any and every product that you associate with your role model. Children become so fascinated by the outer images and skill of their idol that they wish to become like them. Early on, children begin to learn that certain skills or admirations by society can gain you love and respect across the world. However, what happens when there is too much admiration for the celebrity’s skills and ability to entertain, rather than the actual person?

In the recent Stanford Rape case, a white male athlete, Brock Turner was convicted of raping a girl. In a country that continues to prove how race is the center of almost issues that arouse, the judge grants Turner a total of three months in jail, before releasing him on a year probation sentence. Turner’s sentence caused uproar of protest because people felt that he did not get the proper sentence he deserved, and that if he were black he would have gotten the maximum sentence. On many occasion black men have been given harsher sentences for committing the same crimes as a white man. So for this reason, you have to ask yourself, what would have happen if a person of a different race and same class and gender setting commits a similar crime? Will they receive the same sentence? If so, will they be able to return to their previous lifestyle? According to past issues, it is almost impossible for black men to escape crime.

In the series The People vs. OJ Simpson an American Crime Story, it explores how the prosecutors, the defense attorneys and the police use race, gender and class as way in manipulating and attaching a black man to a crime in which he argues his innocence. The film displays how the media, the jury and previous incidents between the LAPD and the black community in Los Angeles implying that these issues were racially motivated. For centuries, America has been known as the land of opportunity, while managing to uphold its motto “Land of the Free,” which seems to be true for certain a race, class and gender; however, studies have shown that black men make up 42 percent of the America’s prison population. While a huge number of black man sit in jail, most powerful positions continued to be dominated by middle or upper class white me; but society wants you to believe that everyone has the opportunity and tools to move up in life. Nevertheless, what happens when another person of different background attains a higher
position in life, can they too marvel in their success, while obtaining the same the privileges as their white peers, and if so how much?

Turner and Simpson both manage to entertain society with their athletic skills. However, Simpson gains respect and fame after playing professional football, America’s favorite sport. Each of these men began to abuse the admiration that society has given them by afflicting pain on the opposite sex. Nevertheless, people seem to adapt to the behavior that is associated with exclusion and privilege. Each abuser manages to use their skills and image in the public’s eye to manipulate the system for their benefits, and thought it may seem that these male athletes get away with anything, there are still those factors of race, gender and class that limits how much abuse the system will allow.

In the series *The People vs. OJ Simpson an American Crime Story*, it examines the murder trial of the black American professional athlete, OJ Simpson. Simpson was a pro-football player that accused of murdering his ex-wife and her boyfriend in 1995. The trial was considered such a highly controversial case because he was a renowned football player that was in an interracial relationship with several reports of domestic violence. Simpson, who was a black man, was acquitted of murdering a white man and woman, which came two years after the brutal beating of an unarmed black man, by the name of Rodney King. With the Rodney King trial and the Simpson trial pending against the Los Angeles’ police, they showed the extent of abuse that the justice system afflicts on people of a particular race, class and gender for years.

For centuries, black men have been labeled as criminals, monster and thugs that need some sort of taming. In Marionette White’s article, “OJ Simpson Trial: We are all guilty,” examines how both black and whites are guilty of using race, class and gender to determine whether Simpson is guilty. She goes on to explain how it was publicized as a “radicalized package.” “Immediately after authorities apprehended Simpson as the prime suspect, Time magazine placed a darkened, altered photo of Simpson’s face on its cover, with the headline An American Tragedy,” (White, 103). The cover of the movie seems to backup White’s statement. The cover displays an image of a black man with half of his face covered by a black glove of the murder found at the victim’s home. The cover indicates seems to allude to the idea that blacks cannot be trusted and that there is animal inside that needs taming. According to Ava Duvermay’s film 13th, after slavery, white Americans began to refer to blacks as criminals in an attempt to rebuild the south. She explores the idea of how public officials such as, President Richard Nixon, President Ronald Reagan and President Bill Clinton, enhanced the stigma that blacks were criminals and animals through laws and mass incarceration. Therefore, evoking a black man’s right to remain innocent until proven guilty.
Through televised media and a marketed exploitation of drugs, sex and criminal cases, the fight against the stereotypes created by previous white leaders subjected upon black men, as a way for whites to remain in control and for blacks to remain feared still manages to cause problems amongst population. According to Amy Wilkins’ *Stigma and Status*, “Some Black men distance themselves from stereotypes of hyper sexuality by enacting “respectable” or “decent” Black masculinities in conformance with white expectations,” (169). In the beginning of the movie, OJ Simpson tells the limousine driver that his aspiration for becoming the man he was, came after meeting one of his celebrity role model, Willie Mays: “I remember the first celebrity I ever met…boy did that blow my mind…I was just a kid but it made me go I wanted to be that when I grow up,” (TPVS). Mays was also a black man known for his great accomplishments as a professional baseball player. In fact, Simpson's desires to model Mays display to what extent he was willing to escape the image of crime associate with black men. He knew that his athletic skills could help him escape the stereotypes of his skin. For a moment, Simpson achieves his dream of escaping the stigma that his skin tone brought him marrying Nicole and moving into an upper class white society, but it was not long before it resurfaced as an issue for him. The series explores how colored people are limited to the idea that money can buy a person all freedom, respect, or power they desired. For black men in general, too much respect can be seemed as threat to white male authority figures.

Mark Fuhrman was the detective that discovered the famous glove at Simpson’s home on the night of his wife’s murder. However, in the series, John Cochran and the other defense attorneys state, how detective Fuhrman was recorded discussing his anger towards interracial dating. During his recording session, he openly states that would do everything in his power to end an interracial relationship. According τ Cochran, Fuhrman saw OJ Simpson and Nicole’s marriage as a threat the white male society. Simpson was not the typical black man that Fuhrman usually encounters on a daily; instead, Simpson accumulated an enormous amount of money, fame and respect from the public. However, that does not seem to stop the accusations implied by the defense, which is Fuhrman planted evidence in hopes of convicting OJ Simpson with the murders of his ex-wife and her boyfriend.

In the series, according to the media, friends, police reports and the prosecutors, Simpson abused his wife because he desired to control her: “He always had that temper,” said Kris Jenner (TPVOS). Like Jenner, The District Attorney believes because he was incapable of controlling his wife is his reason for murdering her: “He got away with beating her, he is not going to get away with this,” (TPVOS). Wilkins states that, “black men have been marketed by the media as players, pimps and thugs with ability to control women,” (169). The series depicted how the prosecutors and the
media used OJ Simpson’s past issues of domestic violence to help promote an image of vicious criminal and how he is responsible for the deaths of his ex-wife and her boyfriend. During the case, he was depicted as a liar, untrustworthy with the need to hide something. The day after police discovers the murders, police place Simpson in handcuffs without proper time and examination of the case. They constantly dangled the story that he was an oversexed man that was angry and jealous that his ex-wife had moved on and because of this, he murdered her. This is where Simpson’s fame began to have a negative effect on his image. For one he is a black man who beats his wife out of jealousy and insecurities. Two, he goes on a high speed chase with police to while trying to escape a crime that he continues to argue his innocent, which makes him seem even more untrustworthy but also so wild animal with no respect for other people’s lives.

“In one, Black men build on the caricature of the player, characterizing interracial relationships as a site of masculine heterosexual accomplishment,” (Wilkins S&S, 173). The one stigma of a black man that Simpson could not escape was the image of a ladies’ man. However, he did not just gravitate to every woman he met; he was fascinated with white women in particular. The series captures Simpson’s fascination with white women through a nightclub scene where he danced and partied with them and pictures in placed in his home. “The media obsessed over every detail of the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, highlighting the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson as if to say that the black male symbolizes violence and the white (female) community symbolizes its victim,” (White, 103). After slavery, black men that were accused of raping a white woman, was murdered before being placed on trail. In fact, Dufay’s film talks about how black men were called rapist by whites even when they were not the ones raping women; instead, it explores how white men were the ones raping black slaves. However, associating black men with rape only increased their image as criminals and made them the most feared human species in the world.

Although Simpson tries to disassociate himself from being labeled as a black man in the series by stating: “I’m not black, I’m OJ;” However, the murder trial continued to remind him how it was impossible for him to erase the color of his skin with money or his athletic skills in a criminal setting. Simpson even experienced some forms of distrust with his lawyer Robert Shapiro and long time friend Rob Kardashian. After Simpson’s acquittal, he learned that the first just how much the color of his played role in his ability to go back to his previous lifestyle. He also loses his privilege at the country club and certain restaurant spots that he frequently visited before the trial. For a man with a lot money and fame, his trial demonstrates how stereotype created by previous white presidents and white upper class make it impossible for black men and other brown men to disassociate themselves
with problems that race cause. He loses friends and a lifestyle of privilege in after the case, which implies that all society see is a person’s race.

Majority of black population live are considered apart of middle or lower class population, and with exception of celebrities, there a very few blacks that are associated with the upper-class population. In Gregg Barak’s *Class, Race, and Gender in Criminology and Criminal Justice: Ways of Seeing Difference*, he states that a person’s income and level of class affects how the capabilities to view them as a crime base race and gender, (83). In other words, Simpson was acquitted of murder and abuse because he had the money pay the right lawyers to represent him. John Cochran seen numerous of times stating that evidence does not matter, and that it was about who could tell the better narrative, and in this case money and fame to overshadow the evidence. For Simpson, his pro- athletic privilege seems to get him out of lot of crime. Along with his skills, he was released from the crimes of domestic violence, endangering other citizens in a high-speed chase, and perhaps murder by giving and raising money for charity. In the series, one prosecutor states that although he may seem nice and charming, he uses his fame to manipulate the system: “He’s not so terrific… five years ago he pled no contest after he beat up Nicole… he never even did his community service, he got out celebrity style” (TPVOS). The series stated how officers was so fascinated with meeting a celebrity that the barely paid attention to his battered wife. District Attorney Sarah Marsh states in the series that there was 60 indications of domestic violence that OJ manage to get away with because officers.

In the series, the Los Angeles police department treats Simpson’s constant abuse towards his ex-wife lightly. In fact during the trial, the prosecutor states how police chose not to arrest Simpson after witnessing a battered and bruised wife running and screaming, “He’s going to kill me,” (TPVOS). Instead, they revel at the fact that “It’s OJ.” While Simpson seems to slide through the police’s radar with his money and fame, there are other cases in the series where lower class blacks are not given their justice. Johnny Cochran and Christopher Darden argue the how a case involving a mentally ill woman who was shot in the back by officers of the LAPD. She like many other innocent blacks, she became a target for crime because she was black and looked suspicious.

Since, “It’s OJ,” he is given a lot of freedom that an average man or woman would not receive if they were in jail awaiting the results of their trial. A lot of men and women suspected of committing a crime similar to the ones OJ Simpson was accused of would have to sit in jail await a bail hearing and even then, their chances of being released from jail are slim. However, when the police are done with examining all of the evidence and bring charges against OJ, his lawyers are a set time to release him to police. After he learns
that he is being charged with the murders, he goes on a high speed chase with police who states that they do not want to shoot at the Bronco carrying him because “It’s OJ.” He is given food that is brought in from outside the jail. The lawyers and officers are seen playing cards with him, and one officer informs him the outcome of the trial before the jury delivers the verdict.

In recent cases, the reasons given for gunning down unarmed black men were that, officers “supposedly” felt threaten or fear for their safety. Most victims of police brutality both past and recent confrontations are lower class blacks and Hispanics that cannot afford the proper form of representation or investigators to help with the convictions. When it comes to male athletes and female acquaintances, any criminal act by hands of male athletes are dismissed solely by the destruction of the accuser’s character and the athlete’s skills. In Jeffery Benedict’s article, “Athletes and Acquaintance Rape,” it was said that male prosecutors would decline charging the athletes with rape or any other crime because of the woman’s inability to convince a jury beyond a reasonable doubt that the man was capable of performing that kind of harm. Athlete gain their fame and respect by finessing society off their performance and skills. They learn how to market themselves as the “good guy,” through commercials and other forms of advertisements. As for the women and victims involved, they are considered average and should be honored to be in acquaintance of these men. The police’s quote tends to create a brand that is hard for any act of violence to surpass.

On several occasions, we see where women, men of same and different race, attack Nicole’s image. During the selection of jurors, black women in particular state how they felt Nicole was a gold digger. She is a woman of a different race and class, who according to a friend’s tell it all books, was not as innocent as she seems. In the book, she exposes how Nicole enjoyed to the use of cocaine. According to the logic in White’s film, cocaine and crack is consider the same drug; however, cocaine was used by upper class people and because crack was considered a lower class drug, the government used it to exploit blacks. Blacks were given harsher sentences for being caught with crack, while cocaine users were given a weaker or lighter sentence. Other than the fact that her husband played in a male sport that dominated every Sunday and Monday for centuries night , maybe her drug use could been the reason for why Nicole Simpson’s accusations of abuse were not taken serious by police. Benedict states that, it would hard for a jury or judge to convict an athlete of rape; without the questioning why would he rape her when he could have any woman he desired, (2)?

In many cases like those that the one Benedict describes above, athletes are not convicted of a rape crime because it hard for a women to convince a jury probable fans that the man is guilty. Instead, like Nicole Simpson and many other victims, the blame is placed on the woman. In the law of
athletic, women are seemed as the aggressors who have the most motives for committing a crime of false accusations. Like many other athletes, it was hard for the police, jurors, and media to envision him as the aggressor because of his charm with previous athletic skills displayed throughout his career in the NFL.

Consequently, the white male society has place black men into a box that continues to stigmatize and label them as predators. In recent incident involving police and unarmed black men, the unarmed black man was shot and killed because they were believe to pose a form of threat to officers. Laws such as “The Stand Your Ground,” offers a window of justice for those who feel threaten in the presence of a black man. For centuries, these types of laws allowed whites to remain in control and blacks to suffer at the hands of them. These laws display how the issues of race are inherited by past ancestors and passed down to generations. No one seems to want to come up with a solution to end the hate and fear that black men have inherited through the media and whites. , Duvemay’s 13th, explores how many black leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Angela Davis the FBI as the world labeled most dangerous people because they desired equal rights and treatment for blacks. In fact, the film poses that the government’s fear of blacks lead to a mass incarceration of leaders and individuals like Angela Davis and the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The movie uses activist of both past and present day to elaborate on the idea that blacks have suffered at the hands of white by exploring how President Nixon and President Reagan’s “declare a war on drugs, with intent associate the black community with heroin and crack and give them a harsher sentence for possession of either drug. Each president that played a role in the mass incarceration of blacks proposed laws that broke up families and dehumanized a whole race for the purpose of not being referred to as being weak on crime. For that reason, many black men like OJ Simpson, Trayvon Martin, and Michael Brown suffer at the hands of these men desires to seen as a figure of strength in society. Which raises the question, are these men strong as they pretended? Moreover, if these men are represent strength, then why target a race that has always been labeled as second-class citizen and paint them as villains?

WORKS CITED


MEDIA, SPECIFICALLY TELEVISION, has undoubtedly become a critical vehicle for presenting social critiques through an artistically biopolitical lens. Ambiguous biopolitical mechanisms make the construction of social hierarchy, beyond obvious frames such as race and class, virtually invisible. Television works as a tool to reinforce biopolitical constructions by leaving criticism ambiguous. In addition, television shows often play off bioscientific fears to attract audiences who could, but often do not, become political activists to amend the social issues framed by the show they choose to watch. This sense of hands off activism boosts the consumer’s sense of social cognition, explaining why audiences absorb biopolitical messages so hungrily: the show does the activism for the consumer. Audience members of The 100 on The CW network should analyze it as a biopolitical text because there is clear evidence of critiques festered by the bioscientific fears. The public political sphere propagates those fears: feminine strength, environmental decline, and modernity. The 100 is a biopolitical mechanism that makes vibrant allusions specifically to fears associated with ethical biopolitics and sexual biopolitics consequentially giving its audience a sense of virtual social consciousness and authority.

This paper will first analyze the ways that The 100 manipulates bioscientific fears to draw the audience in; then it will lead into why The 100 successfully plays the role of televised “Devil’s advocate” for ethical criticism in bioscience by literally questioning the infamous “God Complex” within western society. It will also discuss the biopolitical critiques The 100 makes regarding queer sexuality and popular discourse dealing with the treatment of queer characters on the small screen. Though this is not new social discourse, the lack of scholarship devoted to analyzing television as a biopolitical text leaves The 100 an untouched reinforcer of hands-off activism despite the attention it pays to biopolitical criticism. The recent “trending” effect draws attention to itself as a potentially successful mode of mere entertainment, and the absence of explicit philosophical critiques within the show discourage political and social change on behalf of the audience.

The 100 kicks off with a rundown of the show’s backdrop to place the audience in the appropriate setting. The story takes place 100 years in the future on a space ark developed for survivors after nuclear war destroyed the world. This setting plays with a common bioscientific fear within
western society. The apocalypse has always been a muse for artists because the concept crosses cultural barriers. An apocalypse explained by scripture may also be explained by science using different triggers and theories. A consensus is that the world will eventually end, so why not make art reflecting public fear of the subject? Regardless of religious affiliation or the lack thereof, consumers statistically react to fear mongering: AIDS pandemic, Cold War, Red Scare, Red Summer, and so forth. By placing the characters within a post-apocalyptic setting in the midst of terrorist scares sensationalized by the media, *The 100* sets itself up to be television gold with viewers responding with an average 88% satisfaction on Rotten Tomatoes over the past three and a half seasons. Choosing this kind of setting reflects biopolitical tactics because fear mongering is a way for a public sphere (producer) to manipulate the private sphere (consumer). Sensationalizing those fears to demand attention reinforces the strength the producer has over the consumer despite the consumer’s conscious decision to feed into the product. *The 100* gets away with playing into biopolitical constructions between producer and consumer despite the show’s critiques of issues relevant to biopolitical theory, because the theories are masked behind a popular entertainment genre.

*The 100* takes advantage of the bioscientific fears revolving around the apocalypse to draw attention to the “why”. Why is there a space ark? Why was there nuclear war? It is crucial to note that the citizens of the Ark are all westernized and easy for an American audience to relate to. They are white and/or black with a few minority Asian and Hispanic characters. The show is careful to illustrate that the Earth is uninhabitable and all its inhabitants who did not make it to the Ark are presumably extinct. Only the worthy made it to the Ark and made able to continue the human-race: upper class Americans and its allies. Giorgio Agamben would call those left behind: Bare Lives. They were abandoned either for lack of funding, lack of education, or lack of proper citizenship. The biopolitical critique the show makes in this regard deals with the discomfort one should feel upon recognizing the lack of general diversity in language, race, or ethnicity among the people of the Ark. However, because the show makes not great fete to acknowledge the biopolitical reasons behind why only westerners survived the end of the world, it fails to inspire sympathy within its audience. Rather, it is more likely that the audience find pride in themselves and their country than to acknowledge or empathize with the reality of those deemed bare lives.

Jen Hauser, a featured author in the book *Tactical Biopolitics*, expands on the ways television and other virtual media mechanisms encourage biopolitical discourse despite the ambiguity of the subject and the way the show buys into the very system they appear to critique. Her essay argues that though this medium does fuel the discussion of biopolitical topics,
screen writers do not often discuss biopolitics verbatim, weakening their position as biopolitical activist.

As mentioned previously, this is a major issue for The 100 in terms of successfully delivering biopolitical criticisms to its audience. Hauser says, “the medium can, but does not necessarily meet the message.” Her reading is somewhat optimistic in that she implies that the mode could successfully address biopolitical tensions within queer and ethical theory if the show called a duck a duck. In other words, if The 100 took the time to address the Ark’s problematic demographic, perhaps the audience would have more to say when they noticed that the Grounders (ancestors of Prime-Fire survivors) are mostly people of color. Instead the way that the show sensationalizes its characters and their plight simply reinforces hands-off activism.

