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A U S T I N C O M M U N I T Y C O L L E G E



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Welcome to the third issue of *Curiositas*, a journal devoted to the bold, curious, and deeply engaged thinkers among our student body in the Liberal Arts. At the heart of our mission is a belief in the unifying power of creativity and critical thought—and in this edition, that vision comes to life through a range of interdisciplinary works that challenge, investigate, and illuminate the world around us.

From its inception, *Curiositas* has aimed to showcase the best academic and artistic work produced by Austin Community College students, and this third issue is a vibrant testament to that goal. Over the course of several months, we received more than 70 submissions representing a wide cross-section of disciplines, from English and Philosophy to Economics, History, Communications, and World Languages. These came from students across multiple campuses and instructional settings—dual credit and honors classes, composition courses, literature seminars, and even a technical communication course. This variety is more than just demographic—it's intellectual and creative, too.

Our contributors submitted essays, digital media projects, analytical reports, and creative reinterpretations, all grounded in academic inquiry. What links these seemingly disparate works is a shared sense of intellectual bravery and imaginative reach. These students didn't settle for easy answers or superficial interpretations. They dug deeper—and they invite us to do the same.

Consider Kristan Hennessy's *Shattered Certainties*, a deeply personal literary analysis that merges literary analysis with the author's experience of growing up with a disabled veteran parent. Or Ashley Miramontes' *A Woman's Place*, an essay that confronts religious orthodoxy and finds strength in sisterhood. In *Exploring Ethical Complexities*, Claire Bynum combines philosophical reflection with real-world dietary activism. An Interview with Frank, created by Victoria Trevino, invites us into a shared human moment with someone too often ignored by society.

Even in pieces with vastly different forms—from Evan Roberts' urban planning report on a dangerous turn in Travis County, to Aiden Spicer's digital meditation on analog games—what emerges is a commitment to using scholarship as a way to understand and affect the world.

Curiositas in Latin implies a disciplined kind of wonder, a seeking out of the hidden layers of meaning in the everyday. Our student contributors are asking hard questions about justice, identity, memory, and connection. Their work is scholarly, yes—but it is also personal, urgent, and deeply human.

As editors, we are proud to offer this third volume as a celebration of the intellectual curiosity thriving at ACC. We hope you read with an open mind and leave with a sense of the questions yet to be asked. Thank you to the editorial board this year, to professors dedicated to celebrating and honoring students' excellence:

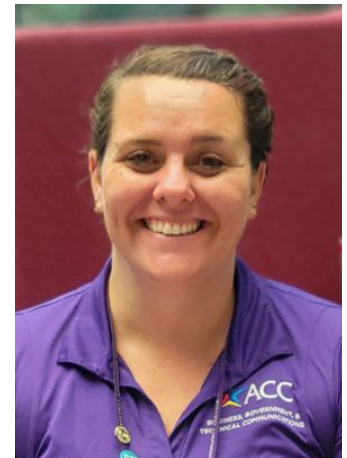
- Wade Allen, Philosophy, Religion, and Humanities
- Chris Gardner, Composition and Literary Studies
- Gretchen Harries, Communication Studies
- Lei Ji, Economics
- Arun John, Composition and Literary Studies
- David Kano, Journalism
- Jeff Stringer, Communication Studies

And finally, this issue is designed exclusively by Angie Creel, the intern I didn't know I needed. Thank you for your vision, your dedication, and your patience! This third edition is truly your baby!

Sincerely,

Alex Watkins

Editor-in-Chief, *Curiositas*



Editor-in-Chief
ALEX WATKINS



**Magazine Designer/
Graphics Designer**
ANGIE CREEL

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A WOMAN'S Place

Ten years ago on a sunny Sunday morning, I was sitting in a pew half-heartedly listening to the man on the pulpit deliver his sermon. I was not particularly interested in his words, but they were familiar to me. I was more interested in playing with my hair and the ribbons that streamed onto my shoulders, braiding them into strands mindlessly, numb to the background noise as the congregation nodded approvingly and whispered solemn amens. It was the first time in a while since Stephanie, my older sister, came to church with us. She'd been away pursuing her chemical engineering degree at the University in Boulder, Colorado, and

hoped to spend time with us in a community of faith. It was strange, then, to see her rise from her seat, gather her purse, and walk out. My twin sister and I, only thirteen at the time, followed suit.