Audience members find themselves so disillusioned by their ability to relate to the character, losing themselves in their pride for western culture, that they find little ambition for acknowledging or rectifying the biopolitical injustice The 100 foresees. Should the world end by Prime Fire, only those who could pay their way to safety or could offer their usefulness to the masses would be let live. The same disillusionment has historically justified imperialism; Western culture clings to the notion of white man’s burden, enforcing their idea of “civilized culture” on foreign soil. The same pride motivating colonists centuries ago is paralleled by the audience’s silence in regards not only to the Arks demographic, but also to their recolonization of Earth.

The 100 is a biopolitical mechanism that reinforces social constructions of western identity, mimicking real world expectations, as well as understanding the moral barriers of imperialism; analyzing the ways that The 100 operates as a biopolitical mechanism is not easy due to the lack of discourse in modern scholarship relating to the ways television encourages silent activism. Modernization theory is the closest studied theory behind biopolitics that specifically addresses how consumer culture in western society creates a sense of contemporary tolerance because of common consumption and accessibility to “new politics.” Modernization theory sensationalizes imperialism and can be used to explain why characters in The 100 hold fast to the notion that their way is the best way in all things. It also helps explain why audiences remain hands-off activism: the characters in the show do all of the dirty work and leave the audience to assume that Clark (female alpha), Bellamy (male alpha), and other authoritative characters do know best.

Scholars have continually added to the theory to make what we now see as “Modernization Theory,” so it is difficult to quote the original theorist. Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole defines it as “[arguing] that societies develop in fairly predictable stages through which they become increasingly complex. Development depends primarily on the importation of technology as well as a
number of other political and social changes believed to come about as a result” (Crossman, *Thought co.*). Those changes often appear in the form of political mobility which social media and television make accessible. Modernization theory relies on the idea that with better communication comes a better tolerance for different religions, sexualities, and cultures. However, the theory lacks relevant connections drawn between consumer and producer and ignores how the consumer consensually identifies as submissive to pop-culture interpretations and critiques of social politics. The audience for *The 100* sees social mobility through the veil of futuristic imperialism, automatically relating to the American dialects, cultural norms, and technology within Arcadian society.

The lack of peer-reviewed publication dealing with the ways television manipulates its audience by portraying protagonist figures in light of western identity and understanding what consumers choose to consume provokes the question, “how well is *The 100* working as a biopolitical mechanism and in what ways?” If there is a lack of discussion about how we as a consumer population elect our social constraints via pop-culture, then we as a consumer population in turn disregard the control we relinquish to our entertainment vices, thus we ignore the “why” behind our motivation for watching post-apocalyptic genres that typically gear toward imperialistic motifs. Those vices are paradoxically master and subject to our control because television shows’ success relies on the audience’s willing participation to watch the show. Therefore, it is important for networks to keep in touch with what audiences want to hear and see.

Not excluding *The 100*, television sensationalizes social “issues” and veils politics behind the guise of consumer’s fears perpetuated by social media. In layman’s terms, if it has been Tweeted, Facebooaked, Insta’d or blogged, chances are there is a TV show about “it”. Currently, science has made great medical fetes that disturb God-fearing Americans. Civilians view a scientist successfully growing a human ear on a pig and then killing it, or transplanting a human brain into a new person as playing God. Especially in western society, religion governs most decisions behind what science should and can engage with as well as when it is “ok” for the government to decide whom to *make live or let die*. Because modern science rattles religiosity entrenched in American culture, the fear it ignites swarms social media posts and blogs. The contemporary relevance of the “God Complex” offers *The 100* an identifiable medium for which the show illuminates ways imperialism ignores those fears, willingly and consciously playing God for the good of mobility.

*The 100* literally names episode 8 of season four “God Complex.” Prime Fire destroyed the world a century before the arrival of Skaikru (the name the Grounders gave to the people of the Ark) and for decades the Ground-
ers have survived. However, with Skaikru’s arrival, suddenly there is a new impending threat which only Skaikru can solve. The show highlights that Skaikru practically abandons morality (again) to save a planet they presume to be theirs to save. In this episode, Clark and her mother, Dr. Abbey, sacrifice a Grounder who they presume to be a criminal in order to test a potential cure for radiation poisoning. Clark and Rowen (a grounder) force the woman with Night Blood (the cure) to give a sample of her blood. They objectify her body in the name of science and survival. The cure experiment fails horribly. Their test subject dies an excruciating death complete with bleeding eyes and ears.

The show provides the added twist that does turn the audiences’ stomachs. The test subject was not a criminal like everyone thought. The show dances around the question of whether his criminality should matter through the voice of Raven who asks, “are we just going to hunt down our next innocent person to sacrifice for the good of Arkadia?”, thus implying that she does not support killing one ignorant innocent for the sake of saving hundreds of others. Foucault’s biopolitical theories often looked at similar issues when he evaluated the exploitation of prison labor and questioned whether it is fair for the ruling classes to dictate a person’s life value based on their criminality. In the circumstance of the show, Foucault may have explained that Clark and Dr. Abbey felt unhindered in proceeding with the experiment because the man was a criminal. However, that would mean that they felt the Grounder was a bare-life. The concept of prisoners as bare-lives is not a new one and is still widely discussed both in scholarly settings and in public society.

The 100 only plays off the popularity of the subject without bringing in biopolitical discourse to explain why they made connections to biopolitical theories such as bare-life individuals and the consequences of favoring successful colonization of the preservation of all lives. They could have allowed Raven to expand on her revulsion by potentially citing Foucault with a quote like this: “it isn’t right to make criminals victims of our social gain. ‘They become the object of [our] hostility and distrust’ and rendered worthless to society except through the exploitation of their bodies” (Droit). Perhaps a more direct stance such as this, alongside the inclusion of philosophy, audiences may have taken better notice of the show’s critique or criminal exploitation. They may have also noticed the way the show manipulated the fears of the “God Complex” by making the audience okay with it when the criminal was the subject of the experiment. Instead, the show’s passivity encourages only hands-off activism and virtual consciousness, as The 100 made it too easy to ignore their critiques.

Shows like The 100 delegitimize their political stance by fictionalizing the narratives and removing critical analysis of the way biopolitics plays into
societal make-up. However, applying an academic lens still offers the possibility for audience members to read the show as intentionally biopolitical, as it often parallels contemporary bioscientific fears with its plot. *The 100* offers a multitude of character tropes which play into modern stereotypes to call out those stereotypes and redefine them. By appearing to buy into stigmas, the show fits into modern media “rules” while manipulating the tropes to be martyrs for the bigger picture of social injustices their characters represent in real life.

Currently, LGBTQ and ethical biology has emerged as a hot topic in western culture. To be clear, the concerns within these contexts are anything but new. However, in a sense, that is how television is able to navigate consumer culture so well. Basically, shows like *The 100* present popular politics in such a way that the audience interprets the themes as new and exciting; such sensations revamp the audience’s own feelings of political consciousness without actually confronting the truths about the political critiques they are consuming. “Civilized” society has a record of self-proclaimed enlightenment, typically polishing an argument old as time and selling it to the public as something new and fresh attempting to remain a beacon for social mobility and leadership. Social theorists often discuss ways that consumer culture praises itself as modern and forward thinking because increased use of social media, industrial development, and common consumerism results in better tolerance and community. In turn, the virtual since of leadership modern consumer culture insights results in virtual social consciousness; virtual social consciousness reinforces hands-off activism by legitimizing a virtual voice like a Facebook/Blog post or Tweet.

James Hay’s essay “Popular Culture in a Critique of the New Political Reason” points out that since the beginning of the early 2000s, America seems to pride itself on the notion that its citizens are in the middle of a political reconfiguration that the media perpetuates with a televised “revolution”. Token characters have become more evident in popular TV shows with the means for the network to look more diverse and inclusive, while other networks develop shows like *The 100* to provoke questions about gender, the environment, and government. The way this works, Hays argues, is in itself biopolitical. The first section of his article asks the question, “Are new political populism and its media ‘Revolution’ the new fan-fare for common man?” With social media giving “common man” a sense of global presence, anyone can feel that they are socially conscious. Similarly, television boosts the consumer’s ego by giving the impression that producers are listening to the cries of political activist and offering a form of unity through media.

This tactic encourages the opposite of activism, however, because to engage in this sort of connection, the audience must consume, meaning they
must sit and watch. Whether the producer does truly intend goodwill and inspire political change, the medium in which The 100 chooses to make its claims ultimately reinforces biopolitical mechanisms that keep the common people common by only offering the illusion that they are anything but common. The flip side of this observation is that the use of token characters with the intention of calling out the use of token characters, as paradoxical as that sounds, offers a kind of criticism that the public is actually willing to swallow. In a sense, playing into biopolitics as a means to inexplicitly address biopolitics is like giving a dog a pill hidden in peanut-butter. The motives are there and though the execution may seem diluted and ultimately feeble as the consumer is simply consuming and not always reacting, The 100 ultimately opens the floor for discussion which the public has ardently accepted in reaction to the show’s token queer characters.

Tactical Biopolitics includes several essays which elaborate the ways this kind of tactic works. First note that the trend of fictional survival style TV shows are the highest rated forms of televised entertainment, making the genre the perfect guise for the artistic desire to illuminate biopolitical issues without watering down the fictionalized entertainment factor. The idea is to deliver political criticism by hiding behind sexual and violent themes adored by young, impressionable audiences. Season three of The 100 alluded to sexuality substantially by framing the queer relationship between the series’ main character Clark and her token lesbian lover, Lexa.

Foucault’s theory of biopolotics essentially being the right of the sovereign to make live or let die is inseparable from the plot of their love story. Using both a queer and biopolitical lens to analyze season three legitimizes the LGBTQ’s social outcry regarding the higher mortality rate among queer characters on the small screen. Thom Geier lists Lexa’s death as number six out of 32 queer character deaths in 2016 on the media blog The Wrap. Lexa’s affection for Clark ultimately pushed her guard into loathing her because he did not support an alliance between Lexa’s clan and Clark’s clan. He opted to advocate her letting die when he had the opportunity to protect her. He kills her “accidently” in a fit of rage toward Clark.

In terms of unspoken rules in movies and television series, the first character to have sex is always the first character the villain murders. The 100, in all its sneaky biopolitical glory, is no rule breaker in that Lexa’s death immediately follows having sex with Clark. Immorality of premarital sex, already a social no-no punishable by a gory cinematic end, fluffed up with a pre-marital queer sex scene between two female power figures? According to the rules, someone definitely has to die. But why kill Lexa and not Clark? At this point in the show, the audience has already seen Clark bedded with Finn (a male character who Clark mercifully kills in season two) so her sexuality is not as clearly defined as Lexa’s who the audience has only
ever seen romantically involved with Clark. The show gives the audience a message in choosing to kill Lexa and not Clark, and begs for further dissection.

First, Clark and Lexa must be analyzed in detail to determine what social faction they parallel. Their names are the best place to begin because they are reflections of femininity and masculinity in a western cultural context. Lexa is a more culturally feminine name meaning “defender of mankind.” This is interesting given the context of the show resting on the notion that mankind has been virtually whipped out and ancestors of the surviving clans whom Lexa leads are still greatly divided despite historical evidence that division leads to death. In fact, Lexa is the champion of her clan, and despite her feminine name, she is physically and mentally superior to her clansmen. She also clearly represents the LGBTQ community because of her open self-identification as a lesbian. The show is careful to never say “lesbian”, though Lexa’s character mentions her attraction solely to women. By removing categorized sexuality from cultural existence, the show draws attention to the biopolitical construction of such categories within our society.

Lexa’s queer identity acts as a parallel to the socially defined queer community and as is typical within the big and small screens, her gender and sexuality pose a threat to the excepted norm of masculine strength and female dependency. The contrast of her social position as leader of the 12 clans to her gender is reflected by her name. This is the show’s way of bringing attention to heteronormative gender constructions: one can be woman but not be “like a man” and one can be attracted to women and not be categorized for the preference. Lexa’s femininity juxtaposed with her attraction to women, her beauty, and her title made her an unstable female trope. Her token character fits social norms within biopolitical media constraints on the surface, however the show sneaks in subtle asides problematizing those constraints. Again, the problem is the show’s passivity toward their own criticisms, making the audience overlook the biopolitical constraints of sexuality. Instead, as will be discussed further, the audience only focuses on Lexa’s death and how that is biopolitical.

In contrast, Clark is a masculine name meaning “scribe, secretary, or cleric.” The name is considered a strong boy’s name often associated with Superman. Clark’s nickname, Waneda (meaning bringer of death), negates the meaning of her given name because Clark is derived from the title of religious clerk, implying that she would be more of a bringer of light rather than a bringer of death. In addition, she is a foil character to Lexa because she is a blonde with blue eyes, whereas Lexa is dark-haired with brown eyes. Clark’s ideal persona of western feminine beauty justifies her masculine name because she fits into the hierarchal frame designed by the sovereign
in western society. This makes sense as she is a descendant of the fortunate few westerners who made it to the Ark. Her sexuality is also more palatable because though she clearly exercises queer attraction, she first has sex with a man. Sexual ambiguity among the characters illustrated by the absence of vernacular for sexual identity addresses the stigmas caused by labels.

Clark is neither “gay” nor “straight” according to what the audience witnesses, which is arguably her saving grace. Lexa on the other hand, is immediately deemed “lesbian” despite never claiming the title for herself. In this way the show addresses the way the audience objectifies sexuality.

The 100 continues testing abnormal gender constructs when Clark chooses to kill Fin to offer a merciful escape, however in doing so, she also demonstrates marginalized agency which keeps her bound within a feminine gender role: caregiver and sacrificer. She exercises biopolitical agency because she is thrust into a leadership position where she is pushed into choosing to make live or let die. She manipulates her options by choosing to make die without committing murder. This is biopolitically justifiable because Finn was a criminal, which made him a homo sacer/bare-life. His biopolitical status relinquishes Clark’s femininity from being muddied by murder. The 100 never articulates biopolitical vernacular like homo sacer or bare-life, so again, the audience absorbs their critiques without solidifying their social context in terms of biopolitical injustice.

There is something to be said about the motivations behind Clark’s gender binary in a biopolitical sense. The setting of the show offers a separation from today’s society because modernly, gender roles often express strict binaries even within a queer context, i.e butch vs femme caricatures. The biopolitical message could be to address the absence of such a character like Clark who straddles gender roles in media set in the modern day. The implication then is that Clark can only exist in the future. But then the added layer of Lexa’s death still raises a red-flag because her death can be read one of two ways, both of which answer some form of biopolitical inquiry. The first possibility is that her death is a slam against the LGBTQ community. Nico Lang with Salon says, “The phenomenon is so storied that it even has a name: TV Tropes calls it ‘Dead Lesbian Syndrome.’ This tendency is similar to what the website calls ‘Bury Your Gays,’ in which LGBT characters are more likely to meet their maker than heterosexual cis-gender (non-trans) ones.” LGBTQ communities see their storylines hitting the cutting room floor and feel forced to acknowledge that they “comprise such a teeny-tiny fraction of characters on television to begin with that killing us off so haphazardly feels especially cruel,” (Bernard, Autostraddle).

The idea that consumers reflect their personal experiences on the characters they watch is not a new one, hence why the LGBTQ community was in an internet based uproar in response to Lexa’s death. Their character was
stereotypically killed off, again. The character/audience parallel is what *The 100* hopes for because the better able a viewer is to place themselves in the context of a show, the better able they are to interpret the show’s overarching message. However, if the message is too personal and lacks articulate criticisms veiled through stereotyping, then the audience misses the mark by fault of the show.

Jose-Carlos Mariategui, Et Al. constructs the argument that media can and is used as a form of biopolitical power in “Social Formations of Global Media Art.” The authors use Foucaultian theory to argue that art aims to produce long term impacts rather than just rest as a one-hit wonder so to speak. In biopolitical terms, Foucault theorizes that institutions appear as regulators of exchange making them the ideal rhetorical device for artists to reinforce their own political theory, be it activist or conformist. The consumer absorbs the critical theories of the artist through their art through the disguise of mindless entertainment. *The 100* manipulates the popularity of small screen entertainment and sacrificially offers its apparent themes to the public. The LGBTQ community perhaps unwittingly played right into the very purpose of the token queer death by lighting up social media with backlash against the show. The purpose of political art is to create friction among an otherwise stagnate audience with a means to establish critical conversation. In this case, Lexa’s death resulted in an eruption of disappointed #Clexa fans who projected their own struggles on the strong female character’s relationship.

This is perhaps the only evidence the show produces in terms of cyber activism, however cyber activism still falls under the umbrella of virtual social consciousness. Blogging and Tweeting about “Burying the Gays” only reaches the people who are already looking at similar posts. The *Salon*, a source this essay previously sited, does not reach the homophobe steering clear of any queer talk. Therefore, the show fails to create anything but hands-off activist. Perhaps if the show articulated their social criticisms by quoting Foucault and addressing the hypocrisy of society’s fear of the God Complex, then the audience would have noticed their own biases toward western society despite their trending critiques of American government. Additionally, if *The 100* had utilized Clark as a vehicle for calling out Lexa’s guard’s fear of an empowered/queer woman, then a more publicly accessible discussion could have begun regarding ‘Burying the Gays’; one that did not rely on following a specific social media channel or scholarly interest in the topic. All in all, *The 100* illuminates several biopolitical critiques which scholars already discuss frequently behind university doors, and which certain activist groups find personal interest in discussing. However, the lack of true critical discourse hinders the show’s credibility as a biopolitical critic, thus restricting its validity among agents who could reconfigure the social
stereotypes and normalized atrocities the show alludes to. By only inspiring hands-off activism and virtual social consciousness via Twitter debates and blogs, the show fails to inspire significant social change.

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GENDER, SEX & (BIO)POWER
Where Biopolitics Meets Necropolitics: Sexual Abuse of Boys by Priests

By Andriana Collins-Brockman

THE 2016 ACADEMY AWARD BEST PICTURE WINNER “Spotlight” features a team of dedicated research journalists at the Boston Globe who uncover the systematic sexual abuse of boys by priests within the Boston catholic church under whose protection enabled the abuse to continue for decades. The abuse takes place within the highly powerful, self-regulated community of the catholic church. The enablement and protection by the catholic church of the systematic sexual abuse of boys by priests exemplifies the intersection between biopolitics and necropolitics in the film. This is done by establishing the church as a sovereign entity who used spiritual death as a mechanism of control to make live the sexual needs of the priests while allowing death for the spiritual, religious and often literal lives of the boys.

Both necropolitics and biopolitics engage in the notion of a society exerting control of a population through systemic use of bodies and well-being. The philosophies differ in that one establishes specific use of death and threat of death as a means of control of a population whereas the latter seeks to better the life of a specific subset of the population while denying life to another. Necropolitics is an important lens through which to read the text of the film, as it deals with the power of a group in actively dictating who will die as well as exposure of certain aspects of the society to death whereas, I argue, through the use of the Foucauldian definition of biopolitics. Necropolitics is usually associated with literal death of bodies, however, it is applicable here as the film deals with spiritual death, which often translates to literal death when several of the victims commit suicide as a consequence of the church’s inaction to stop the problem.

The first scene of the film establishes the Boston Catholic church as the sovereign power over conventional law through their display of authority within the confines of the police station. The scene begins as one of the officers explains to the other how the mother, the boys and the priest are doing. The dialogue is intentionally vague and not direct regarding the abuse as the viewer has not yet been introduced to what exactly is going on which is metaphorical to the unspeakable and concealed nature surrounding the situation. Midway through the scene, the assistant district attorney enters hurriedly as the officers vaguely discuss what is happening. During their conversation that follows the lawyer asks him if there are “any press” to which the higher-ranking officer responds “some guy from The Citizen but we sent him away. None of the other papers.” Burke responds “let’s
keep it that way” as he storms off authoritatively to find his clients. Burke’s commanding tone of voice within their exchange shows that he, in being representative of the church, has power and authority in their ability to demand what actions be taken by the law in keeping the newspapers away. Law enforcement should objectively protect its citizens, including those who have been victim to sexual crime. Instead they are to follow orders of keeping the press away rather than the usual hierarchy of the accused being below the law.