We were surprised to see, once we approached her as she sat on the church steps, that her eyes were heavy with emotion, tears pooling at the waterline but held back by her pride. We asked her what was wrong. She smiled and held our cheeks. Our sister was not the vulnerable type, and we were taken aback by this sudden display.

"I'm sorry you had to hear that," she said, "You are both beautiful and strong and I hope you know



ASHLEY MIRAMONTES

"To anyone looking down at their shoelaces, feeling silly for dreaming: Whatever the journey may be, and whether or not you feel all that brave, you can still tighten up your laces and take the next step forward. And after a mile or two of brave little steps, you'll take in how far you've come and realize it was only ever silly to have hesitated."

you are capable of so much more than you've been told to believe." At this, she wiped at her eyes before the tears could escape them and left.

The sermon had been about "a woman's place." A woman's place is in the home as a wife and mother. Holy is the woman who submits and obeys her husband. Damned is the rebellious woman, the jezebel, the whore of the secular world. I didn't understand most of it, but it was typical church stuff and not very different from the kinds of things we'd been told for most of our young lives as girls: purity, meekness, submission yada yada. It was boring, but nothing about it seemed all that shocking. What exactly was the problem?

Not so long after that, my twin sister Allison began to get into the habit of reading for fun. It was harmless enough, but it seemed to have opened up a world within her. I loved hearing her talk about the latest story she'd picked up. She loved books about monsters and wizards and magical things. Excited by her energy and a bit envious of her newfound ease with words, I began to read for fun too. And as we read together, I felt worlds opening up within me as

well.

There was so much power in stories and so many ideas to explore. A childhood dream began to brew up in the both of us, of one day telling our own stories. We would spend afternoons at the kitchen table brainstorming and writing together.

One day, visiting our church leader's home, playing with his daughters, and having dinner, my twin sister happened to mention that she wanted to become a writer. She could picture her own books lining the walls of libraries. A little jealous of how impressive that sounded, I wanted to jump in and say, "Me too! I'm also smart! I could do that." But then I saw the stern expression of the man at the head of the dinner table and thought I better not.

"It's good that you like to read so you can teach your children one day," he said, dabbing at his mouth with a napkin. "But your ambition should be guided in the right direction. A

God-fearing woman knows that her purpose is to have a family and take good care of it. A submissive wife is a happy woman. She is aligned with her spiritual destiny. She is aligned with God's plan." My parents nodded along as he quoted scripture to further make his point. We had a lot of respect for him. He was eloquent and authoritative and had been a dear family friend always there to help us. A part of me wanted to agree with him because of all this, but something clicked when I saw my sister's disillusion, that spark in her eye snuffed out. She was embarrassed. I suddenly realized why my older sister had left the sermon that day.

My mother and her mother and her mother's mother had all followed a similar path; that of the traditional wife. They had not received an education and married quite young. My oldest sister had been the first to break that generational chain. Stephanie was ambitious, sharp-witted, and fiercely independent, so it seemed natural for her to go to college despite it never having been an expectation. Her social grace was only enhanced by her intelligence, and the congregation saw her as an example to follow. It was then a painful betrayal to hear that a woman like her was a woman destined to be unhappy and unfulfilled.

Had she been in the church leader's dining room that afternoon, she would have taken us in her hand

IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR



and gracefully removed us from that environment, refusing to make a scene or elaborate. But she hadn't been there, so I only had her message ringing in my ears: "You are capable of so much more than you've been told to believe." As the night came to an end I followed Allison as she stepped out onto the back yard. I told her that the man was wrong as we rocked back and forth in his daughters' swing set. She looked down at her shoes.

"I don't even know why I said that," she lamented, her voice getting smaller with every word. "It's not like I'm all that smart. My grades aren't even good. It's just a silly pipe dream." We had just learned the words "pipe dream." Finally one of us found a use for them.

I would think back to that moment years later when I attempted once again to pursue an education. I dropped out of high school as a kid. I had been passionate about certain subjects but was horribly inconsistent, anxious, and avoidant. Despite Stephanie's message, I didn't think I was capable of very much. But after a few years of dead-end jobs and aimlessness, I began to read again. And the worlds within me whispered and beckoned me to explore. I lined my bookshelves with the stories of women who pursued education against the odds and expectations of their culture: Zora Neale Hurston, Tara Westover, and Malala. I couldn't help but be inspired.

In my fascination with educated women, I'd had conversations with some of the women in my life who didn't have the opportunity to pursue a degree or a career and worked only in the home. While they loved their husbands, their children, and their homes, they all encouraged me to pursue something more and they told me their stories. Some of them were unappreciated, unseen, and undervalued. The fact that they didn't work outside of the home was both an expectation and a pointed remark to be used against them.

Others were truly happy and fulfilled and had stable, loving men in their lives. Their role in the home was appreciated and seen for the physical and emotional labor that it was. But they too wondered



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

what doors they could've opened for themselves if only they'd had the chance. It made me deeply grateful that I had the chance. The more I heard women speak, the more it turned out that I wasn't alone. So many of our fears had been stoked since childhood, and so many false limitations had been imposed.

Among these women was the church leader's sister, Maggie, who'd scandalized her family when she divorced after heeding their advice and tolerating years of her first husband's abuse. She was a pariah to her father and brothers. They refused to acknowledge her new partner as her husband. And yet even as she took her stand, she remained faithful and full of grace. Maggie taught me that a woman did not have to be submissive to be gentle, pure to be worthy, or meek to be kind. Her humble words silenced the louder voices of the men on the pulpit. I would think back to her and all of those women as I navigated the beginning of my adulthood. I thought about their lives and their longings.

I decided, at 22 years old, that I would follow their advice and my older sister's example and go back to school, get my diploma, and eventually my degree. I had dreams of becoming a teacher. Though I was no longer avoidant, I was still highly anxious. Days before I was to start again, all the doubts about my abilities rose to the surface and I sought the comfort of my father. I leaned next to him and shared my fears, wondering if I was good enough. He held my hand gently in his and told me there was no point in worrying. He said that as much as modern women denied it, women were happier when they stayed in the home and served their husbands. I had met a good, hardworking man so he didn't see why I wanted to study or have a career.

“Back in my day women were honored and valued for being wives and mothers. As it should be.” He said, calmly nodding as he spoke.

The conversation gutted me. Was there really no point in trying again? Had I proved him right by failing in my past attempts at school? It was easy to think so. But as much as my insecurity tried to confirm this, the general statement simply didn’t ring true anymore. I looked up at my father, a bit wounded, and I wanted to relay all that I had learned about the women in our lives and how little he truly knew about their experiences.

I wanted to say “Back in your day, Father, your own mother had to struggle after her husband died, and not having an education or means meant she felt she had to rely on men for her survival for the rest of her life. This was difficult for you Dad, and you’ve often told me how you spent your childhood in helpless rage and disbelief at how she tolerated and catered to abusive men. And yet I can understand why she felt like she had to. Because back in her day any man in the picture was better than no man at all. Don’t you see the pattern?”

I thought about one of my aunts. Back in her day, her abusive husband had beaten her and she’d gone to my grandmother for help. She was told to endure. She was told that taking care of her family was her calling and this was her cross to bear. My grandmother was only telling her the same thing she had been told back in her day when my grandfather abused her. She couldn’t drive, she could barely read. What option did she have but to endure? What better salve is there to resignation than calling it destiny? Decades later she would finally leave my grandfather, despite the scandal, deciding to enjoy the last years of her life on her own terms. She would come to bitterly regret that kind of advice and urge me to study and to never tolerate a man who hurts me, tradition be damned.