The understood expectation within law enforcement is seen additionally when the two officers discuss the possibility of arraignment and the deputy replies, “what arraignment” in a dismissive question which acknowledges and furthers the expectation that knowledge of what has taken place will not leave the confines of the police station by the press or via charges filed. The officers dismissive tone also reveals that this is a common occurrence within the station. Hierarchy being revealed through dismissiveness continues as the assistant DA walks into the room where the bishop is discussing with the boy’s mom as he says, “you know Sheila the good work the church does in the community” as a reason why they should forgo charges against the father. As Mr. Burke enters the room the bishop turns around authoritatively and informs him that “we’ll just need another moment, Paul” he says as though Paul is intruding on official business taking place and that the law is not needed in these matters. This establishes the church as the sovereign power which, within the realm of necropolitics, is “defined as a twofold process of self-institution and self-limitation (fixing one’s own limits for oneself). The exercise of sovereignty, in turn, consists in society’s capacity for self-creation through recourse to institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary significations”. (Mbembe 13). The church has created its own set of rules to which they are responsible and defines the institution and the limitations of the law that they are accountable for. It is the priests whose needs are championed and their sexual desires allowed to flourish, while the young, impressionable boys are chosen to fulfill their needs at the expense of their faith and livelihood and thus are sentenced to spiritual death that often leads to physical death when they commit suicide from no longer having a spiritual base to turn it as it has been robbed from them. The boys are punished by feeling shame and confusion regarding their sexuality and faith while the priests face no punishments because they are a part of the hierarchical system that controls punishments within the church, regarding societal perceptions and through secular law. Important in this definition of sovereignty is the creation from within which differentiates it from another type of power. It is within the symbolic space of law and law enforcement which is representative of the legality of the larger land that the catholic church displays its power within something deemed “in
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The bishop promises to give Sheila his personal card as they will deal directly with the church rather than the law. The scene is an introduction to the sexual abuse and the agency of the church as both the accused but also the authority.

The film then follows the journey of the Spotlight news team as they uncover evidence that the sexual abuse is systemic in that it is not just local but known about and enabled in order fulfill the needs of the priests. The introduction of the story to the Spotlight team begins when the newly appointed editor, Marty Baron, from Miami hears of what is largely referred to as The Geoghan Story published by another reporter within a column of the newspaper. In a meeting, he questions their reluctance of the story by saying “apparently, this priest molested children in six different parishes over the last 30 years and the attorney for the victims, Mr. Garabedian […] says Cardinal Law found out about it fifteen years ago and did nothing.” Another reporter in the meeting responds “yeah, I think that attorney’s a bit of a crank and the church dismissed the claim” while another reporter chimes in and says, “he said, she said” as a basic summary of the conflict. Rather than see the allegations as a horrifying possibility that is taking place within a religious group whose duty it is to provide protection and spiritual guidance, their immediate response is to dismiss the allegations as improbable and describe the attorney as insane for believing them. Their response shows a pivotal part of both necropolitics and biopolitics in the lack of the system seeing a problem within itself and how it operates. Anyone who questions the actions or motives of the sovereign is deemed mentally unable to properly make those deductions and the system distances itself from them by challenging their abilities, attacking their character and deeming them unfit to both participate in the system nor speak regarding it. It is a protective mechanism which is essential and present in order to shield the sovereign similarly to how historical monarchs were protected by soldiers in battle by distancing the enemy and killing them before they could destroy the nucleus. All actions are done to support and protect the needs of the system. Only an outsider such as Baron can see the potential danger and implications involved because the newspaper, although their job is to remain objective, is part of the system due to the large population and reach of Catholicism within the organization and the city. The other reporters continue their vague protests of the story to which Baron responds, “this strikes me as an essential story to a local paper.” The importance of that statement is that someone who comes from outside of the system can see the impact of a biopolitical system whereas it is not clear from within. This is an essential aspect of Foucault’s biopolitics. The intersection between biopolitics and necropolitics is clear when comparing research to another comparable instance of sexual misconduct done within the prison
system. Author Jessi Lee Jackson notes in his research when describing the knowledge of misconduct by the hierarchical prison system that “while the report provides evidence of the contradictory roles of the state in permitting, perpetrating and protecting people from sexual violence, it fails to grapple with the implication of these contradictions” (Jackson 197). This is seen in the newspaper, whose responsibility of reporting in this instance is comparable to the responsibility of the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission’s (NPREC), failure to be able to grapple with the allegations made and suggested over the last 30 years and because of their hesitance to truly report it, has also enabled it to continue. Although boys being taken advantage of by adult priests is very different from the rape of prisoners within the prison system, they are comparable in that they are both forms of sexual abuse that take place within a system that allows it to happen in such a way that shields it from consequences and thus arguably condones it. Jackson continues with “Instead, the NPREC report frames increased state control over incarcerated bodies as a way to solve the problem of prison rape” (Jackson 197). This is seen in Spotlight by the church using the law to control evidence of its transgressions because “the documents are under seal.” To obtain them, the team would have to “file a motion to lift the seal on those documents” which the apprehensive reporters in the meeting simplify as “sue the church” and notes that “the church will read this as us suing them.” The implication is that rather than being an objective paper, they are supposed to care about what the potentially criminal religious system thinks about their role and the implications through that. It is also evident when asked by a member of the team regarding their new story “do you think that suit has a chance” and Michael responds “depends on the church” to which Bradlee adds “and what parish he belongs to.” In addition, when Michael goes to interview Garabedian regarding his work on behalf of the boys, Garabedian asks him “did you know they tried to bring me up before the Massachusetts Board of Bar Overseers three times? They’re watching me very closely. […] Yeah, the church. They’d like to get me disbarred.” This is further evidence that the church controls the law rather than the law maintaining and regulating the church’s intersection with secularism. The film sets up the different layers of the system and the varying degrees to which they are complicit. What is made clear is that they catholic church is control of each layer and is the sovereign power.

Jackson’s explanation of the necropolitics of the prison system continues as he states “NPREC highlights situations in which women and children are victims of prison sexual abuse and invokes ‘the logic of masculine protection’ (Young 2003), constructing a patriarchal logic in which the state must intervene to protect vulnerable populations from racialized sexual aggressors. In expanding the prison regime, it expands the sexual abuse of
prisoners” (Jackson 197). In the film, a few members of the Spotlight teams discuss their new assignment and Bradlee says “we covered Geoghan when the story broke three years ago” as in literally referring to the vague story that they wrote about the allegations previously. However, the wording in the sentence is strategic as it also implies complicit protection and concealment as “to cover” something is synonymous, especially within the legal and law enforcement community, of suppression of facts and evidence with the intention of helping to set free the guilty party. Just as the law is protecting the prison system rather than the vulnerable population of children, so does the “masculine protection” of the government, Catholic church, and previously the newspaper, all of which enables the victims to be continually sexually abused. This sexual abuse intersects with the biopolitics of sexuality and necropolitics when the team finds out that systemically enforced religious custom requiring priests to deny their sexual desires leads to them taking advantage of the boys and causes death to the victim’s faith, and in many cases, the end of their lives.

One of the aspects of this that enables it to fall into the category of necropolitics is the spiritual death that often leads to physical death. Spiritual death on its own is the perfect metaphor for literal death in a textual context. However, unlike any other stand in for actual death it describes a literal death of the alternate, spiritual being of a person. This is different than, for example, a mental death as that only truly dies when physical death occurs. A spiritual death also carries with it the religious context of being unable to enter heaven life after death as the “now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sexuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like that. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). The religious text that the catholic church is founded on and by which they measure the ability to both live spiritually on earth and live forever in heaven condemns the behavior that the catholic church is persuading otherwise innocent children to partake in. These acts are considered sins and kill them spiritually due to the commandments of the text. It also kills them with mental side effects because of the trauma through the other activities listed in the Galatian passage. When a Spotlight reporter meets with the leader of the survivor group called SNAP, he explains: “When you’re a poor kid from a poor family, religion counts for a lot. And when a priest pays attention to you, it’s a big deal. He asks you to get out the hymnals or take out the trash, you feel special. It’s like God asking for help.” This continues the establishment of their power as both religious leaders and the power over the boys. He continues, “so maybe it’s a little weird when he tells you a dirty joke, but now you got a secret together,
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so you go along. Then he shows you a porno mag, and you go along. And you go along, and you go along until one day he asks you to jerk him off or give him a blow job. And so you go along with that, too. Because you feel trapped.” This is an example of how the slow and deliberate nature of creating trust in order to break it becomes evident. This is shown not to be an accident or something that happened out of impulse, but rather something very deliberate. The intentional nature is best described why what he says next with “because he has groomed you. How do you say no to God, right?” Because the priests are considered the sovereign and thus likened to God because of their power. When they betray the trust of the boys, they take more than just their sexual innocence as he explains, “it is important to understand this is not just physical abuse, it’s spiritual abuse, too. And when a priest does this to you, he robs you of your faith. So you reach for the bottle or the needle, or if those don’t work you jump off a bridge. That’s why we call ourselves survivors.” The priests are their direct link to their faith and God because that is the way that they catholic church is setup. This is especially seen in catholic rituals like communion. Priests are the messenger and the intermediary between man and God. By taking advantage of this and leading the boys to a dark place because of the abuse, the priests lead them to a spiritual death by both cutting off their relationship to God because of the lack of trust in the relationship with the priest, as well as creating doubt because of abuse within their safe haven.

This is a process and not an instance where one day a priest goes up to a boy in the congregation and starts touching him. There is trust and a relationship that is established and that trust slowly grows and evolves in a way that does not make it evident to the victims. This is important as it establishes the abuse as an intentional breach of trust, which in relation to murder would be termed premeditated. The reporters meet with different survivor victims of the sexual abuse to find out the evolution of the abuse in their cases as well as find out that the abuse has affected their lives specifically. Garabedian arranges for Michael to meet with one of the clients that he represents to interview him. He asks how old he was when it started happening to which Michael says “I was twelve. It was just after my father killed himself.” This age is pivotal as it is the end of adolescence and near the beginning of teenage years when children are at their most vulnerable and susceptible to influences. Boys were chosen around this age due to their vulnerability and lack of self-understanding. In addition, boys were often chosen because of their familial status as they were generally seeking someone to fulfill a fatherly role if that was missing. The priests took advantage of that need and targeted them as not only would they be more likely to want the priests in their lives, but they would be less likely to tell their family what was happening as they tended to be emotionally
closed off due to deaths or familial tragedy. The theme of the priests choosing wounded and hurting boys because of their susceptibility and need for a male figure in their lives is a constant and another clearly premeditated and intentional element. He explains that his father “was a real piece of shit and my mom, she wasn’t so stable either.” This made him vulnerable to the advances of something he thought could provide support and stability outside of the home. When Michael asks when he first met Geoghan he replies that when he and his sister were at Dunkin’ Donuts that his sister “tells him [Geoghan] about my old man passing and he rushed right over.” Geoghan has just been informed of a boy who meets his criteria and is in need so he takes advantage of that and goes right over to him in a way. The film then cuts to a similar interview taking place between the reporter Sacha and another victim who answer the same question posed by Michael but was clearly asked by Sacha. The film uses this cut here and in other places to emphasize the similarities between their stories. The victim nervously discloses what happens to him in saying that he invited him back to his apartment and continued to describe the encounter with “well, he was very nice at first. He was very funny, very casual. And I think he could tell I was gay, so he showed me this mobile he had. Like over a baby’s crib, but with different words. Homosexual, transsexual, bisexual.” Sacha asks, “did you know you were gay at that time Joe?” He replies with “yeah, but that wasn’t information I was sharing with anybody.” She asks what happened next and he replied “well I was a little freaked out. I think he could tell so he said, ‘you know what would help was if we played strip poker.’ ‘Course I lost. And things went on from there.” She asks for specifics to which he responds, “specifically, he molested me.” He continues as she presses for details of the molestation. But his description up until this continues to reveal the intentional nature of these crimes. Not only was it to satisfy the sexual needs of the priest, but it was to impose dominance at the expense of a young boy and it was very intentional as boys were targeted because of having troubled home lives or because they were struggling with their sexual identities which the priests picked up on and exploited for sexual game. This is biopolitical because when the intentions are shown and proven to be so intentional and in order to make live the sexual lives of the priests in order to let die the spirituality and often sexuality of the victims. In Leon O Giollain’s review of Marie Keenan’s article regarding the sexual abuse of children by the catholic church he explains he article says “that clerical sexual abuse arose out of a culture of repression and compliance that continues to prevail and, in her view, to pervade, the whole (ecclesiastical) ‘system’. ‘Power and submission’ is the paradigm in which she situates motivation- the motivation of those in authority, the motivation of those who engaged in deviant sexual behavior, the motivation of those others who
are perceived to have rigidly and repressively conformed” (O Giollain 99). This explains in a biopolitical context that the system to which the priests and catholic church belong to is the one that created the sexual needs that the priests are disgustingly seeking to fulfill. It is the system that created the problem by requiring celibacy and in seeking to make live their sexual needs takes about the purity and celibacy of the boys in question. The research regarding whether celibacy is a direct correlation to sexual abuse is varied and controversial as some agree while others do not. Whether or not celibacy specifically is a direct link to the sexual abuse becomes irrelevant because what is crucial is that because of the large number of priests that Spotlight reported taking part in this with more than eighty priests in this specific religion alone, it is clear that not only did something in the system created the need but that the system also maintains the need by a lack of consequences and enabled continuation through self-regulation rather than allowing secular law to punish and intervene.

The film is an incredibly important as it is constructed in way that reveals very clearly the agency and role that each level of the system portrayed in allowing it to happen or enabling it to continue because of turning a blind eye. It is based on a true story and stays close to a historical accurate narrative as to how the events took place and their impact upon the community. In response, the catholic church had mixed review, but Father Peter Daly said in the National Catholic Reporter that is “was a tragedy brought on by sins of priests and bishops. The damage is not yet finished and the perpetrators of these crimes have never been held fully accountable” (Daly). This perfectly sums up the consequences of the actions of such a powerful and continually self-regulated system and how biopolitics and necropolitics. Because of the nature of their self-regulation, it is not possible to know the extent to which this abuse continues today. By Spotlight exposing the system, it also makes it easier for the system to continue because they are able to see the flaws within it and to adapt. They stated before in the film that an article was done about the abuse which was “buried” through church intervention and eventual focus on another story. By writing a story of this magnitude that sensationalized the abuse, it created a false sense of punishment and accountability that seemingly appeased the audiences of the story and served as a trial by public opinion. Unfortunately, unlike secular law, public opinion is much more forgiving when a large portion of the population spiritually depends on the system. The movie as well as the article that it portrays shows how biopolitics and necropolitics continue to thrive even despite efforts to destroy it. When every aspect of the society contributes to and is a part of the machine, the machine will just continue to improve upon itself to make it stronger. The machine will continue to live while others will continue to die at its expense.
Where Biopolitics Meets Necropolitics: Sexual Abuse of Boys by Priests

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Bio-Power and Sexuality in Margaret Atwood’s 
*The Handmaid’s Tale* and Octavia Butler’s 
“Bloodchild”

By Michelle Marlow

The complete takeover or dominance of a society in order to satisfy the dominant group’s needs can be referred to as totalitarianism. They offer their ‘help’ so that the needing group are tricked into believing that they are really receiving aid of some kind. The situation turns out to be a form of human enslavement, in which the needing group are used to fulfill the need’s and wants of the dominant group in power. There are two stories that perfectly illustrate such examples: Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Octavia Butler’s “Bloodchild.” Atwood’s novel illustrates a society fixated on life and reproduction; the protagonist, Offred, is one of the several ‘handmaids’ who are confined to a prison-like compound in order to be available for periodic sexual intercourse with the “Commanders of the Faith,” and the “church-state regime,” called [the Republic of] Gilead, condones such practices in order to ‘solve’ the fertility problem of the human race. Their names are even stripped from them: Offred, in reference to ‘off-red, ‘afraid,’ or ‘offered’ foreshadows rebellion (Ketterer). Instead of viewing women as equal members of society, this colony dehumanizes them by assigning them to single roles (such as handmaids or Martha’s), to dictate and identify their purpose: this essentially reduces their purpose in life to reproduction (Neuman). According to Michael Foucault’s The History of Sexuality, this power over life had evolved into two basic forms: “the second, formed somewhat later, focused on the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological process . . . births and mortality . . . Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population” (Foucault 139). Butler’s “Bloodchild” has an identical form of control, but with a differing dominant species and sexual identity: the protagonist in this short story is a male, Gan, while the dominant character is a female alien, T’Gatoi. Gan and a larger group of humans need to escape from antagonism on Earth, and so they end up on a planet in which their progeny became valued property of the alien species (the T’lic). In Atwood’s novel, the women are the ones who are used to expand the population, whereas in Butler’s short story, it is the boys who become the bearers of the alien babies. By reading both of these pieces through a Foucault lens, I argue that *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Bloodchild* show how the government controls
its citizens by maintaining power over sexuality and reproduction and the consequences to follow from that authority.

Through control of sexuality, the state gains power over the people, due to the effect sex has on an individual, from behavior to pleasure. For humans, it is only a natural response to desire sexual pleasure. According to an article by Amanda Gardner on health.com, “it make us feel good. That is why we want it, like it, and spend so much time hunting for mates. The pleasure we get from sex is largely due to the release of dopamine . . . it’s like a drug” (Gardner). Addictive substances overpower the human brain, and once we have it, we cannot seem to get enough of it. Sex is a drug for us; it’s addictive, and we always want more. Sexual pleasure gives us this euphoric feeling that completely takes over our bodies and makes us feel as if we are the ones in power, the ones with all of the control.

Sex is a power weapon, and when the Commanders in Gilead realized that they could control the whole community by baiting its citizens with a sexual lure, they grabbed ahold of it. Their rise to power stems from a decline in fertility rates (due to pollution and chemical spills); they instilled in the women that they only had one specific purpose in life, and that was to repopulate the nation. Gilead knew that the citizens had taken the bait, and “there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques of achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of ‘bio-power’” (Foucault 140). Sex is one of the few things that the citizens could control themselves, and when Gilead took that away from them, they felt powerless. The women especially maintained their culture through cruelty to one another, and by their lack of solidarity, Gilead’s dominance stems (Callaway). How could they enjoy and have control over something that was supposed to feel natural to them?

The prevalence of pornography and rape in the pre-Gilead world (as seen in Offred’s flashback) shows that the founders felt justified in their establishment of the new order. This attempted well-kept secret of pornography in Gilead returned what little power the people could have. If sex became something that they couldn’t control themselves, it was no longer enjoyable for them. The Commander, for example, frequented the brothel (where the ‘forbidden’ women stayed) so that he may experience pleasure from sex. For humans, we want sex to be an experience of pleasure and not something that is mandated or forced. If sex becomes something we are forced to participate in, it loses its meaning and purpose. When we are in control of our own sexual pleasure, only then will we feel enjoyment. Our pleasure derives not only from sexual stimulation, but also from a sense of control that we have over ourselves.

The Republic claims that women are better protected and safer in this world than they were in pre-Gilead: and although Gilead claims to be
repressing sexual violence, it is actually institutionalizing it. They say that women are better protected and safer in this world than they were in pre-Gilead: and although Gilead claims to be repressing sexual violence, it is actually institutionalizing it. We see this when the Commander takes Offred to Jezebel’s: a club filled with prostitutes that service the male leaders.

Furthermore, sexual violence is apparent in the center of the novel when, during the “Ceremony,” handmaids are compelled to have sexual intercourse with their commanders. For the Republic of Gilead, all decisions lead back to a desire to regulate the population; therefore, they use sex to reinforce their power. Offred is read a small section from the Bible, with the Commander and his wife present: this reading synthesizes institutionalized humiliation, objectification, and ownership of the women in Gilead (Callaway). This reading offers them a little more comfort as they begin to initiate into an act that contradicts what the bible really stands for, which is that sex stays between a man and a woman after marriage. Offred seems to consent to a degree because she does not see another way to escape, but she also does not want to willingly do something this degrading. Being forced to have sex with a man she is not interested in being with, nor is married to, strips away her femininity to the point where she begins to feel as nothing more than a sexual object to be used and tossed.

The power over life is also demonstrated in Bloodchild through the use of a dominant versus submissive species. The group of humans live on a protected preserve and are allowed to form human families, but “every family must give one son to the Tlic” (Helford). This relationship to the Tlic is euphemistically called the joining of families (Weinbaum). The relationship could be compared to a marriage, in which both parties receive benefits from the government and each other through the relationship. Marriage is commonly referred to as ‘the joining of two families,’ and in it, each family receives ‘better benefits’ than they would if they were single. An alien female is assigned to each human family, and while the humans are allowed to have sexual relationships amongst each other, they must sacrifice a son if they are to have one. Using the word ‘sacrifice’ here illustrates a more serious concern in this relationship: when the time comes for the human boy to ‘give birth’ to the alien larvae, there is a possibility that he can die in the process. The human boys are raised from birth with the knowledge that they will eventually have to carry and birth alien grubs. This image of a female impregnating the male complicates traditional sexual imagery (Helford). The joining or merging of the alien family with the human family is Butler’s way of illustrating a very strange marriage: they both benefit from it (the aliens get to reproduce and the humans receive protection from the aliens). It almost seems like some sort of exchange of goods scenario, except that one party is being ‘duped’ or tricked into receiving the better end of the deal.
Since Foucault believes that “sex is placed by power in a binary system,” he appears to over-look the intricacies in sex that result from this power. Men with important government positions do not feel as though they need to ask for permission to engage in sexual activities: they carry a demeanor that radiates arrogance. The Commander, for example, feels a strong desire to have sex with Offred outside of the weird sex triangle because it is something that is forced upon him. Oddly enough, the one that enforces the new rules of Gilead does not seem to agree with them fully. The Commander takes her to the brothel to pay for sex with prostitutes, all the while trying to justify why he is doing it. He says that “everyone’s human after all . . . you can’t cheat nature. Nature demands variety for men. It stands to reason, it’s part of the procreative strategy” (The Handmaid’s Tale). He is careful to add that it is only for men that nature demands variety because he wants to exclude women from sexual exploration. In this instance, sex becomes binary: a system that is divided between men and women, but allows the men to hold a higher power over the women.

Just like the Commander, T’Gatoi also holds power in the Preserve. In Atwood’s story and Butler’s, these two figures are central to the development of the government: they are both the procreators. The Commander and T’Gatoi are responsible for repopulating their houses. T’Gatoi is the “government official in charge of the Preserve, and thus the most important of her kind [. . . ]” (Butler 3). T’Gatoi’s people wanted more humans to be readily available, and “Only she and her political faction stood between us and the hordes who did not understand why there was a Preserve [. . . ] Or they did understand, but in their desperation, they did not care. She parcelled us out to the desperate and sold us to the rich and powerful for their political support. Thus, we were necessities, status symbols, and an independent people” (Butler 5). T’Gatoi wants Gan to believe that she and the other aliens are there to protect the humans and keep them safe, to be protectors for them, but in truth Gan and the other humans are trading one form of slavery (on Earth) for another.

Suicide is sadly, one of the few ways that the people of Gilead can escape from the power of their government. Foucault says that suicide has become “one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis; it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die . . . was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life” (Foucault 138-139). While suicide is not the most pleasant of topics to discuss, it makes one wonder if it is really a choice or if it was forced onto the individual. Here is a theory: the government takes majority or complete control of life and government. Therefore, your life no longer has a higher purpose.
or meaning. The high-power officials, by means of controlling sexual pleasure, pre-determine who stays and who goes. What if, in their minds, they know full-well that what they are doing is wrong and will drive people to insanity? What if they know that the only way for their people to ‘leave’ their control is through suicide? This seems to be what Foucault is trying to explain. He says that the political power determined that suicide was the people’s determination to die: when they realize that they have no way out, they instinctively react to suicide. Gilead recognizes this reality, so before the handmaids move into their new homes, they remove all of the sharp or ‘damaging’ objects, such as mirrors, ceiling fans, and anything that can be tied around the neck for strangulation. If the government knows that people will voluntarily kill themselves in order to escape, the only way that they can regain control is to take over the reproduction sphere.

Suicide is a particularly interesting topic to note in Atwood’s novel for two reasons: first, it destroys life in a society that focuses on administering and maintaining life, so it is going against what that culture deemed most important. Second, committing suicide takes away power over life from the Republic and gives it back to the people. The Commander is hesitant about telling Offred of the last handmaid (who hung herself), so as not to give her any ideas on how to go through with it. Offred notices that The Commander has taken extreme measures to prevent her from doing this: there is no chandelier in her room, no glass on the picture frame, nothing for her to tie a rope to. This seems to be a major problem for Gilead, because it seems that the ones who are at a higher risk for suicide are the handmaids, and they are also the final hope for repopulating the population. If the handmaids kill themselves, the loss of life is greater than just their own.

Just like the women in Gilead, the humans on the Preserve have no other option to escape the Tlic control, other than to kill themselves. Running away would prove to be useless, as they would be “running inside the Preserve. Running in a cage” (Butler 20). Gan sees this happening with his own mother in her refusal to consume the eggs T’Gatoi has offered the family. Gan recalls his father never refusing an egg before in his life, but his mother “seemed content to age before she had to,” and “unwillingly obedient, my mother took it from me and put it to her mouth. There were only a few drops left in the now-shrunken, elastic shell, but she squeezed them out, swallowed them, and after a few moments some of the lines of tension began to smooth from her face” (Butler 3-4). These eggs cause human life expectancy and vigor to increase, which explains why Gan’s mother refuses to eat anymore of her own free-will. She knows what will happen to Gan when he is ready to carry T’Gatoi’s grubs, and refuses to stay alive to watch her children suffer. Gan’s mother’s refusal bears witness to a form of resistance against the control of the Tlic.
Gan becomes fully aware of the effects of carrying T’Gatoi’s grubs, and like the handmaid’s in Atwood’s novel, he contemplates suicide himself. At first, he tells T’Gatoi to implant his sister with the eggs, a seemingly easy way out. After contemplating this, Gan realized that he did not want to sacrifice his own sister to that kind of pain, knowing that she raised him alongside with their human mother. Gan told T’Gatoi “Don’t do it to Hoa . . . do it to me,” while he slowly “lowered the gun from his throat and she leaned forward to take it” (Butler 26). Gan cares very deeply for his mother and his sister Hoa, and would not want to put either one of them through the process of carrying alien eggs in their bodies. No matter which option Gan chose, he was putting himself at risk of suicide: either the gun or carrying T’Gatoi’s babies could potentially kill him. To Gan, carrying and birthing alien eggs would give him a higher chance of survival: he wanted to be here for his family.

There are many references to birth, both real and metaphoric, in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and “Bloodchild.” When the United States was attacked by a dominant group, the Republic of Gilead was born. This imagery of rebirth assumes the idea of the new Republic as a child, a society that has to learn how to function again. The Preserve in “Bloodchild” depicts the humans as being reborn when they escape from Earth to find sanctuary amongst another species. Their old lives pass away on Earth and a new beginning is reborn on the Preserves, a ‘beginning of the end’ so to speak.

In a stereotypical scenario, the women are the ones who give birth, and the women of Gilead fit perfectly into that mold. The sexual roles that women and men play in this society have not changed as far as the man being more dominant than the women, but The Preserve does a complete turn around and gives the women control of the sexes. T’Gatoi is a female of a different species, and she given complete control of Gan and his family. Instead of her being the one to go through penetration and birth, it is Gan who takes her place. In a stereotypical scenario, males are the ones who are given control in almost every sphere, especially when it comes to sexual pleasures. By flipping this metaphorical card to the other side, Butler hands control over to a female species, while the males serve as submissive counterparts. Gan recalls very vividly the process of his implantation with T’Gatoi:

“I felt the familiar sting, narcotic, mildly pleasant. Then the blind probing of her ovipositor. The puncture was painless, easy. So easy going in . . . I held on to a pair of her limbs . . . Then I let go, moved inadvertently, and hurt her. She gave a low cry of pain and I expected to be caged at once within her limbs. When I wasn’t, I held on to her again, feeling oddly ashamed” (Butler 27).
The imagery used in Gan’s retelling of the implantation process shows the reader how dominant the Tlic aliens are and how they abuse their power to manipulate the humans into thinking that they are safe this way, better off even. Gan is very submissive in this part of the story. He knows what to expect from T’Gatoi implanting him, but he does so willingly. The sexual imagery used here gives the reader an in-depth look at the thoughts going through Gan’s mind during the whole process, and poses several questions: Is he doing this solely because he does trust T’Gatoi, or has he been tricked into believing that she will take care of him? When Gan ‘held on to a pair of her limbs,’ immediately he thought he would be punished by ‘being caged’ in her limbs. He felt guilty for hurting her, but T’Gatoi only let out a small cry of pain. She did not punish Gan as he thought she would, and he grabbed onto her again. A part of Gan trusts her enough to be able to connect even closer in this way, while another part of him has been deceived by the control exerted onto him by T’Gatoi and others on the Preserve.

Michael Foucault’s ideas throughout The History of Sexuality, Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale, and Octavia Butler’s “Bloodchild” “enables us to understand the importance assumed by sex as a political issue. It was the pivot of the two axes (the disciplines of the body and the regulation of populations) along which developed the entire political technology of life” (Foucault 145-146). Looking at all three of these works in one setting allows us to see the importance of sex in a society and the impact it has on authority of power.

The authority of power and sex, combined with the hunger for greater power, gives the Republic the will to control its subjects. Gan and the other humans on the Preserve willingly give up their freedoms for the supposed interest of a safer way of life. Both of these texts parallel each other because there is a crisis of reproduction in each one. Atwood’s novel illustrates a decline in fertility rates to justify the control of sexual reproduction, while Butler’s story shows us a group of people escaping certain death to a supposed ‘safer’ planet. Forcing people (such as Gan and Offred) into having sex is considered rape: a crime through which the dominant person seeks sexual gratification from someone who would otherwise refuse them. This sexual power is ultimately a kind of social power. This means that sex and sex appeal are merely conduits or means to achieve power or success in other spheres of life. Offred and Gan have no choice but to participate in these acts: they are forced into consenting to someone who they generally would have told no.

Both texts are set in the near future, foreshadowing to the reader a future that our reality could hold. As readers, we are aware of what our own government is doing to us. On top of using manipulation and money to control the everyday movements of our society, our government also uses
sex against us, though many are not aware of this. Almost any commercial on television that is selling a product depicts a woman whose skin is barely covered, which shows an attempt to manipulate both sexes to buy the advertised product. By creating sex symbols, who are sponsored and obedient to the American government (think Kim Kardashian), the world population is being controlled and has been for decades. Although these are minor instances in the face of sexual control, it can very well turn into one hundred percent dominance over our species. We as the reader realize that one day our country could become like the Republic of Gilead or the Preserve with Gan. By looking at *The Handmaid’s Tale* and “Bloodchild” through a Foucauldian lens, readers can see how bio-power impacts a society: Atwood and Butler both warn us of the horrible tragedies that can befall a nation if we hand over total control of life and sex to the State.

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The Effects of Biopolitics on the Feminist Spirit: An Analysis of “The Yellow Wallpaper”

By Maggie Dillard

IN 1892, CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN PUBLISHED “The Yellow Wallpaper”, a short story that, little did she know, would alter the history of feminism in drastic ways. In 1973, the story was published again in an anthology that was placed in countless textbooks, which gave it a wider audience, and more relevance to the fight for women’s rights that Gilman was pursuing through her writing. Now in 2017, women are still fighting for the rights over their own bodies. One of the first acts that President Donald Trump enforced when he was elected into office was a decision he made about women’s bodies. Federal funding for Planned Parenthood was taken away in a budget bill that also repealed the Affordable Care Act as an anti-abortion movement. Previously, Planned Parenthood received $553 million in government funding to provide services to patients on public programs like Medicaid, which provided services from cervical cancer screenings to STI testing, not even abortions. Judith Solomon, the vice president for health policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, states, “They would have to have alternative providers, and the question is, are there? That is why this is especially troubling in terms of Medicaid, and really undoing decades of work to ensure that low-income women have ready access to family planning” (Dias). Our country’s officials are taking matters into their own hands to decide what kind of medical treatments are available to women of lower incomes. Without having an alternative option for them, they make women’s health seem insignificant.

Women’s health is a key issue within Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” as she tells the story of a woman who is locked in a room and made to believe that she still obtains freedom even though it is clear that she does not. The treatment that she receives from her husband entirely mirrors the psychological trauma that women, during this time, were oppressed by, and the ways they were able to be controlled biopolitically within the patriarchal society they lived. The story went on to stir uneasy feelings within the male population of its readers because of the new revelations of truths that it revealed about the negative aspects of the micromanagement of women that had gone unrecognized by society for so many years. The issues that Gilman addresses throughout “The Yellow Wallpaper” can be seen even within the patriarchal society today as women are still fighting for female independence. Charlotte Perkins Gilman utilizes her voice in “The Yellow Wallpaper” to fight for feminist rights by exposing
how men’s biopolitical power and excessive regulations negatively affects the female population’s control over her own body.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman sought to bring to light the destructive effects of the rest cure as a treatment for postpartum depression, and question why male figures have authority over the female body. Gilman writes “The Yellow Wallpaper” to tell a story centered around a woman whose husband has secluded her in a house by herself for an entire summer in order to cure her postpartum depression. The woman’s husband in “The Yellow Wallpaper” also plays the role of her doctor, and he is able to control her actions by making her feel as if he is only interested in making her healthy again. He attempts to put the “sick” woman on a rest cure. The rest cure was originally developed by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell for soldiers after the end of the Civil War, and was slowly applied to women, as Dr. Mitchell believed that women’s “inappropriate displays of feeling” and expressions of emotion made them predisposed for nervous disorders. Heather R. Willis writes, “At this time, Dr. Mitchell and others considered a woman’s body inferior to a man’s. This theory was supported mainly on a belief that a woman’s reproductive organs “-dominated” her nervous system, making her more susceptible to diseases and mental illness.” The physicians of the day believed that intellectual activities triggered the nervous system and attributed to real health problems for women, and the women were taught through different treatments to suppress emotions and “acknowledge the paternal authority of the doctor” (Willis). Willis continues, “She was taught through this process that she did not and could not know what was best for her. However, for some women, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, these treatments did not help in the slightest. The constant rest, inability to read or work, and the repression of their ideas literally drove them insane.” Having to submit to the word of a male doctor, who cannot possibly understand the female mind, pushed these women, including Gilman, to feel the costs of the suppression of their real feelings and the lack of control over what is really best for the woman herself.

As for the woman in Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” it is eventually her inability to govern her own life that ends up causing her more harm. In Carol A. Whitehurst’s work, readers discover that through research and multiple studies, psychological oppression has been found to be an actual condition that can develop in women. Whitehurst states that this condition is “a woman’s conviction that there are many things which she cannot and/or should not attempt to do, simply because she is incapable, by virtue of being a woman.” Limiting the capabilities of the woman simply because she is a woman, or in an attempt to heal her, actually causes damage to her psyche, and eventually results in the development of a physically destructing psychological oppression. Whitehurst continues, “Psychological oppression
is created in women when they learn to see themselves as limited beings, incapable of many activities, particularly societally important activities involving power, decision making, and leadership” (119). Psychological oppression begins when a woman feels like her abilities are limited and that she is incapable of making decisions for herself. Whitehurst also furthers her analysis by stating that psychological oppression then worsens when that woman starts to feel “caged, being kept on a leash, being limited and stunted” (119). She proceeds with saying that these feelings are “manifested in boredom, frustration”, etc… (120). The woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is prohibited from doing anything, including writing, which is something she loves to do. Her husband keeps her locked up and banned from leaving. Like all women, she has a desire to do things on her own and feel a sense of accomplishment from doing a task well. At one point, she says, “…and [I] am absolutely forbidden to ‘work’ again until I am well again” (Gilman 3). She knows that allowing her mind to work in some way will help prevent her from actually becoming sick, as her husband believes she already is. His treatment of her is biopolitical because he punishes her in an attempt to optimize her health. He continues prying into her space, ordering her to stop writing, and attempting to biopolitically control her every move because of the validation he has due to the fact that he is a doctor, which gives him more agency over her.

Michael Foucault, philosopher and social theorist, was the first to discuss biopolitics around the time that he published his book Discipline and Punish, which discussed the “docile bodies” of women, and he argued that women and men’s bodies did not differ. Sandra Lee Bartky writes,

But Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the “docile bodies” of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men?... [Foucault] is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine (27).

Foucault’s writing of “docile bodies” in Discipline and Punish treated male and female bodies as if it were one. But, he does not account for how male doctors believe that they have a right to diagnose women based on knowledge that they proclaim to have without ever having experienced the differences in women and men’s bodies. After the woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” understands the limitations that her doctor husband is attempting to place upon her to make her better, she says, “Personally, I
disagree… Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good” (Gilman 5). Because of the sheer fact that men can never really know what women want because they have not experienced what it is like to be in a woman’s body, women should have the right to express themselves in the midst of a mental struggle or illness. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the woman’s husband does not know of the internal issues that are at stake for her health.

During the time period that Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper,” women were controlled by the males in their lives. The woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” accepts the diagnoses from her husband and agrees to the rest cure treatment because she felt she had no choice but to comply. Because this subordinate behavior to male figures was such a standard for women, it also became a quality of the female identity. Monique Deveaux states, “Women internalize the feminine ideal so profoundly that they lack the critical distance necessary to contest it and are even fearful of the consequences of “noncompliance,” and ideals of femininity are so powerful that to reject their supporting practices is to reject one’s own identity” (Deveaux 226). Therefore, women adopt the feminine ideal so much that they are unable to distance themselves from it without feeling fearful of consequences, and that rejecting it may also mean rejection of their own identity. Refusing to submit to the decisions of a husband or male authoritative figure, such as a doctor, was equal to rejecting femininity. The woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” believed that she had no choice because it was her duty as a woman in a patriarchal society to listen and obey what her husband told her, no matter the affects it might have on her. Because of the control that her husband was given over her due to the fact that he was also her doctor, he was able to form dominance over her. This is also biopolitical because he was able manipulate her into believing that he was only doing what was best for her medically. This fully explains the psychological issues that she has formed while in “captivity”, and why her end result should not shock the reader. The man’s actions and treatment toward the woman are what drive her to act out in the way that she does in the end.

The illness that impacts the life of the woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is postpartum depression that is a result of the expectation that is given to her to bear children and sacrifice all of her time to care for her family. The role of women in the household is not only to submit to the husband’s wishes, but also to give of her time to her husband and children. Rosalyn Diprose writes, “women give birth and consequentially, women, at least traditionally, are expected to give the time to others necessary…” (79). Just as serving her husband is part of the feminine identity, the expectation of childbirth is also part of traditional womanhood. The act of childbirth is exhausting and sacrificial; therefore, feeling as if it is something she is forced
to do when she does not feel ready or capable enough results in the psychological issues that come with postpartum depression. Diprose continues, “without ‘reproductive choice’ for women, the giving and hospitality upon which the expression of uniqueness depends would be meaningless” (79). The micromanagement of the patriarchal society that strips her of her right to choose what her body undergoes and what type of treatment her body receives inevitably causes the psychological oppression that develops when she feels incapable of controlling her own body. Expecting that she give of her body to reproduction and sacrifice her time to the care of the child without having the support reciprocated is what negatively influences how she feels within the household, and “it is also in such times that biopolitics and government of ‘life’ in the ‘home’ is intensified” (Diprose 80). In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” it is clear that the woman was and is still being micromanaged by her husband’s treatment of her as he manipulates how her illness is treated. His influence over her is an example of what Diprose says is when “the ‘home’ too falls prey to totalizing micromanagement through an intensification of biopolitics” (81). Her husband biopolitically treats her in a way that interferes with her every move, while continuing to force her to submit to societal expectations of what her feminine identity entails without her awareness that his control over her is the source of her psychological stress and lack of agency.