I thought about Tia Miriam, my aunt, and her

story. I wanted to say, “Back in your day, your own sister mourned the loss of her husband, but she had learned and practiced the trade of cosmetology. She still struggled of course, but having a skill of some kind allowed her to be able to depend on herself and provide for her children. She’s loving, kind, independent, and devoted to her role as a mother. She was a traditional woman, and yet because she didn’t limit her pursuits to the title of wife, she was able to adapt when life threw her a curveball. Don’t you want me to have that same ability?”

I wanted to say all of this and so much more but I only nodded and kissed him on the forehead. I knew he thought he was saying the right thing. I knew he only wanted me to feel that I could rely on him and that I didn’t have to worry about my future. But I walked away feeling like an embarrassed kid looking down at her shoes rocking back and forth on the

swing set, feeling silly for dreaming and seeing that horizon get further and further away. Why want to become a student or a teacher or a writer? I have

“Back in my day women were honored and valued for being wives and mothers. As it should be.”

my father for now. I have my partner. Once we’re married, I will be in my place. I will be at home.

I went to my room and cleaned to distract myself. I dusted and organized my bookshelves, anxiously moving furniture to make it feel more spacious. But no matter what I did the room only felt smaller somehow, the walls inching closer and closer on all sides. I needed to get out of there. Despite being low on gas and having no money, I drove to the gas station and sat in my car numbly. I stared at myself in the rear-view mirror for a while, looking to find some fundamental flaw in my design. The softer features of my face, the smallness of my wrists, the shape of the mass that was my body; all signs of my femaleness served to mock me. Was there some spiritual or biological fate imprinted on me that I was uselessly fighting against?

I called Isaac, my boyfriend and I told him what my father said. Like me, he was raised with similar conservative religious values. We both want a

traditional family and a simple life. I truly want to be a mother and a wife someday. Isaac's dream is to become a good father, emphasizing the "good" part. I often tell him it won't be too difficult for such a good man. I knew in my heart that Isaac understood and valued my ambitions. I knew that he thought I was smart and capable and had on many occasions been bewildered by the depth of my insecurities. But those same insecurities now scratched at the back of my brain. He was a devout Catholic and though he was by no means a fundamentalist, a part of me feared that he would agree. I had to know what he believed in.

He listened and finally sighed. "Well honey, you know what that means." I didn't. But he said in his deep, comforting voice "You're gonna prove him wrong." There was something about the way he said it that made me smile ear to ear. He said it like it was a no-brainer; like it was a fact of life. The sky is blue, the grass is green, July is hot, and you, Ms. Miramontes will get your diploma and your degree. There was not a shadow of a doubt in his mind that I could do it. What he believed in was me. In that moment, loitering in the parking lot of a 711, I felt that I was home.

When I went back to school I found myself thriving for the first time in years. I met incredible people who saw potential in me I had not realized existed. Ms. Phillips, the school administrator, encouraged my growth and always held me accountable. She's a hardworking woman both in her family and profession and she loves her school and her students deeply. Ms. Cox, or Ms. Ma'am as I now call her, is a devoted mother and teacher. Having met her, I pity the schools that don't have a sassy southern belle brightening up the room and giving students the tough love we sometimes need to hear from a kind woman. My English teacher, Mr. Warren, an educator at heart, read my writing assignments and signed me up for a small anthology contest which I would later win. I told him how my mother gushed to all her friends that her daughter was now a published author and we laughed. I felt in that school, in that classroom, that I was home.

My counselor Ms. Marlin encouraged me to enroll in college courses at ACC and worked to find jobs that could allow me to continue my studies. My mentor Ms. Cadena, whose support came to mean

the world to me, nominated me for a competition at Berkley and my team was the third runner-up. She encouraged me to join the student council and to become a tutor. Mr. Gonzales and Mr. Mah have both patiently suffered through my incoherent questions, teaching me to think inside a problem and outside the box.

Stephanie has helped me through impossible math assignments, keeping her message alive and well in my heart. Allison has proofread all my writing. We've spent afternoons brainstorming together at the kitchen table just like when we were girls. Because of these good people and their guidance, I've had experiences that built me up and helped me grow into myself and know I am more capable than I was taught to believe. And so everywhere I go, whether it's the school, the college campus, or I am surrounded by strangers and a panel of judges 1,500 miles from my city, I always feel that I am home.