The amount of control that the men had over women during the time when Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” was significantly more prohibiting and limiting than it even is today. The effects of the patriarchal rule over the life of the woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” caused her to experience mental issues due to the oppression of her normal feelings and emotions because of her inability to express herself in normal ways as her husband’s way of treating her health problems. Carol A. Whitehurst also writes, “psychological oppression exists when a woman has internalized her oppression. […] Creating a sense of inferiority and incompetence within a person is far more effective than any external controls, in the form of rules, laws, and restrictive norms, could ever be” (120). She feels as if she must internalize these feelings instead of being able to release them. The woman is forced to oppress her feelings because she doesn’t even feel as if she can trust her journal because she never knows when her husband might gain access to read it. He begins biopolitically controlling her through her lack of privacy, as he continuously invades her space without warning through the means of her journal, which is a space she thought was secretive and safe. The woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” felt forced to suppress her feelings, her freedoms, and her voice, which resulted in her psychotic behaviors. However, she does explain in her journal that her husband’s actions towards her cultivate deceit and that she is starting to become afraid of him. When
a woman feels threatened to suppress her natural rights as a human being, she is then forced to allow the patriarchal system to maintain rule over her life. When in reality, it is those drives of hate towards his domineering behavior that should empower her to fight for her rights as a woman.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman broke barriers with “The Yellow Wallpaper” by using her story to expose many of the ways in which the male patriarchy’s control over women destructively affects them. The men of the time had kept the unfair treatment of women by the patriarchal culture completely hidden away in their unconscious as a way of refusing to believe that their micromanagement of women had any kind of negative influence on them. Janice Haney-Peritz works to explain how “The Yellow Wallpaper” differed from the usual texts of its time and is still used today to “remind contemporary readers of the enduring import of the feminist struggle against patriarchal domination” (114). Because “The Yellow Wallpaper” sought to shed light on the struggle of the women of its time, it was chilling to its male audience as it is said to be “one of the rare pieces of literature we have by a nineteenth-century woman which directly confronts the sexual politics of the male-female, husband-wife relationship” (Haney-Peritz 114). During this time period, women were not being treated fairly by their husbands, but their oppression and submissiveness was a quality of their identity, and not something they felt as if they could change. Men grew to accept that this type of treatment of women was normal. Therefore, when “The Yellow Wallpaper” blamed this management of women as the cause of the woman’s psychotic behavior within the story, male readers were frightened because their oppression of women was finally revealed.

Gilman used “The Yellow Wallpaper” to raise awareness about the critical results of not allowing a woman to have a voice of her own. The woman in the story notes many times what she might have said to her husband but did not say because she did not feel as if her voice mattered. Haney-Peritz writes that these instances within the story “can be read as the places where the narrator might have contradicted John’s prescriptions, if only the woman had a voice to do so” (117). The woman in the story often refers to her lack of voice in her writing as the “unsaid”, and at this point, seems to be “what matters most” in the fight against her husband. Although she knows that her husband has access to read what she writes, the woman confides in her journal, and uses it to say what she wishes she could have said to him directly. She knows that she does not have a voice in their discourses, but she also knows that her opinions and ideas should matter. Her oppressed feelings are finally released within her journal, and she realizes that she must find a way to free herself.

The woman’s oppression becomes a psychological issue, and she begins seeing herself as a shadow-woman locked in the yellow wallpaper that
adorns the walls of the room. Gilman writes that she says, “Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one… and she is trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so” (22). She views herself as the woman who is trying to escape the wallpaper that is holding her hostage, just as her husband and the patriarchal society that she lives is suffocating her feminine identity. However, through the oppression that she is finally able to express in her journal, she realizes that she is capable of freeing herself. Haney-Peritz writes, “Now the woman who had earlier wondered what one was to do when caught in a contradictory situation knows exactly what she must do: she must free the shadow-woman from the paper-pattern that bars her full self-realization and through identification, bind that woman to herself” (119-120). She rips the paper from the wall all around the room in an effort to free the shadow-woman, which has become a part of her. She says to her husband, “I’ve got out at last…in spite of you…and I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (Gilman 27). As the wallpaper was a representation of the part of her that was defined by the subordinate aspect of her feminine character, she strips that part of her identity away and proclaims that she will not be a victim of that type of treatment any longer. She finally frees herself from the stereotypes that John and society, as a whole, had placed on her.

Gilman proclaimed within “The Yellow Wallpaper” that when a male dominant figure uses isolating forms of treatment to cure a woman, it is not her illness that drives her to insanity; it is the patriarchal culture’s socialization of her that makes her ill. The woman in the story was placed, against her will, in a room that was not her own, in an unfamiliar environment with restricted rights and privileges, and expectations of learning how to submit to her husband in a way that follows the traditional forms of subservient womanhood. It was not that she was psychotic, but it was the conditions that surrounded her that pushed her to act in a psychotic manner that ultimately concluded with her finding freedom within herself. However, Haney-Peritz states that a woman could only imagine that she had found herself; but until social life conditions are radically changed, there would be no ‘real’ way out (124). Even in today’s society, because this patriarchal control continues to dominate the choices that women make about their own bodies, women are still constantly struggling to battle this same type of male supremacy. Until women have total control over what happens to their bodies, the issues revealed within the life of the woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” will continue to present themselves in our culture.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman took a step out of her comfort zone, and out of the realm of women’s power to construct a story that revealed how dangerous the control of the patriarchal society is on the female body. “The
The Effects of Biopolitics on the Feminist Spirit

Yellow Wallpaper” brought to life many themes that give it the relevance and credibility that it still has in this day and age. Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett wrote an article that featured an image of President Donald Trump signing away the reproductive rights of women (see fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Reince Priebus, Peter Navarro, Jared Kushner, Stephen Miller and Steve Bannon watch as Donald Trump signs the executive orders in the Oval Office (Vucci).

If there is a woman in the room, she is not included in the photograph alongside the men. Coslett writes, “This photograph is what patriarchy looks like – a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded. Nothing quite says powerlessness like the removal of your right to bodily autonomy, at the behest of a group of people who will never – can never – know what that feels like” (Coslett). If stripping the funding of Planned Parenthood is their way of fighting against abortion, their fight is not effective. Instead, the message they portray is the small-minded view that women are still expected to be subordinate and obedient to male’s control over their bodies. This biopolitical control that men exhibit towards women makes them feel powerless and unable to regulate what even happens to their own bodies. This puts women at a higher risk of psychological oppression like that of the woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” The method these governing officials are using to make a point about their own beliefs and opinions puts women’s health in jeopardy. It is unjust for men to be given such power over the woman’s body and body parts that they do not share. Gilman displayed tremendous fearlessness when proclaiming that women should be treated just as equal as men, explaining how the patriarchal society biopolitically controls the mind and body of women by putting limitations on their abilities to reign over their own bodies and actions, and how this type of restraint on women
can drive them to perform psychotically. She uses the issues of “The Yellow Wallpaper” to force her male audience to consider why women do not have rights over their own bodies. She gives the story enough significance to effectively reveal the destructive ways that the patriarchal system can influence women when given total power over them. Gilman understood why it is important for women of all ages and backgrounds to use their voices to fight for the rights of women, as feminism truly is a war that women should never stop fighting for.

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LOCAL & GLOBAL (BIO)POLICY
Syria and Homo Sacer: The State of American Exceptionalism
By Jordan West

AMERICA’S POST- 9/11 ROLE in the world has been characterized by extra-judicial involvement in foreign conflicts, as well as direct involvement by American forces in regime changes of countries in the Arab speaking world. Much of the 21st century thus far has seen U.S. Presidential administrations operating outside of international judicial precedence in a preemptive effort to thwart the possibility of another attack on American soil. The presidency of George W. Bush was defined by the attack on the World Trade Centers in New York and the response of the office of the President as well as Congress. In the seven years that followed, war waged in Afghanistan and an invasion of Iraq succeeded in ousting the Taliban regime as well as the regime of Saddam Hussein, respectively. The election of Barack Obama to the office of President in 2008 ushered in a new series of armed conflicts in Libya, continued occupation of Afghanistan, and a drawdown of U.S. military presence in Iraq followed by a resurgence of military troops to prevent sectarian violence within the ethnically fractured nation. Much of American foreign policy towards the Arab Muslim world post-9/11 centers on countering the seemingly ever-present threat of “radical Islamic terrorism.”

The presidential campaign of Donald Trump made the American response to the global “war on terror” a central focus of his quasi-populist platform. Donald Trump’s subsequent election as 45th president of the United States signaled a fundamental shift of American sentiment towards Muslims abroad and at home. Just as the attack on the World Trade Center and invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan defined the presidency of George W. Bush, the conflict in Libya and the response of President Barack Obama to the Arab Spring defined his presidency, the defining conflict in the middle east for the presidency of Donald Trump may very well be the ongoing civil war in Syria and his administration’s response to the rising humanitarian crisis taking place there.

President Trump’s populist campaign defined its agenda as an “American First” policy toward issues concerning foreign trade, military involvement in foreign conflicts, as well as immigration. The “America First” ideology is a reformation of the concept of “American exceptionalism” and has consequences specific to America’s involvement in the ongoing conflict in Syria. Granting refugee status to Syrian civilians fleeing war is a point of contention for the current administration. The executive order issued by President Trump in January 2017 explicitly states the administration’s view that Syrian civilians...
could be dangerous and cannot be granted a residential status in the U.S. The current Presidential administration’s torch-carrying of American exceptionalism as a matter of general policy seems counterintuitive to its refugee policy. Furthermore, the subsequent reaction to the refugee plight faced by Syrian citizens invokes a continuance of a “state of exception” and reduces Syrian refugees to a state of “homo sacer” with no protection under law.

Effort has been made over the past decade to understand the current state of American domestic and foreign policy, as well as America’s role in the global security apparatus through the theoretical lens of biopolitics. The focus of this article will be to analyze the current administration’s reactions in response to the Syrian refugee crisis through the writings of Giorgio Agamben as they apply to the ideas of “homo sacer” and the “state of exception,” by framing this phenomenon in the historical context of “American exceptionalism.” The ongoing civil war in Syria and the American response to an influx of refugees provides a new and multifaceted instance to consider the biopolitical implications of America’s role in an increasingly globalized world. The “America First” approach of the current administration frames the ban on Syrian refugees as a necessary action taken to secure the American population. The executive order does not consider or address the practical consequences it creates for Syrians fleeing violence with nowhere else to escape. Understanding the executive order as a biopolitical mechanism shows the inherent hypocrisy of a nation’s policy that espouses its own exceptionalism as a paragon of freedom and justice maintained at the expense of innocent human lives.

The Syrian civil war has been raging since March of 2011. The populist uprising against the regime of Bashar al Assad began as peaceful protests responding to the arrest of a bus full of school children. The protests quickly devolved into a full scale civil war pitting various armed groups against the regime and one another. The resulting turmoil demanded a U.S. response to rising violence perpetrated by the insurgency of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, now known simply as The Islamic State (IS). The chaos and barbarity inflicted on, and by, the various armed groups to establish themselves as the ruling interest in Syria has resulted in the internal displacement of 6.3 million Syrians, as well as 4.3 million Syrians seeking asylum in neighboring countries and abroad, and 13.5 million Syrian persons in need of humanitarian assistance (Humud, Blanchard, & Nikitin 14). Through understanding these ideas biopolitically as they relate to one another, and therefore, as part of the global biopolitical system and conversation, we can begin to understand the future implications of “American exceptionalism” in the “war on terror” for the people most at risk in the resulting chaos and violence: refugees and civilians caught in the crossfire.

The “war on terror” has its conceptual roots in the ideology of American exceptionalism. The term “American exceptionalism” was coined in 1831
by Alexis de Toqueville to explain American political values and attitudes. Toqueville believed American exceptionalism arose as a consequence of its unique historical evolution as a country, its national commitment to values such as liberty, individualism, and populism, and its tendency of making moralistic judgements of other sovereign domestic systems (Koh 1481). In Harold Hongju Koh’s essay *On American Exceptionalism*, Koh quotes historian Margaret MacMillan as saying: “Faith in their own exceptionalism has sometimes led to a certain obtuseness on the part of Americans, a tendency to preach at other nations rather than listen to them, a tendency as well to assume that American motives are pure where those of others are not” (Koh 1480). This “obtuseness” applies to various interactions with foreign nations on the part of America such as the non-ratification of several international human rights treaties while still maintaining compliance. Koh sees this tendency of compliance without ratification as a way to maintain a sense of political freedom while simultaneously maintaining the position of the moral high ground (Koh 1485). The United States’ sense of exceptionalism assumes it is recognized globally as a bastion of freedom from tyranny, the single most powerful and influential nation in the world, and being above reproach from the international community. This sense of freedom from reproach by the global community not only encompasses the United States’ approach to the ratification of treaties, but also extends to its general conduct in the globalized world. While institutions in the U.S. government would espouse the tenants and spirit of global humanitarian efforts and point to themselves as ideal contributors to that effort, their refusal to adhere to the same standards of the global humanitarian efforts taking place reveal the practical effects of American exceptionalism.

Evidence of American exceptionalism presents itself in the humanitarian actions carried out in the Syrian conflict. Humanitarian action in terms of dollars contributed to funds allocated to Syria include the U.S. as the single largest donor to United Nations’ humanitarian funds. To date, the U.S. has contributed “more than $5.9 billion dollars” to the aid endeavor in Syria. This money comes from funds already established to aid countries in the Middle East, as well as funds “reprogrammed” from other aid endeavors around the world (Humud, Blanchard, & Nikitin 14). The Obama administration’s acceptance of 12,623 Syrian refugees as of October 2016, seemed to signal a turning point in American policy towards the acceptance of Syrian refugees; however, the realization that other U.N. countries have accepted millions of refugees since the start of the Syrian civil war reveals the continuance of American exceptionalism’s prevalence in international humanitarian actions (Bruno 2). The international agreement between U.N. member nations, although not explicit, suggests equal parts humanitarian funding as well as the provision of sanctuary for Syrian civilians caught in
the rubble of a collapsing country. On one hand, American humanitarian policy and intervention indicates that America wants to protect Syrian civilians from Assad and Jihadist organizations through military support, yet on the other hand, does not want to provide refugee status to the very same civilians it “protects” through assistance in Syria, in America.

Within President Trump’s first 100 days in office the Congressional Research Service release an updated report outlining the progress of the Syrian conflict and the status of American involvement therein. Two weeks after the release of the report, President Trump enacted Executive Order 13769, banning the immigration of people from 6 majority Muslim nations for at least 90 days, and immigration from Syria indefinitely in response to the terrorist attacks carried out in San Bernardino, CA, The Pulse Night-club in Orlando, FL, as well as attacks in France and Germany carried out by Muslim immigrants; granted, the perpetrators of these attacks were not Syrian refugees. The consequence of banning Syrian refugees specifically, though Syrian civilians were not perpetrators in these attacks, seems to create a perception that the executive order was not issued as a response to recent attacks, but on the contrary, the attacks were used within the political conversation to justify a ban of the Syrian Muslim other. The enactment of any executive order and action carried out by the President without the prior approval of Congress serves as an instance of the office of the Presidency operating within the Agamben concept of the “state of exception.” The state of exception is an action of the sovereign in a given nation suspending the rule of law as a provision of the law itself. In other words, the law gives the sovereign, or in this case the President, the ability to suspend law in times of emergency or in response to a catastrophe in order to ultimately protect the rule of law and the polis the sovereign governs. Such has been the case in the American political system since the declaration of the “war on terror” over a decade ago. The term “armed conflict” gained favoritism in place of the traditional war as involvement in armed conflict does not require the approval of Congress or the passing of a resolution to enter. As such, the executive order has also become a favored vehicle for the enacting of law outside the traditional process of congressional approval and public consensus in this state of exception.

The travel ban for Syrian refugees falls into the category of state of exception both by being the result of an executive order as well as being, in effect, a “ban.” In Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and the Bare Life*, Agamben says:

> The relation of exception is the relation of ban. He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened
on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order. (Agamben 28-29)

According to Agamben, a person considered homo sacer exists outside of the law, and as result is constantly existing in a state of exception. In understanding the relation of the banned Syrian refugee to the executive order in Agambian terms, Syrians banned by the executive order no longer fall within the protection of the law. As a result, the banned Syrian is made bare-life. Excluding Syrian refugees from the political system, and therefore a political life, reduces them to a state of bare-life. Without the status granted by inclusion within the law, Syrians’ exclusion guarantees them no right to life. This reductivism enacted by President Trump’s order recreates the banned Syrian into the form of homo sacer.

The title of the executive order makes clear its goal: “EXECUTIVE ORDER: PROTECTING THE NATION FROM FOREIGN TERRORIST ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES.” By titling this declaration as an effort to prevent, or ban, the entry of terrorists into the United States, and then making Syrian refugees the population most effected by its exclusionary policy, the conclusion left to be drawn is that Syrians are the ultimate embodiment of the terrorist identity. The executive order reads: “It is the policy of the United States to protect its citizens from foreign nationals who intend to commit terrorist attacks in the United States; and to prevent the admission of foreign nationals who intend to exploit United States immigration laws for malevolent purposes” (“Exec. Order No. 13769” 1). The order, in respect to Syrian refugees, states: “I hereby proclaim that the entry of nationals of Syria as refugees is detrimental to the interests of the United States and thus suspend any such entry until such time as I have determined that sufficient changes have been made to the USRAP [United States Refugee Admissions Program] to ensure that admission of Syrian refugees is consistent with the national interest” (“Exec. Order No. 13769” 2). “I hereby proclaim,” echoes the proclamations of old decrees establishing the voice of the sovereign as reigning body imbued with the power to take life as well as grant it. However, this order embodies the new formulation of biopower as the sovereign’s ability to make live or let die. By declaring that Syrian refugee admittance is not “consistent” with national interests because they pose a threat because they may “intend to commit terrorist attacks,” the executive order justifies the administration’s abandonment of otherwise defenseless population. If Syrian refugees are terrorists, then the executive order keeps terrorists out of America giving the illusory sense that a victory has been won thereby justifying the continuance of a state of exception.
Under the guise of securing the population of the nation and protecting it against foreign terrorism, the administration can manage the immigration of people its polis fears, reinforcing the othering of Muslim immigrants in American society. By establishing a system that excludes Syrian refugees as “consistent with the national interest,” the population within America that believes Syrians pose a threat to their security can feel emboldened and justified in their prejudice against, and othering of, Muslims. The “state of exception” therefore not only creates a situation in which this executive order targeted against a specific sub-set of the Muslim population is possible, but also creates the situation in which the reduction of Syrian refugees to a state of “homo sacer” is necessary to the safety of the American polis. The result is the continuation of the “state of exception” at the behest of the American population in the interest of their personal security, and as a result, in the interest of national security. However, the Syrian civilians fleeing war torn areas have not actually been the perpetrators of recent domestic or international attacks. The function the executive order serves is to pair a concrete identity to an ambiguous threat called “the terrorist.” The identity the executive order chooses as the identity of “the terrorist” is Syrian. If the executive order can marry these identities as such that one is synonymous to the other, the reduction of the Syrian refugee to homo sacer is justifiable and necessary.

The concept of homo sacer as it pertains to the “war on terror” has been written about extensively within biopolitical theory. Theorist Halit Mustafa Tagma wrote about the biopolitical concept of homo sacer as it applies to prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, by saying: “The body of a prisoner is likened to a body abandoned by the law that can be killed but not sacrificed - homo sacer” (Mustafa 14). By understanding that in essence the body abandoned by law is rendered homo sacer, the implication inherent in the relationship between the rule of law established by the executive order to the Syrian abandoned by the laws of their own country and the laws of a country such as the United States is a life regarded as able to be killed without impunity, but not sacrificed. The executive order also embodies American exceptionalism by refusing the responsibility of providing a place for refugees without addressing continuing U.S. involvement in the conflict the refugees are fleeing. The appropriate level of U.S. involvement in Syria is the focus of the Congressional Service Report, Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response, released on January 6th, 2017. In that report, meant to inform Congress as well as the President, the level of U.S. involvement and its impact both past and present in the ongoing conflict is described in terms of military action and humanitarian assistance. Despite the allocation and delivery of humanitarian aid, the report notes: “The negative effects of the humanitarian and regional security crises emanating
from Syria appear to be beyond the power of any single actor, including the United States...U.S. policymakers and their counterparts have appeared to feel both compelled to respond to these crises and cautious in considering potentially risky options” (Humud, Blanchard, & Nikitin 5).