My father continues to help me build a life for myself. I love and respect him deeply and I am grateful that despite his worldview he supports my decisions. He is loving, warm, and deeply faithful. But I will have to kindly agree to strongly disagree with his position and the conviction of any man no matter how gentle, authoritative, eloquent, or well-respected he may be, that a woman's place is in the home. Thanks to the mentors in my life, my loving partner, and the stories of women who wanted more, I know I can move forward with the knowledge that a woman's place is in the home... and the classroom, and the workplace, and the conversation.

Because a woman's place is simply where she takes a stand.

PROFESSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article was written by Ashley Miramontes as part of Professor Jeanne Chaltain's English Composition I course at ACC.

Shattered CERTAINTIES

A Personal and Literary Exploration of “The Red Convertible” and the Systemic Failures Impacting Veteran Mental Health

Growing up, my parents were very focused on the idea that if you worked hard, followed all the rules, and saved money, you would be successful in life. They would frequently point to examples in our community: the middle-aged man working at the gas station, the prisoners picking up trash on the side of the road, a homeless person asking for money at the

intersection. They would tell me, “That’s what could happen to you if you don’t finish school, or get pregnant, or don’t work hard.” It was a fairly straightforward theory. You were certain to reap what you sow.

Years later, in my late teens, I visited my recently divorced stepdad (simply “Dad” to me) in his new studio apartment. The scene that lay before me

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

From Dr. Seuss’s The Lorax



KRISTAN HENNESSY

shattered that certainty. My own voice bouncing off the bare, dingy apartment walls seemed to mock me.

“Oh, it’s nice! I like how much light there is in here!” I smiled at my dad. He gave me a weak smile in response, sinking into an old, dark blue couch he’d found in front of someone’s house for free.

“It’s not much, but it’s home,” he reassured me, still smiling, still sinking. He seemed older, greyer, skinnier, and more tired. I wondered if he’d lie down and take a nap right then and there.

“No, no, I like it! The floor plan has a lot of flow,” I said stupidly. The floor plan wasn’t bad, in its defense. Something still wasn’t right, though.

hobbies? His guitars? His music collection? Why was this apartment empty? The gravity of the situation hadn’t fully struck me yet.

“Hey, Dad, is it ok if I grab something to drink from the fridge?” I asked, still naively thinking this was some semblance of our old home.

I felt his reluctance as he answered. “Sure,” he said slowly, “but I don’t know what all’s in there. Might not be much.”

I opened the fridge door and my heart dropped. The fridge was also bare. Hot and angry tears stung my eyes. Rage at the unfairness twisted my stomach and made it hard to think. On the shelf was a single head of iceberg lettuce, a cucumber — my dad’s

favorite salad topping —, and a bottle of ranch dressing. It hit me like a truck. There wasn’t much. In fact, there was barely anything at all. No wonder my dad was tired and thin-looking. The painful truth about life danced in front of my eyes.

This is what 40 years of hard work earns you. This is what providing for a family of five earns you. This is what 27 years of military service, a fistful of deployments, and countless traumatic

events earns you. The calculator in my head was clacking furiously, trying to make sense of the numbers. “Forty years plus twenty-seven years, times five deployments, times five family members... equals a ninety-nine cent head of lettuce — that can’t be right...” But it was. After all the work and sacrifice, my father was left broken and alone.

Too injured to get a job, he relied on his disability from the military, which wasn’t enough to pay for the divorce my mother was putting him through. His mental health was suffering as much as his physical health was. He was sinking. The VA gave him some pills to help with the physical



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

I looked around the room to steady myself, maybe find something with a little more substance to talk about. An empty studio apartment stared blankly back at me. There was an unfamiliar, dilapidated couch against the wall with my unfamiliar, dilapidated-looking father lying on it. A small, outdated TV sat opposite. A few framed pictures of my youngest brother standing on the kitchen bar were the only sign that an actual human being occupied the place. Otherwise, the walls and windows were bare.

Desperately, I looked around for traces of my dad’s former life. What happened to his computer

pain and some to help with the mental pain. And then they gave him some more. And some more. When he finally suffered a psychotic break and attempted suicide, he was on about 9 different medications, some of them contraindicated with other medications he was taking. Thankfully, he has made an amazing recovery. He still struggles with his mental and physical health, but he's made steps in the right direction. If there had been more help for him, maybe he would be living a better quality of life today.

My father's experience is not a unique one. "The Red Convertible" by Louise Erdrich (1984) is a short story about two Native American brothers, Henry and Lyman, who bond over a red convertible they purchased together. Not long after, Henry leaves to fight in the Vietnam War and comes back deeply changed. Lyman tries to help him reconnect with life by restoring the convertible, but it's not enough. The story ends with Henry's suicide and the destruction of the car. The story explores themes such as brotherhood, the impact of war, and the ways we

needs of veterans, underscoring the persistent and unresolved issues of PTSD and suicide among returning soldiers, particularly within marginalized communities such as Indigenous populations. This essay explores the connection between "The Red Convertible" and the persistently high rates of suicide among veterans, examining the nature of trauma and PTSD, barriers to accessing mental health care, and the impact this has on veterans and their families. By understanding these angles, we can identify areas for improvement and advocate for more effective support systems for veterans.

The Vietnam War and the Global War on Terrorism, while separated by half a century and thousands of miles, still share some similarities. Perhaps the most prominent similarity is: an ongoing crisis among our veteran population who have an increased chance of experiencing PTSD and other mental health issues, face economic and social struggles when returning home, and find many barriers to getting the healthcare they need. All of which contribute to a rising and sustained level of suicide.

"This essay explores the connection between "The Red Convertible" and the persistently high rates of suicide among veterans, examining the nature of trauma and PTSD, barriers to accessing mental health care, and the impact this has on veterans and their families.

PTSD and Trauma

To begin, we first need to explore what PTSD is and how it affects a person's wellbeing. PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, is a mental health condition that can develop after someone experiences a traumatic event such as war, sexual violence, physical abuse, etc. The symptoms of PTSD vary in severity from person to person and can include flashbacks, nightmares, heightened startle reflexes, anxiety, heart palpitations, sweating, and more. Those with PTSD may have trouble maintaining their close relationships, trusting others,

cope with loss and grief. The tragic transformation of Henry following his return from the Vietnam War (and the nearly identical transformation of my father over 50 years later) highlights the enduring failures of the U.S. military and healthcare systems to adequately address the mental health

communicating, regulating their emotions, facing reminders of the traumatic event, etc. This may affect their outward behavior making them more irritable, more likely to have outbursts, more reckless or self-destructive, overly watchful, or having problems concentrating. This, in turn, leads to more isolation, less support, and an overall

exacerbation of symptoms. The Veteran's Health Administration estimates that 10% of Vietnam veterans and 29% of OEF/OIF will experience PTSD in their lifetime (Schnurr). Keep in mind that PTSD was not recognized as a mental health diagnosis until 1980.

In "The Red Convertible" Lyman talks about how his brother would no longer smile, eat full meals, or sit still for very long. The one exception was when he was watching TV, when he would sit so still and tensely that he once bit through his upper lip without noticing. When Lyman goes to turn off the TV one time, Henry lunges at him and shoves him against a wall. Society did not fully understand the effects of war on the human mind, but we can look at it through a more informed lens. We can see that Henry was having trouble regulating his emotions, having anxiety, and displaying paranoid behaviors. Lyman goes on to talk about how his community eventually figured out to stay away from Harry, and Lyman couldn't blame them: "It was a fact: Henry was jumpy and mean." My father's transformation was very similar. For years, we walked around our house excruciatingly carefully, trying not to move too quickly, or too loudly, or even too quietly. Any error could snap my father into war memories and we would find him outside with his large bowie knife "securing the perimeter". Unfortunately for Henry, PTSD was not formally recognized as a diagnosis until 1980, which delayed diagnosis, treatment, and support for him and veterans like him. And unfortunately for my dad, although PTSD was on the global radar, there were too many barriers to accessing help.