The conflict in Syria is not as cut and dry as the invasion of Iraq where the United States acted with allies against the interests of the regime of Saddam Hussein. The conflict in Syria is made up various organizations vying against one another with various political allies investing money, military support, and aid to achieve a range of security solutions best suited to each party involved. Syria has become a quagmire of various proxy-wars being waged between Turkey and the Kurds, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the United States and Russia. Any possibility of a unilateral agreement is snuffed out by the very nature of the conflict itself. The role of the U.S. throughout the conflict has been one of provider of aid, as well as chief strategist of war for both the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as well as the Kurdish militias in their fight against both ISIS and the forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. As difficult as the Syrian civil war is to navigate, the future negative consequences are equally simple. The current presidential administration’s efforts to ban Syrian Muslims fleeing violence, famine, and death feed into the narratives created by the very Jihadist groups the executive order claims to combat. The narrative characterizes western nations, especially the United States, as oppressors of Muslims seeking to eradicate the Muslim faith as well as the Muslim people.

Syrian refugees exist in a problematic space not only because of the precarious nature of their lives, but also because they live with and around the various armed groups vying for control. At first consideration this observation seems obvious, however, the reality of the situation is far from clear. The ideal Syrian refugee, it seems, would exist in a space all its own, separate from the front lines of the various individual conflicts taking place. The reality is that conflict has permeated every facet of life in Syria. There is no “front line” that separates civilian life from combatant life, and so those exclusive states of being meld together in the life of a Syrian civilian caught in conflict. The refugees fleeing, and that have fled, this conflict are thoroughly and completely products of war. The executive order reflects this uncertainty of identity by banning all Syrians as a preventative measure to assure they do not bring the conflict with them. As a result, Syrian refugees are caught between the physical violence of civil war and a cultural violence waged against their identity by the nations claiming to want to save them. Without an end to the conflict in Syria in sight or the granting of refugee status and the ability to resettle, Syrian refugees are left with virtually no protection either at home or abroad and are reduced to bare-life.
As the current administration continues to analyze and mold the ongoing situation in Syria through humanitarian aid and current military actions, it is almost certain that America will do so from the “flying buttress” of American exceptionalism where “America(n) [interests come] First” instead of American action serving as a bedrock upon which a more equitable globalized society can be built (Koh 1483). Both America’s action and inaction in the Syrian conflict, along with its complicated history of involvement in the reformation of the Middle East, will show us to be on the wrong side of history. A continuance of a state of exception, and the necessity of reducing a population to a state of homo sacer, creates an enemy of the state. As a result, further unilateral actions can be taken by the sovereign to reach for more power both internationally and domestically simply because an enemy that is said to pose an existential threat to America has been identified. The process is self-perpetuating. The current administration’s attempt to frame Syrian refugees as potential enemies of the state reveal two important characteristics of the current American biopolitical landscape. The first is that protecting the American polis from a nebulous other, that is neither definitively combatant nor non-combatant, is completely impractical. When applied to the Syrian refugee crisis, this way of thinking is not only impractical, it is dangerous in that it creates an enemy through naming it as such. Furthermore, this characteristic is antithetical to America’s core values. The second being the only definable attributes of the “America First” ideology in the international and domestic spheres are the consequences created by adherence to it in foreign affairs. With no practical solution to combat an unidentifiable adversary, America is left with the self-perpetuating “war on terror,” and the continuance of harmful domestic and international policy. And as is the case with any war, there will continue to be refugees. America’s exceptionalism will ultimately be judged by how resolutely it holds fast to its core values of freedom, equality, and justice for all in the actions it takes at home and around the world.

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When You Go West: Biopolitics of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of West Georgia

By Shelby Hearn

TO “GO WEST” is a phrase heavily loaded with history and specific imagery. Two simple words conjure up an entire chapter of American history. For most, to “go west” recalls journeying beyond the Mississippi River into the unexplored American frontier. Images of cowboys and ranchers, lines of covered wagons rolling through the plains, and explorers donning raccoon skin caps likely come to mind. The common story associated with “going west” is typically one of optimism, individualism, innovation, persistence, and survival. Packed into a single phrase is what many consider the tale behind American identity as we know it. An expression so packed with imagery must come with other angles as well. On one side of the coin is discovery and adventure, while on the other side to “go west” involves violent conquest and the continued theft of native land as the American colonies extend their reach on the justification of divine entitlement. These dual meanings of optimism and discovery versus colonialism and war are both intrinsic parts of the phrase “go west.” However, to “go west” was a term before its association with the American frontier. Before cowboys and conquest, to “go west” meant to die.

The University of West Georgia has taken the notion of “going west” on for its recent marketing campaigns while also creating new meaning for the concept according to the brand they have begun to build for the institution. As one advertisement declares, to “Go West” is to go beyond the university’s campus and engage with community partners and corporations. To “Go West” is to be a leader, says another. To “Go West”, says the university’s diversity statement, is to become “part of a culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.” Commitments to diversity and inclusion specifically have been a large part of UWG’s rebranding initiatives. The phrase is found throughout university web pages, news articles and communications with the student body; it is so prevalent that on the surface there appears to be no doubt in the institution’s value in both attracting a diverse population of students and ensuring their academic and social inclusion. Examined with a critical eye through the lens of Michel Foucault’s theories surrounding biopolitics and biopower, UWG’s apparent concrete commitment to a diverse and inclusive can be seen for the façade it is. As an institution of biopower, the University of West Georgia claims a symbolic commitment to being more inclusive in the interest of a biopolitical agenda, thus shirking authentic responsibility for the continued exclusion and neglect of minority student populations.
THE UNIVERSITY AS A BIOPOLITICAL INSTITUTION

Institutions of biopower, as laid out in Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, include schools among the army, police and family structures. As Foucault writes, these institutions were created as key parts in the development of capitalism for the purposes of “optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general” while simultaneously maintaining an easily governable population (*The History of Sexuality* 141). While the developing institutions of power Foucault describes took form in the nineteenth century, their basic foundations persist into systems not created until the twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as the University of West Georgia which did not see its first iteration as an agricultural and mechanical school until 1906 and would not evolve into a four-year liberal arts university for another fifty years thereafter. The time between the first institutions of power and the University of West Georgia’s development may span centuries, but foundational ties between the university and biopolitical agendas of optimization and the resulting consequences remain.

One of the core foundations on which biopolitical institutions are built is “segregation and social hierarchization ([*The History of Sexuality*](#) 141). Foucault’s lecture “Society Must Be Defended” expands on how exactly segregation is so integral a part of biopolitics, this being the coinciding timeline of the rise in western biopolitics and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolutionism in the nineteenth century. It was not so much Darwin’s theory in its entirety, Foucault notes, but rather an amalgamation of his notions on natural selection, the hierarchy of species, and the struggle to live and reproduce among different species that became a core part of marrying political discourse and biology (“Society Must Be Defended” 76). Evolutionism became the justification for colonialism, racism, sexism, and normalizing sexuality; it is all in the name of optimizing the human species. When viewing a southern American university as a biopolitical institution it is especially important to recall this long history of segregation and prejudice and how it still permeates the culture today. The University of West Georgia, located in a southern rural town, can neither divorce itself from biopolitical roots in prejudice nor the regional precedent set by slavery, the Confederacy, and Jim Crow. The remnants of this history physically exist on the campus; the Bonner lecture hall cites the plantation on which the college was founded, and the Greek Village homes are stylized in the antebellum fashion, keeping the fraternities and sororities close to their white upper-class roots. It has only been fifty-four years since the university admitted its first black student. These direct and modern instances of prejudice in the university’s history further solidify its status as a biopolitical entity.

Under Foucault’s idea of the relationship between schools and capitalism, all universities are tools towards optimization of the workforce, even
as the western image of the workforce has shifted from manual labor to technology and corporate development. People pursue college degrees in order to be better prepared for work, to be the most optimal employees in the job market. Lawrence C. Soley’s book *Leasing the Ivory Tower* expands on the relationship between universities and capitalism. He writes on the variety of research heavy universities and their potential contributions to the corporate biopolitical world such as medical research to improve biological life or social science research looking into motivating workers for better productivity (Soley 79). For the University of West Georgia, it takes its capitalistic connection a step further with a multimedia advertising campaign. Mindpower Inc.’s multi-platform “Go West” marketing campaign for UWG situates its position within the capitalist agenda on a more obvious level. The advertisements centered around a “Go West” spirit speak to ideas of capitalism believed to be unique to Americans: innovation, individualism, and discovery. Additionally, the creation of such an ad campaign plays closely into the aspect of control within biopolitics. With marketing like Mindpower’s campaign for West Georgia, the university has more control over how it is perceived by potential students as well as employees. Universities that do not rely as heavily on advertisement must rely more on reputation and therefore relinquish critical amounts of control in how the world at large views them. A university will want to attract the best possible students and employees, and in turn the more students a university like West Georgia has and the better faculty it employs, the more funding it will get.

As Soley notes, funding is a key part of what keeps a university going and therefore sets the institutional priorities. The focus on finances over other more socially-conscious priorities has “reduced the importance of teaching, degraded the integrity of academic journals, and determined what research is conducted at universities” (Soley 145). We see a steep social cost here as well in lowered quality of education, reduced access to postsecondary education and a loss of academic freedom (Soley 145). Concerns over funding keep universities closely tied to their foundations in biopolitics and their original purposes within capitalism, making it difficult for the institutions to develop any sort of resistance to biopolitics. Soley briefly references student activism of the 1960s discrediting corporate involvement in universities, but claims a new “assault on universities” has begun in order
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to “reintroduce power onto campuses” (Soley 1). Biopolitics needs to exert control over its institutions and populations in order to be effective and it maintains control by creating situations in which it is not in population or institution's best interest to resist.

The interest of control within biopolitical institutions goes beyond the general idea of marketing and extends into the tracking and keeping of statistics, making note of each minutia of information and understanding how to manipulate it for the better. The records kept at a university are beneficial both to those who run the institution and those who choose to attend. Graduation rates, instructor-to-student ratio, commuter vs. residential students, and racial and ethnic demographics are all commonly cited and easily found statistics. For example, US News’s notes UWG’s student-faculty ration as 20:1, our 4-year graduation rate at 16%, and our gender distribution at being 63% female. UWG’s own 2016 factbook breaks down the student body composition by race with the vast majority of students identifying as White (53.3%) and Black (36.1%). The fact book is lengthy at nearly 100 pages of information on history, students, employees, services offered, and finances. As Foucault notes in (one of his lectures, for sure) this kind of record keeping is a hallmark of biopolitics. Where our general look at biopolitics states that it is the politics around life, we can narrow this definition when talking about higher education. Postsecondary education is a core part of life, with more people pursuing four-year degrees every year.

BIOPOLITICAL LANGUAGE OF DIVERSITY AT UWG

Examining the language and rhetoric of written statements, policies, and correspondences from the University of West Georgia is the best way in which to dig into the symbolic nature of the diversity work done at the institution. West Georgia has taken great care in the image they have crafted for themselves and so it only follows that how they present diversity and inclusion at the university is a part of that image. The repetition and purposeful pairing of the words “diversity” and “inclusion” are key parts of the innovative, forward-thinking image the “Go West” business model creates. The university is not unique in its usage of the terminology
though. In Sara Ahmed’s book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, she explores the seeming universality of the language of diversity. Ahmed describes the pervasiveness of the term diversity alone, that it appears “from mission statements to equality policy statements, in brochures, as taglines […] and as a repertoire of images” such as professional photos in advertising of “smiling faces of different colors” (Ahmed 51). Taken from the context of her book, Ahmed’s description could easily be directly about the University of West Georgia. Language of diversity can be found all around the university; it is included in the institutional values, a separate department is dedicated to diversity and inclusion, and in 2015 President Marrero created a committee for campus inclusion which then developed UWG’s diversity statement.

Diversity language has not always been such an integral part of the institution, however. West Georgia has been gradually adding the language in as it has redeveloped its brand since 2011. The term “diversity” within universities can even be considered a part of the corporatization of the university (Ahmed 52). “Diversity” comes into institutional life from a history of management; unlike terms such as “equity” or “equal opportunity,” diversity can be quantified and regulated. From a biopolitical standpoint, diversity is something to be tracked and turned into statistics that can then shape the intended image of the university. While the statistics West Georgia has collected on visual diversity in race still depicts white students as the majority, one can still see that black students take up a large portion of the pie chart and can compare those numbers to national averages and see that UWG’s racial diversity is well above those numbers. When speaking strictly in terms of diversity at the University of West Georgia, the institution invokes ideas of difference without necessarily speaking to a “commitment to action or […] justice” (Ahmed 53). Where West Georgia differs from Ahmed’s examinations of diversity work in universities is its common use of “inclusion” in conjunction with “diversity”. If not found side by side, the two terms are seldom far apart as if one implies the other. However, to be diverse is not necessarily to be inclusive. The reverse is also true: an institution may consider itself inclusive of the minorities that are there, but that does not necessarily mean that as a whole it is socially and culturally heterogenous or that it is working towards such.

In fact, it is so heavily suggested that the University of West Georgia is both diverse and inclusive without much evidence towards either claim, that the terms possess the ability to “conceal the operation of systematic inequalities” inherent in an institution of biopower (Ahmed 53). This institutional repetition of diversity and inclusion effectually normalizes whatever inequalities that exist within the university. Ahmed even suggests that as more institutions adopt diversity terminology, the words begin to
lose their edge. Diversity and inclusion becomes institutionalized and to institutionalize something is for it to “become routine or ordinary such that [it] becomes part of the background” (Ahmed 21). As diversity work is institutionalized, it becomes a part of a biopolitical agenda rather than a tool to resist and deconstruct harmful hegemony; their purpose folds into the background and the language becomes a veil behind which institutionalized hierarchies and inequalities are hidden.

At the University of West Georgia, the institutionalization of diversity and inclusion is solidified with the advent of the Presidential Committee on Campus Inclusion and the diversity statement developed from it in 2015. The short statement reads:

When you “Go West,” you become part of a culture that embraces diversity and inclusion, recognizing the valuable contributions of each of our faculty, staff, and students. Our individual differences lend us a collective strength that also serves as an expression of our values and beliefs. We value every member of our community not in spite of but because of our differences in age, color, creed, education, ethnicity, gender expression, national origin, physical and cognitive ability, race, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and veteran status (UWG Diversity Statement Fall 2015).

Immediately the reader is called back to the “Go West” marketing campaign. Attaching the West Georgia brand to a proclamation of diversity and inclusion indisputably displays the biopolitical gain in what is seen as a more progressive attitude. The statement is directly centered on the image West Georgia has devised of the place it already is rather than an image of what it aspires to become. Connecting diversity to the advertisements clearly states that this statement and its content are more about “generating the right image” (Ahmed 34). All that follows the “Go West” rhetoric is implied to already be well established parts within the institution. The suggestion that inclusion is already an intrinsic part of the University of West Georgia means that work towards becoming more inclusive is unnecessary. The redundancy of any attempt towards better inclusiveness is further implied with the term
“culture.” All aspects of a culture are considered deep-rooted; cultures are built over extended periods of time involving widespread beliefs, established morals and social norms. These are not things formed overnight or after a few years even with the help of a slogan. If the committee’s claim to an accepting and inclusive culture was followed with concrete evidence, then there would be no argument that the university’s commitment to diversity and inclusion was ingenuine. In Ahmed’s book on racism in higher education she discusses how diversity is so often connected to institutional images, and that this suggests that diversity is about changing perceptions rather than changing the organizations themselves. The university makes an unsupported declaration that serves to craft a more marketable image, covering up the true culture of inequality found at biopolitical institution in the rural south.

The Committee on Campus Inclusion’s statement is intended to address diversity and inclusion in a general sense, but it is not the generality in which evidence of true commitment gets lost. More specific statements regarding diversity and incidents of bigotry at the university have been released. In November 2015, West Georgia president Kyle Marrero released an e-mail to the student body entitled “Letter from President Marrero on Diversity and Inclusion.” The subject line does not immediately indicate the purpose of the letter, but it was sent to address the actions of a student athlete who donned blackface on Halloween a few weeks prior and posted a picture to social media captioned “MLK died for this.” Merely from the header of the e-mail, president Marrero has separated himself and the institution he represents from the issue at hand a blatant display of racism by a student representing the university. The email itself expands on this separation. Marrero insists that “neither the portrayal of blackface nor the [student’s social media] post are acceptable at the University of West Georgia.” Sara Ahmed references similar emails that surface from institutions and the common language that accompanies them. Dr. Marrero’s writing falls in line with these commonly used tactics of separating his institution from the problem rather than recognizing that it is the institution at the core of the problem. The remainder of the email is spent referencing what he and the institution have already done in terms of diversity work, further pushing this act of prejudice off onto an unnamed student as if he were an outlier working against the institution’s alleged accomplishments in inclusion.

In the fall of 2016, Dr. Marrero was once more driven to address the student body at West Georgia after an incident with a student filming another ripping down temporary “All Gender” bathroom signs. While once again a student leader felt he had the full right to act in a way that made minority, in this case trans and gender nonconforming, students uncomfortable and even unsafe, Dr. Marrero’s written address was shorter than the last. The president this time did not point to the diversity statement, but he did once more

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make sure to separate the institution from the actions taken by one of its members. Sara Ahmed refers to this type of institutional response as a “bad apple model.” Prejudice should not be dealt with as an individual problem, Ahmed explains, because that model of thinking about racism or any other form of prejudice does not fully appreciate the scope and insidious nature of bigotry. Most importantly, to view actions born of prejudice as a problem with an individual rather than an institutional or cultural issue means that we are without an idea of how this behavior gets reproduced (Ahmed 44). By taking this notion a step further, we can more closely examine where the symbolic nature of West Georgia’s diversity language comes in. To identify instances of prejudice solely with individuals and only when individuals’ actions garner enough negative attention is to actively reproduce the prejudice of biopolitical institutions. Addressing directly the individual and their actions and condemning these actions allows West Georgia to preserve its own institutional prejudice by “creating an illusion that we are eliminating” prejudice from campus (Ahmed 44). President Marrero’s return to the diversity statement about the University of West Georgia’s culture maintains this illusion, crafting the notion that these individual students have tainted the culture of campus and that addressing them as individuals will expunge the prejudice from the institution. In reality, the actions of those young men are a part of a larger culture rather than the one described in the president’s statement. The culture depicted in the actions and language of those within the institution is not one of embracing diversity and inclusion, instead it is a culture holding diversity and inclusion at arm’s length, close enough so that it may be seen but still far enough away so that it cannot be fully actualized.

To say that the University of West Georgia is entirely about the language of diversity without any kind of tangible diversity work would be disingenuous. However, what the university has done in terms of action towards inclusiveness on campus does not fall in line with the image created by the diversity statement, and the programs created continue to perpetuate biopolitical agendas rather than resisting them. The primary mode of addressing diversity and inclusion at West Georgia is through its Center for
Diversity and Inclusion, a department of six staff members. The existence and structure of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) speaks to how West Georgia views diversity work. The department exists separately from other campus departments, suggesting that diversity work is only to be done by one group rather than something that is, as the diversity statement claims, a part of the entirety of a campus culture. The very existence of this center indicates a campus issue with inclusion, the direct opposite of the image the university wishes to depict through its advertisements and statement on diversity. However, CDI can act as a physical veil partnered with the rhetorical veils put up by the institution to conceal the need for more proactive work against the prejudice inherent to the institution.

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion puts on a variety of monthly events that change with the seasons, but they lay claim to some bigger and more constant programs intended to make the University of West Georgia’s campus more inclusive. The African American Males Initiative (AAMI) and the Multicultural Achievement Program (MAP) are both learning communities housed within CDI. These two programs were developed to help black men and other racial and cultural minority students succeed academically at West Georgia. It is interesting that these are two chief programs coming out of CDI when you recall the wording of the diversity statement and the university’s biopolitical purpose of optimization. The Committee on Campus Inclusion claims that in embracing diversity and inclusion, the university is “recognizing the valuable contributions” of students, faculty and staff. The statement does not refer to value intrinsic in a human life, it expresses value in the contributions a student, faculty, or staff member can offer. We know that as universities are organizations driven by capitalism, the contributions of institutional members should directly correlate to financial gain for the university. In the case of students, this involves retention and graduation, the rates of which are fastidiously kept by the institution. This language implies that diversity is only valuable when diverse bodies are able to contribute to the university, therefore programs like AAMI and MAP must be in place to ensure these contributions take place. Academic support is certainly paramount to a student’s successful experience in postsecondary education, but the University of West Georgia cannot claim to embrace diversity if it is only in the interest of making diversity better optimize the institution.

BIOPOLITICS’ EFFECT ON STUDENTS
The foundational purpose of biopolitics is the optimization of life. Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics follows western advancements in both medicine and politics, culminating together at a point in history in which death no longer
ruled society. Beginning in the nineteenth century, man is able to postpone death in ways never before possible, prolonging life and presumably making life better. The question to be asked when it comes to biopolitics is: whose life is being optimized? If it were simply about biology, perhaps all life would be viewed as equally deserving of optimal opportunity, but because of the involvement of politics and power hierarchies are in place. Those with power benefit from biopolitics. In the entire history of power Foucault covers, those with power have been straight white men. When discussing biopower within universities, the hierarchies have not changed. The social, personal, and economic advantages that come with attending a university were originally meant for white men. Below straight white men in the biopolitical hierarchy are all others, deemed less worthy of the benefits of the biopolitical benefits to life for reasons rooted in evolutionism. However, biopolitics is also about keeping populations governable. The objective of a governable populace has led to the symbolic inclusion of minorities within postsecondary institutions.

Symbolic inclusion, or what Ahmed refers to in her book as a “lip service” model of diversity work, provides all the markers of inclusion without doing any of the real work necessary to foster a genuinely inclusive college campus that values its individual students (Ahmed 58). The lip service provided at the University of West Georgia is seen in a variety of ways, from a diversity statement to the presence of a Center for Diversity and Inclusion. The biopolitical gain in this lip service is understood as the creation of a favorable image and placating the student populations who might otherwise begin to cause trouble for the institution in the form of resistance. In practice, this inaction does a great disservice to minority students who are already historically at a disadvantage in life, let alone when pursuing postsecondary education. Marta Tienda’s article on promoting integration in higher education specifically addresses the disparity between racial groups’ graduation rates on a national level. Using figures from students enrolled in college in 2004, Tienda notes that while “less than half of all students who first matriculated in college in 2004 received their degrees in four years,” white students were among the majority of those who did at 41% (469). Only about one-fifth to one-quarter of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students graduated in four years by comparison. Institutions of higher education, set up with the betterment of white students in mind, are not properly equipped to help racial minorities succeed aca-
demically. Academic struggles for underrepresented student populations only scratches the surface on the negative effects of symbolic rather than action-driven diversity work.

Numerous studies have been done in the past decades surrounding the health and wellbeing of minorities in the United States. An article published in the *Independent* examines a 2016 study addressing troubling increases in mental health issues in college students. Of all the students surveyed more than a quarter indicated having a mental health problem in the past year, the main challenges being eating disorders, anxiety, and depression. In closer examination of the study’s findings, researchers were troubled at the “disparity between gender and sexuality” noting that “34 of females reported issues, compared to just 19% of males” and an overwhelming “45% of LGBT students […] admitted to facing challenges, compared to just 22% of non-LGBT [students]” (Ali). An article in *The Atlantic* looks at the mental health of racial minorities on college campuses. The article examines a survey of first-year college students done by the JED Foundation and the Steve Fund. Their study found that “50% of white students felt more academically prepared than their peers, versus 36% of black students” and that “students of color were more likely than white students to say that ‘everyone has college figured out but them’” (Green). These are just brief glances at how institutional discrimination and the perpetual sweeping under the rug of prejudicial actions at universities are harmful to the minorities that are a part of them. Clearly diversity statements are not enough to promote true, successful inclusion on college campuses. The University of West Georgia is not unlike the colleges surveyed in the above articles. Students of color, female students, and queer students are all a part of the university’s population. The female and queer students at West Georgia are among those alarming numbers facing mental health issues, compared to their male and non-LGBT peers. The students of color at West Georgia, too, find that attending a university that originally deliberately excluded them is more difficult for them than their white peers who have been historically set up for success.

In his lectures on biopower and politics, Foucault uses the phrase “make live and let die.” Those in power have the right to “make live” or to engineer life towards prosperity as well as to “let die” usually through systematic neglect (“Society Must Be Defended” 241). West Georgia engineer prosperous life for a select few as an institution specifically built to benefit those in power. Its doors may be open to others, but they fall into the category of those the powerful have the right to “let die.” Foucault describes this as a form of “indirect murder” that does not necessitate physical death, but rather involves “political death, expulsion, rejection” (“Society Must be Defended” 256). In only providing students with symbolic inclusion, in
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the form of non-legally binding statements and reactive emails rather than proactive initiatives towards truly creating a campus culture that condemns discrimination, the University of West Georgia is, in Foucauldian terms, letting its minority students die. While West Georgia wants its students to think of “going west” as an adventure and an opportunity to be a part of a progressive and inclusive culture, the reality of “going west” is more accurately found in its oldest meaning. When you “Go West” you go to die at the hands of biopolitical exclusion and rejection.

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DISPOSABLE (BIO)SUBJECTS
WHERE IS AWAY? THE BIOPOLITICS OF PLASTIC POLLUTION AND DISPOSABILITY

By Wesley McMahan

EVERYWHERE ONE TURNS in today’s world, no matter the continent, no matter land or marine, plastic is close by. Humanity justifies plastic use by that plastic serves a purpose to elevate humanity with its convenience, the afterlife, or rather, the life after the designated use of plastic promotes far worse harm to not only humanity, but also all ecological entities that inhabit the earth. The effects plastic leaves on the earth bring on this corrosion of life after the plastic is discarded or thrown away. However, with a capitalistic attitude in the economy, where more product equates to more profit, plastic production is reaching all time high numbers while the subject of life after use remains greatly overshadowed. Now, plastic is found in the conversation of disposability as it pertains to world use and the ease of throw away. As plastic is designed for convenience, be that in use and its disposability, the afterlife of plastics embodies the disposable. Furthermore, plastic acts as a symbol of disposability wherein lies far greater questions of, what makes something or someone disposable? What exactly does it mean to be disposable? What once had a use or purpose is remodeled into the disposable and thrown “away” from everyday life.

From a viewing of the 2016 short film, “The Smog of the Sea,” I will raise to question the relationship between plastic pollution and the disposable as it pertains to the biological life of humanity. In the short film, scientist Marcus Erikson teams up with an unlikely group of environmentalist to travel through the Sargasso Sea, trawling the waters for the seemingly invisible issue of plastic pollution while attempting to debunk the garbage patch myth and better inform the public of its desolate reality. What the short film fails to represent is how humanity is made disposable with the use of plastics, be that in the production, the use of plastic itself, and the harmful effects plastic generates in its life after use. Just like the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the land we inhabit, plastic is not going away and it is with great consideration and a greater responsibility that we, as humans, must move forward when deciding how to handle the afterlife of disposable plastic and its effects on disposable human life. For those whose lives are positioned within the disposable, plastic pollution can only cause further harm to their situation in forms of chemical pollution, land deterioration, and wildlife deterioration through the presence of plastic.

Leo Baekeland introduced the first synthetic polymer in 1907, earning its patented right in 1909. Baekeland was an American industrial chemist
who sought out a fix for the quickly diminishing shellac. The problem was the rate at which shellac was being used up and the long-term durability was unstable. So, Baekeland created Bakelite, the first synthetic resin thermosetting plastic. This was the largest advancement in thermoplastics. Bakelite was a chemically resistant plastic made up of a combination of phenol and formaldehyde, chemicals-derived from coal tar and methanol, a wood alcohol. What was made as a simple replacement to shellac changed plastics as well as the world, forever.

The big issue with plastic is its position within the disposable as humanity’s use for plastic is based on a one-time use where the plastic serves a single purpose. Beyond that purpose, plastic is regarded as a throwaway and finds the beginning of its new life in the nearest wastebasket or trashcan. In her essay simply titled *Disposability*, Ranjana Khanna positions disposability in relation to excess. In regards to excess, disposability is broken into two categories, disposable product and disposable asset. I will discuss the definition for disposable assets later in the essay and will currently focus the attention on disposable products. For a disposable product, Khanna defines these as things that “designate[s] a product created for disposal after (usually one) use, at which point it is treated as excessive or waste matter” (Khanna 184). This is the exact action taken for plastics once their initial use has occurred. Hypothetically, plastics embody a form of *homo sacer* as they bear a life that carries influence but is not regulated or thought of in their afterlife once thrown away. There is no form of responsibility pertaining to the afterlife of plastics and therefore a subliminal separation from the self is created, positioning plastics as an ‘other’ or as Khanna calls it, “waste matter” (Khanna 184). While plastic itself causes issues in various forms, these issues are generated into our ecosystem in the afterlife of plastic and its disposability. This disposability is engrained within the production of plastic where more is production equates to more profit.

More creating more is the baseline of capitalism, more production equates to more profit and profit is the central focus of a capitalistic society. Capitalism is directly correlated with non-sustainability. Michelle Yates argues that capitalism follows a concept of “distancing and separation” where an “out of site, out of mind” approach is used in the production, consumption, and disposal of the capitalistic economy (Yates 1681). Meaning, once a profit is made, the rest is “out of mind” without regards to the effects of the products afterlife. Yet, with garbage, an unusual situation arises where the post-consumer mentality views garbage as other even though garbage is something we as human interact with on a daily basis, making the “out of sight” notion invalid and leads the discussion to topics of the othering and the deeming of disposable. This is what Jennifer Clapp defines as the “waste distancing effect” where one mentally and geographically distances
themselves from waste to a level where the ecological and social impacts of the disposed are never taken into consideration (Yates 1683). This is a difficult issue to tackle in today’s society where plastic production is found in nearly every industry in some form or fashion.

When considering the leading uses for plastic in today’s economy, it is easy to see the strength of humanity’s relationship with plastic. According to PlasticsEurope.org, the top uses of plastic reside in packaging, building and construction, automotive, medical, electronics, agriculture, and sports. This statistic hits every point for the majority of humanity. Plastic packaging is the leading cause due to its durability for transporting goods while remaining a low cost solution and carrying the disposability it is know for. Going down the list, we see the basic needs humanity seeks to live a life worth living; shelter, transportation, health care, communication, food, and leisure. Plastic plays a major role in all of these things constituting the life worth living, while at the same time; plastic plays a detrimental role to the environment, especially those in low income or developing areas.

The production methods alone cause harmful environmental effects. The method of production for plastics involve many chemical reactions conducted in industrial plants around the world. In these plants, irreplaceable resources are seen as excess and disposable and are therefore being used in the production of plastic. In the past ten years alone, there has been more plastic produced than in the past century. Plasticizers are the chemicals that make plastic heat resistant and pliable and also colorful. In her research, Heather Davis notes that these plasticizers are not made up of the stable bond of plastic and will leach off gases into the environment. Davis further describes the production of plastic a and its disposability as “…[it] is discarded, left with a molecular structure that holds onto its stability…it may influence the environment greatly but remains immune to that environment’s influence” (233). The production of these impermeable products makes up an ever-growing continuum. It is the capitalistic approach where profit is the only concern while everything else is disposable that has created this great mess of plastic we are facing today. With people in low-income and developing areas being exposed to the harmful effects of plastic pollutions, no counter exists in the fight against these effects. Healthcare for the rising cancer case caused by plastic pollution must go untreated. Wildlife that many rely on for food becomes scares as they ingest plastics and die from suffocation and poison. For a low-income community, plastic serves no greater purpose and instead works against the struggling economy.

In 2011, the New York Times conducting a study releasing that nearly 300 million tons of plastic is produce annually world wide with only ten percent of that number being recycled back into the system. In the United States alone, there are approximately 50 billion plastic bottles produced
with 38 billion of those bottles being discarded irresponsibly. Considering the world population of only 7.5 billion people, 38 billion wasted bottles in the United States alone, is more than a discouraging number, it’s an issue that needs to be addressed and controlled (Wassener). Sadly, these numbers only consider plastic bottles and fail to mention every appliance, fixtures, tool, toy, utensil, and the endless amounts of uses plastic is found to be the solution for. It is the grand total of all of these plastics that correlate the world as a whole. If plastic pollutions in these numbers were recognized as a worldwide issue and the production of such plastic declined, we could slow the rate at which we are burying ourselves in plastic and created a way of containing the mess we have created. That, unfortunately, will be a greater task than the cleanup itself as long as profit is of more value than human life.

Essentially every piece of plastic ever produced still exists in our world today. That means every polymer created since the discovery of plastic in 1907 is somewhere in our waterways and land. According to a journal entry form Colombia University; plastic withstands a thousand years before decomposition (Cho). Scientists have formulated two categories for a broad classification of plastics, macro-plastics and micro-plastics. Currently, our greatest threat from plastic resides in the form of micro-plastics. Micro-plastics include all particles <5 mm in size. As for the difference between primary and secondary micro-plastics, primary micro-plastics are specifically engineered while secondary micro-plastics are composed of weathered pieces of larger plastic debris, or macro-plastics. One on the most controversial primary micro-plastics are exfoliates found in numerous cosmetic products and gels. Once washed away from their one time use, the exfoliates wash down the drain and are then directly sent into our waterways where they will remain. As for secondary micro-plastics, these are derived from broken down pieces of macro-plastic due to abrasion and sun exposure. Micro-plastics are the main focus of the research crew in *The Smog of the Sea*. While aboard their boat, the crew releases a manta trawl off the side where there is no disturbance of wakes from the boat. After a one-hour trawl, the team carefully examines their findings, resulting in horrifying results. What looks like the bluest of blue waters is actually filled with these micro-plastics to the square foot. The organic matter, such as seaweed and algae, revolving in the ocean acts as a broom and collects many of these micro-plastics in their vegetation. This itself creates a problem, as the removal process of these micro-plastics becomes a tedious process of going through each piece with tweezers and magnifiers to extract and count the plastic, a daunting task for any team.

Plastic in our oceans are not simply dumped there out of a giant garbage can as 95% of the plastic in our oceans come from land, lakes, and riv-
ers. It is true that a vast amount of trash is thrown away by dumping into the ocean, but wind and freshwater rivers take a greater effect. Just as it is within our oceans, plastic accumulates in our freshwater lakes. When this happens, the natural current of a lake forces the plastic to the banks and into the estuaries of rivers flowing from the lakes. From here, the rivers natural path leads to the ocean, as Erikson states, “[we have] rivers of plastic literally flowing into the ocean” (*The Smog of the Sea*). All of the waste and issues arising concerning waste is due to a lack of information to the people using these plastic products. Because of the waste distancing effect making the mindset of plastic disposability, there is little thought going into the means of recycling, avoiding plastic use when possible, and the responsible disposal of plastics when situations do don’t offer adequate methods. Geographical location does have influence over the amount of plastics found in the surrounding waterways. Areas with higher populations, such as China, Vietnam, and the United States, produce significantly higher amounts of waste and pollution. In 2015, a group of authors from the University of Paris formed a research project concerning the plastic pollution in urban areas and their results were staggering. After a rainstorm hit the Los Angeles River area, the team estimated that 2.3 billion micro-plastic and macro-plastic particles entered into the ocean over a three-day period. Much of these being in the form of take out food containers, straws, utensils, etc., all items of the throw away variety. Sadly, the recycling rates in the United States are reaching numbers where there is too much recycled plastics coming back and the solution is yet again that of the capitalist society. The excess recycled material is disposed of by exportation to other countries where laborers are made to sorts through the trash for anything of value or profitability, and what is left is then dump into the oceans.  
Erikson and crew set out on this journey to tackle one of the largest misconceptions concerning plastic pollution, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. When Charles Moore founded the garbage patch, the media delivered an idea of this great floating island made entirely of trash. It was said to be larger than the state of Texas, so people assumed this was a thing that a person would be able to walk out on and “plant a flag” as Erikson says. The trouble, though, is the garbage patch is not a land mass at all and is instead billions of tons of plastic floating along the ocean at various depths. Once this is brought to light, there is no longer a colonial mindset of conquering the garbage patch is reduced to a giant mess that none want to take responsibility for. Again, the “out of sight, out of mind” approach is the best mindset for this problem. It is again the production for profit mentality of capitalism that has driven this issue into the oceans where humanity if left to suffer the consequences. We have five main subtropical gyres within our oceans that act as a vacuum that pulls all trash and debris into the swirling
smog as discussed in the short film. The research conducted for *The Smog of the Sea* was a reconfirmation of the studies at The 5 Gyres Institute and a first hand observation for many of the crew members aboard the ship. Their main goal was to observe the garbage patch, debunk the idea of a giant mass of trash, and bring awareness to the ever-growing issue of plastic pollution and disposability. They want to make it known that recycling alone will not solve the issue, nor will the use of “safer” plant-based plastics. It will take an entire change of attitude toward plastic use and a total denial of its use. The fact of the matter is, we all use plastic and we have all thrown away plastic in some irresponsible form or fashion. But if we position plastic pollution as a global occurrence, we must include those in developing countries as well. These countries rarely have a means of fresh drinking water, healthcare, food, and clothing.

The real dangers of micro-plastics are found in the digestive tracts of fish and other wildlife that many people rely on as their main food source. There are over 600 species endangered by micro-plastics within their environment. Micro-plastics closely resemble the zooplankton and fish eggs that many organisms feed on. Not only do these plastics create a choking hazard and entanglement for many of these organisms, but also plastics have an astounding ability to absorb persistent organic pollution, which essentially poisons these food resources ([5gyres.org](http://5gyres.org)).

These persistent organic pollutants have been linked to produce an array of health issues, including cancer, among humans. A pea size micro-plastic, or nurdle, has the ability to absorb up to one million times more of a concentration of persistent organic pollutants than the surrounding water and vegetation. Persistent organic pollutants consist of DDT’s, PET’s, hydrocarbon, as well as industrial pollutants. These pollutants can be thought of as motor oil, flame-retardants, and industrial chemicals, all of which find their way into our food chain.

As more plastic is produced without the ability to be permanently disposed of, humanity is essentially burying itself alive in plastic. The Anthropocene is defined as the present geological age, beginning with the Industrial Revolution forward, during which humanity has begun to significantly impact the environment. This is the very geological age we are in and continue to change through procedures such as plastic pollution. What was introduced to replace scarce resources has now found its stake in mass consumerism offering a cheap and quick fix. Capitalism is the driving force of this era of humanity. With the main focus being the profit, capital is gained by producing mass quantities of product at the cheapest rate possible. It is difficult to imagine a day where one does not consume in some way or fashion, even if that person is desperately attempting to avoid the need. Even those seeking to grow their own garden in order to produce
Where Is Away? The Biopolitics of Plastic Pollution and Disposability

food that is sustainably source will also find themselves buying the gardening tools and supplies needed to produce said garden, many of these goods being plastic or arriving in plastic containers. Heather Davis responds to the Anthropocene with the furthering of this idea of our era, only focusing in on specific economic and political conditions, arriving at what researchers, including Davis, are calling the Capitalocene. Both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, going by their make up of the chemical and geological make up of the earth, include plastic in their definition. Plastic’s position within the Anthropocene is unchanging and its use is growing each day. It is not new information concerning plastic pollution and the environment, but the damage invoked by the tons of plastic has irreversible consequences. As Marcus Erikson observes in the short film, plastic residing in the “deepest parts of the ocean has a layer forming, that defines the Anthropocene even more than carbon from the Industrial Revolution, isotopes from H-bomb tests, what defines us is plastic…it’s the fossil of our time.” With this statement, Erkison argues that it is plastic that is driving the Anthropocene, and with Davis’ statement about the Capitalocene, we can see a partnership of plastic production and irresponsible disposal making this fossil of our time. But how does humanity dispose of something that has been seen as a throw away since its start?

When rummaging through one of the trawl nets after a one hour test, Erkison’s crew members discussed how there is no way of identifying where the plastic comes from with no way to place blame, the only one to blame is “just humanity” (The Smog of the Sea). One researcher has closed his research in on one particular plastic concern and has traced back to the producer by way of the global chain commodity. In 2005, David Redmon released his documentary Mardi Gras: Made in China to raise awareness on the toxicity of Mardi Gras beads as they follow their path from the restrained factories of China, to Bourbon Street during the Mardi Gras festival, and finally to the oceans and surrounding environment where they spend the rest of their life. Later, in 2014, Redmon released a follow-up book, Beads, Bodies, and Trash, to further expand on his research. What is notable in his study is the relationship between the plastic beads of the Mardi Gras necklaces and the people producing them. Redmon locates the definition of a “total institution” as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead and enclosed, formally administered round of life (Redmon). This is the exact institution found within the factories of China where teenage girls are being used to string the Mardi Gras beads into a necklace to be sold for profit. The conditions are unseen, remote, and greatly monitored to ensure these young women are producing mass amounts of product at cheap labor and in labor conditions unsuitable for
humans. Redmon suggests that these factories “increase surplus labor by cheapening labor and de-skilling workers...making it easier to recruit, control, and discipline workers through their senses” (Redmon). This total control of bodies through a strict labor setting is directly related to the foundations of capitalism, cheaply produced product in great quantities to make great profit.

Labor is essential for capitalism to generate profit. This is the very aspect Khanna’s second category of the disposable engages, the disposable asset. The disposable asset refers to something available for use, in excess notions such as need, necessity, or requirement, i.e. labor. Within the labor force there is a hierarchy with people positioned at both ends of the spectrum. According to Khanna’s conclusion, all labor is a form of disposability, as those who are working exist to work and not to live. Their lives are being expended to produce and not to live. As Khanna states, “to dispose is an excretion of power by the disposer in the utterance of a disposition made explicit, or, indeed, in a decision to control over a discarding of bodies” (Khanna 185). In order for something to be disposed of, be that plastic or a person, there has to be an assumed source of power over the disposed. It is this very exertion of sovereign that creates the disposable as well as the production. Now, we see a link flowing from the sovereign entities of capitalism, the labor needed to produce, and the sovereign mindset that leaves the used product as disposable.

There is one further issue concerning disposable assets in the form of bodies within the labor force of capitalism. In order to push greater numbers of product out the doors and into the consumer's hands, the introduction of machinery has replaced many humans in the job force. Machines are a unique labor force that produces high quantities of product at an elevated pace, untouched by human production levels. Machines do not receive a paycheck nor do they raise concerns for poor work conditions that produce health related issues. They do, however, further position human labor as disposable seeing that once a company decides to turn to machinery to run their business, the first to be disposed of are the ones in the labor force who’s lives are no longer seen as an asset.

There is no debating humanity’s relationship with plastic is an unbreakable vow. Even with a total abstinence from the use of single-use plastics, we have position ourselves geologically within the Anthropocene where plastic will remain in our lifetime as well as for many lifetimes to comes. The issue of disposability within the plastic pollution problem we currently face is directly related to the capitalistic approach of more products, more profit. With an ever-increasing number of single-use plastics finding its way into our waterways and resources, we can easily understand that this is a global issue. As seen in the documentary, The Smog of the Sea, plastic
pollution has consumed the environments we inhabit and this is due to a lack of knowledge and responsibility concerning the disposability of plastic pollution. With a closer look, however, we can see how single-use plastics and their disposability is related to the disposability of humans in less fortunate circumstances and cultures. With the growing numbers of plastics, more labor is needed to produce the toxic product and the solution is being placed on the lives of people who have been positioned as a disposable asset to the world of capitalism. We need a global understanding and more thoughts concerned about where it is our products come from, who it is that has been made to produce the product, and once the product has reached its maximum use and ready to throw away, where is away?

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KAZUO ISHIGURO APPROACHES cloning and the ethics of harvesting organs from living beings in a way that makes the reader wonder what the long-term consequences of therapeutic cloning may be. Therapeutic cloning is used to treat diseases by taking a skin cell and placing it inside of a fertilized egg whose nucleus has been removed. The idea of cloning seems out of reach in many people’s minds; however, in 1997 Dr. Wilmut and Dr. Campbell of the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland produced the first cloned sheep Dolly proving that cloning is not reserved for science fiction novels. Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* follows Kathy H., a clone who is retelling her story before she is taken in to start her process of organ donations. The language used in the novel is directly related to the idea that these clones in 1990 England are merely seen as science experiments and, in many ways, animals. The bigger picture of the novel is to show how easily our definition of humanity can come into crisis by ignoring the ethical implications of raising clones only to harvest their organs.

Currently cloning is limited to plants, algae, and unicellular organisms naturally and artificially to animals. The clones we are introduced to in the novel have attended a boarding school named Halisham. The school attempted to show the identity and autonomy of the clones through the study of arts and humanities, but ultimately failed as the students continued to complete organ donations. While therapeutic cloning to this extent has not taken place, Ishiguro is making a statement about where the biopolitics of modern medicine can lead society. The novel shows that a group of individuals may hold no purpose in life except to serve those that are wealthier, or deemed more important. The novel highlights the Foucauldian idea of “make live and let die.” The clones did not ask for life, but they are forced to live healthy lives so that they may donate their organs to a class system deemed more privileged than them. The “let die” process is slow and drawn out, but it isn’t depicted as torture because the donors are given what the novel calls “carers.” Carers are given the job of helping donors remain comfortable and calm so that they may have the opportunity to give away more organs before “completing,” or dying. Yet, today we would depict this process as murder regardless of how comfortable biopolitical institutions make the process. Ishiguro takes a scenario that seems unrealistic to show that the medical field is capable of forming a society full of problems that revolve around arguments of rights and autonomy between clones and
originals. However, the novel is also a commentary on the value of life and how society biopolitically devalues an underprivileged society in order to continue the reproduction and health of the favored individual.

The novel opens with Kathy H. saying “Now I know my being a carer so long isn’t necessarily because they think I’m fantastic at what I do” (3). Kathy is good at her job, but being good at her job means keeping donors alive long enough to give more organs. Many of Kathy’s donors have completed. This concept of completing suggests that the one purpose in the life of the clones is to donate their organs so other people have a longer life. This is the population that is sacrificed for the supposed betterment of society; at least this is how they have been raised at Halisham. They have been primed to give their organs. They are told to act like regular human beings, but they are not classified as being people. As they get older the clones are allowed to interact with regular society, but society does not know who are the clones are because boarding schools like Halisham are kept hidden from the view of the masses. The purpose of the clones complicates Foucault’s “make live” and “let die” because they are made to live, so that they may die, so that someone not classified as a clone may live. Societal institutions turn a blind eye to the slow murder of the clones and try to assuage their guilt by remaining dumb to who the clones were and what kind of lives they were living, or lived.

While reading about Kathy’s experiences as a child the reader has insight to how the “guardians” saw the children. Some guardians would say the children were “unworthy of privilege” (43) and others would shake with rage as they said the children weren’t being taught enough (290). Ishiguro never states how the clones are created, but the way they are treated suggests they were not connected emotionally or physically to one person or body, in the way a child is connected to a parent. The only adult connection they have are with the guardians at Halisham. The children fantasized about receiving gifts from them, and wanted desperately to earn the approval of different guardians. The narrative of the clones as children shows that they were like the children who got to roam free amongst society. Her childhood narrative shows that they were human, but society decided to ignore the clone schools so that their ethics could not be questioned. The children didn’t see the outside of the school grounds until they were teenagers. No one came to visit the school except for Madam and the men who brought trinkets for their store. They stayed hidden from view and controlled biopolitically so that other people in society could feel safe.

Halisham school was a long running experiment. Miss Emily later tells Kathy and Tommy that “Halisham was considered a shining beacon, an example of how we might move to a more humane and better way of doing things” (258). The art they were producing at Halisham was supposed to
show that the clones had souls. Showing this would hopefully help change the living conditions for many of the institutions raising donors; however, regardless of living conditions no one wanted to prove clones had souls to save their life. Many clones around the country were living in deplorable conditions and weren’t given the luxuries that were afforded to the clones at Halisham. Societal institutions did not believe the clones should be given an education, or indulgences since they did not contain a soul and would later die giving donations. Even as an adult Kathy couldn’t believe people thought they were soulless: “Did someone think we didn’t have souls” (260). Halisham failed as an experiment because it is no longer a school. It fell apart mostly because of the Morningdale Scandal: a scientist tried to create clones with super intelligence. This scandal caused people to fear clones more because they viewed them as superhuman and wanted them to stay hidden for the sake of science.

Society feared clones all of Kathy’s life. She describes when she realized this by saying, “I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush up against her…. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spider” (35). Again, the clones are seen as something insignificant and inhuman. The question comes up as to why the arts would show they that the kids have emotions if society only viewed them as beings lacking autonomy and free will. Throughout the novel we see that the character Tommy consistently has emotional breakdowns. He is the center of the school’s pranks, and everyone makes fun of him. In the hierarchy of the school Tommy is on the bottom. This doesn’t change until Tommy is told by Miss Lucy that “At least one person believes you are a good student, as good as any she’s come across, never mind how creative you are” (28). Tommy, along with the other students believed that their art meant something to the institutions outside of the gates at Halisham. They were raised to believe that art was important to life.

While the reader sees the humanity of the characters questioned, it isn’t just the students at Halisham who are questioned. Kathy H. says “I don’t know how it was where you were” thus putting the reader in place of a donor (13). Kathy’s audience is a group of donors; the reader is not put in the privileged group of society, but instead is held in the dark without knowing who is behind the process of donations or who receives the organs. This changes the ton of the novel because the reader cannot participate in the biopolitics of the life because they do not know or understand all of the details revolving around Halisham or the organ donation. The reader also begins to feel like an animal because once Kathy places the reader in this category, the reader can now understand the alienated feeling the clones have. Taking this even further, Kathy could very well be treating the reader as
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her last donor that she cares for before she enters into donations—meaning the reader could be close to completing. The normal population does not hate the clones, and they do not wish them any harm, but they are scared of them because they seem unnatural and invoke fear in the originals. This fear is overwhelming to the originals because they are biopolitically controlling the lives of the clones. It is easier to ignore the death and chaos in the lives of the underprivileged if medical advancements are being made. The reader is held hostage to Kathy’s memoir. This is the only information we can get because Kathy has lived a full life as a carer, but she does not know the inner workings of pharmaceutical companies, or the government, or society in general that continues to run the hospitals and housing for the clones. This helps define biopolitical power because it shows how populations can be governed without fully being aware of who is in charge and also why things are happening the way they are.

This memoir type fiction allows Ishiguro to give an outline of biopower instead of describing it directly. Bruce Jennings in “Biopower and the Liberationist Romance” says “By adopting the perspective of one of the new class of human beings created by this system, and by tracing her gradually dawning awareness of her status and function in the world, Ishiguro explores ambivalence, defensive denial, and the complex process of identity formation” (18). The clones are forced to be in denial about what is happening to them. They are being murdered but biopolitics tells them this is their job. This is the one thing they were created for. They were given life so that they must die to save the privileged population and the medical community. Defensive denial plays a major role for the reader and for the clones because neither knows what is going on to keep this biopolitical plan moving. Kathy’s recollections of her stories should be enough to show that she is human; however, it isn’t her life she really fights for it is the idea of being in love that she wants to fight for. She has accepted her place as a future donor, but she would rather save Tommy’s life because of the love she has for him. They are made to believe that they are put on this earth to only serve as organ donors, but that a possible exception can be made if they are in love. This turns out to be false and everyone Kathy knows has completed. The reader acts as her diary as she spills out her own emotions in an effort to find her identity since her body is not her own. Even when the clones realize this is their only purpose, they are not inclined to rebel. They continue on with their perceived purpose and donate their organs to save nameless people in a world that feels safe because the clones grow up in boarding schools and cabins. The don’t rebel because they do not see the point in rebelling. Their population is at the sole control of the biopolitical figurehead making the decisions for the medical field at the time the novel takes place. Their sense of responsibility is based in deception—which is
at the heart of biopolitics. The clones all believe they are given life so that they may be able to die for society.

The novel helps address bioethical dilemmas that remain in the realm of speculation. In the article “Therapeutic Reproduction and Human Dignity” Richard Storrow says “the most powerful engine driving the disapproval of human reproductive cloning is that it poses too great a threat to human dignity. This concern takes several forms, from the fear that clones would be mere genetic copies lacking in individuality to the fear that rogue physicians will clone individuals without proper permission” (265). He also points out “The idea of human cloning for organ banking is never exploited for shock value. Unlike many cloning tales, Ishiguro’s eschews power-hungry physicians, money-crazed titans of commerce, and other conventions of the genre” (268). Human dignity is never mentioned in the novel. The only utterance given is when Miss Lucy says “They are not teaching you enough” and she shakes with anger (28). Ishiguro uses the memoir style to not make an over-exaggerated claim about bioethics. He wants the reader to focus on the individuals in the story instead of making the cloning a corporate, money-making scheme. Storrow makes the point that Ishiguro is trying to “warn us about how relaxing our vigilance can result in governmental power running roughshod over human rights, he nonetheless skillfully forces us to confront the undeniable humanity of human clones (267). The novel uses cloning as an example to show that biopolitics forced on citizens can easily take precedence over human rights. It not trying to say “beware of cloning” but rather the book is saying to guard your own ambitions because biopolitical control can change the masses’ thoughts on something as seemingly simple as human rights.

It is Miss Emily, the head of Halisham, that finally reveals the scope and logic of the biopower that has come to dominate their society: “when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn’t time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions.” Here she admits that medicine has taken precedent over human rights and bioethics. Medicine has created a way to end chronic illnesses and biopolitical power allows individuals to ignore the consequences and aftermath of such discoveries. She continued on saying “And for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere . . . by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it is was too late.” Miss Emily highlights the meaning of biopolitics in this phrase. Biopolitical overtaking happens without anyone noticing. The powers that are in charge in the novel found a way to corrupt regular citizens by making them believe that ignorance is bliss. The progression of medicine happened too fast that society missed the human rights that were being violated. Once it was apparent what was hap-
pening no one wanted to admit the ethical mistake they made. It was easier to keep pretending that the clones were not real humans and therefore not rights were being violated. Miss Emily continues her speech to Kathy and Tommy by justifying why no one stopped the use of clone organs, “There was no way to reverse the process. How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? . . . So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren’t really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn’t matter” (262-63). It is easier for society to say the clones were less than human then it was to admit they had made a mistake in creating them. The novel doesn’t end with a change to society because once biopolitical control makes individuals question human rights, it is difficult to pull back and reverse the process of what has been started.

There are contemporary issues that deal with the ethics of medicine and that show how difficult it is to reverse a process once it has been started regardless of the ethical issues that arise from it. These issues show that *Never Let Me Go* continues to be a commentary on biopolitical power in the medical field as science bioethics continue to collide. For example, companies like Advanced Cell Technology, are attempting to use cloning for therapeutic purposes. This company uses skin cells to try and clone the original in order to help with diseases like ALS or ALD. In 2001, ACT announced that it had the world’s first cloned human embryos. The issue with companies like this is that they have their own private ethics boards and usually only exist to legitimize a company’s research. According to the article “Therapeutic Cloning Research and Ethical Oversight” members of the ACT ethics board were asked about children donors, and at first the board said it would have to be of “vital importance” to accept a child donor, but eventually that statement was retracted and they decided “a cell line derived from a child could not be used in therapeutic cloning research” (208). Currently, therapeutic cloning for some is considered a morally offensive act, but many are still fighting to have the chance to clone individuals to help with diseases that limit individual’s mobility and quality of life.

Other examples of bioethics colliding with medicine is the use of savior siblings. In the same way that parents are able to test to see if a fetus is healthy, parents are able to select embryos so that they may have another child that is a compatible donor for an already living sick child. Richard Storrow says in his article “Parents planning to create a savior sibling intend that the child will donate umbilical cord blood, regenerative tissue such as bone marrow, and, potentially, a non-regenerating organ to promote the health of the sick sibling” (260). The President’s Council believes that “savior siblings” and sex-selection for non-medical reasons is considered unethical.
and messes with human dignity. However, medical advisors cannot stop parents from conceiving savior siblings because a parent still has the ability force a child to donate bone marrow to a sibling if they are a match. This currently follows under the realm of bioethics and therapeutic cloning. Children do not have medical rights because they are deemed incapable of making medical decisions in their best interest. This idea matches with the clones in the novel Never Let Me Go because they have no medical rights to their own body even as adults.

Kazuo Ishiguro avoids telling the reader what the source of these medical advancements are in the novel. He isn’t interested in telling his reader to beware of cloning, because medical advancements can strongly change the way individuals fight terminal illnesses. Never Let Me Go warns about the cleverness and sneakiness of biopolitical control. Kathy H. knows she will die from donating her organs to someone she will never meet. Her life will be sacrificed so that someone else may live. There is no difference between Kathy and the person receiving her organs except that Kathy was created and raised in a different way. Medical advancement has allowed individuals in the novel to ignore ethics and human dignity. Cloning to this extent is not currently happening, but it is on the horizon. We see these advancements happening as animals are being cloned, artificial wombs are being created, savior siblings are being legalized, and therapeutic cloning is becoming a tangible option for people with diseases. The eradication of cancer and other terminal illnesses seem fascinating, and it is the goal of a lot of researchers, but Ishiguro begs his readers to remember human rights during the entire process of medical research. For the clones in the novel, the reader included, it was easy for the privileged society to ignore them so that they got the cures to cancers in exchange for clone’s lives. Biopolitical powers make it easy to ignore the things that seem inappropriate and destructive when the greater community is benefitting from the demise of another.

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These materials, as well as jobs, were relocated to England, forcing those who wished to maintain their jobs to relocate to England as well. Furthermore, another law prohibited the importing and exporting of goods with any nation outside of England, and the English were entirely uninterested in maintaining trade. These acts worked together as a strategy to starve out the Irish, forcing them to submit to England if they wished to survive.

Jonathan Swift, a writer during this time, was born in Ireland and grew up in England. Formerly in favor of England, Swift acknowledged and was ashamed of the treatment implemented by the English upon the Irish. He believed their treatment of the Irish was inhumane, and wrote the essay, *A Modest Proposal* as a mocking response to the harsh judgements and actions carried out by the English. Swift’s *Proposal* is a satirical piece, addressing the inhumane treatment of the Irish by the English for selfish purposes. The essay describes suggestions for their hardships of poverty, overpopulation, and starvation by giving a simple, disturbing answer. He sarcastically proposes that the impoverished, starving Irish Catholics should sell their children as food to the wealthy, upper class English citizens in order to monitor population control as well as earn a form of currency.

Swift has a strong empathy for those suffering in Ireland, and expresses his thoughts of the English greed through the use of satire. He writes, “There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born…” (Swift 3). He criticizes the large amount of children in need in order to reveal how vast the suffering and starvation in Ireland stretches, and how many people are affected by England’s apathy. Swift then continues to assert his satirical plan to help the Irish.

He proposes a plan in his essay which appears heartless and inhumane on the surface. He writes, “I do therefore humbly offer it to the public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed…the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in the sale to the persons of quality and fortune…for a good table…” (Swift 5). Swift criticizes England’s insatiable hunger for greed and the power over others by reducing their victims to a form of livestock, kept alive and breeding specifically to serve them. The image is not meant to be taken literally; instead, it serves as a metaphor for England’s controlling actions, including taking the lives of others, in order to feed their greed and power. Swift includes the line, “already computed” (Swift 5) when describing the number of Irish children at their disposal in order to indicate that there are more babies to come. This line mocks England’s insatiable greed, assuring them there will be more babies found in Ireland, as well as more bred, for their hunger of killing others for their own gain.

Scholar Shane Herron argues that Swift writes about cruelty for the sake of being cruel. He writes, “…Swift’s satirical representations of evil relay