Barriers

One might expect that the biggest hurdle would be behind us once a war is over, but that is not always true for our returning service members. Many veterans face significant barriers to reintegrating into civilian life and getting the care they need. Due to the injuries my father sustained on tour, he was awarded disability through the VA. However, this process took years. There were many times that my parents had to weigh between my father attempting to return to work so we could pay our bills (but then losing his disability claim, which

would be disastrous if his physical symptoms acted up - and they would indeed act up for the rest of his life) or filing for bankruptcy. By the time he was finally awarded disability, our family was financially ruined. The approval wasn't the answer to all of our prayers, though. It was just enough to get by, but never ahead. I could tell this weighed on him. He struggled to live on a fixed income, especially after the divorce. When I visited his apartment in my story above, he was on the verge of homelessness.

Henry faced a different set of obstacles. We don't learn much about Henry's financial status, but we do have some other clues about the quality and accessibility of his care. Not only did Henry live in a time before PTSD was understood and diagnosable, but he lived on an Indian Reservation. According to Henry's brother, Lyman, we learn that there were no Indian doctors on the reservation. There was an old man called "Moses Pillager", but he had once courted their mother and they felt he couldn't be trusted. They didn't see "regular" hospital care as an option because back then, hospitals could commit you against your will and the treatment wasn't ideal. Not to mention there was the ingrained systemic racism that marginalized communities were subject to. Many felt they couldn't trust the healthcare system, and rightfully so. (But that's another topic for another essay.)

The disease process of PTSD makes it complicated to treat because those suffering from it may find themselves resistant to help. Even before the disease process of PTSD was understood, Lyman and his mother were able to spot several tell-tale signs of the disease, such as Henry's mood changes, jumpiness, and isolation. They knew it would be a struggle to convince him to get help. When talking about trying to get Henry to a doctor or hospital Lyman realizes, "We wouldn't get him there in the first place ... so let's just forget about it." Henry is not alone in this. The more my father sunk into his new post-war routine, that harder it was to convince him to get help. At times it was almost impossible to get him to leave his bed or study, let alone go into public.

Similar to the limited opportunities for Henry, there were many years when we lived in rural areas in Maine and Iowa and there were no VA doctors or hospitals nearby. In 2015, RAND researchers found



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

that while 93% of veterans lived within 40 miles of a VHA facility, 45% of veterans did not live within 40 miles of a VHA medical center (which offers more comprehensive services), and 74% of veterans lived 40 miles or farther from a full- service specialty care VHA clinic (Rasmussen, Petra, and Farmer). Now imagine you are a veteran suffering from hearing loss, vision loss, mobility loss, or a combination of the three, and being forty or more miles from the nearest VA medical center. It's a significant obstacle for many, especially those without vehicles or support systems to help.

As if the physical hurdles of injury and rural healthcare weren't enough, there are still the mental and emotional hurdles to overcome. There was - and still is - a stigma about seeking help for mental health. Back in Henry and Lyman's day, many people feared they would be committed or labeled crazy. Others didn't believe that the treatment would work at all, so there was no point. "They don't fix them in those places," Henry and Lyman's mother said; "they just give them drugs." While we have made immense progress in destigmatizing mental healthcare,

we still have an attitude toward pharmaceuticals with some believing they're useless and others thinking they're a magical cure. One time, in a bout of frustration, my mom asked my dad, "Can't they just give you a pill to make you normal again?" No, unfortunately, they can't. These attitudes are not helpful to the treatment plan or to the veteran in need. We have since found that the best treatment is one that actively involves the patient and multiple modalities (pharmaceuticals, therapy, peer support, etc.) based on the patient's needs.

Another important statistic, although we don't deal with it in our story, is substance abuse. The VA found that 1 in 5 veterans also have substance use disorder, and there seems to be a significant overlap between those seeking help with SUD and those with PTSD (Acierno). This fact contributes greatly impact the ability of someone to seek help and can damage existing support systems in place.

Impact

The suicide rates among veterans are alarmingly

high, and the impact of this ongoing crisis reaches far into our society. According to a 2019 report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the suicide rate among veterans was 1.5 times higher than that of the non-veteran adult population. This rate is even higher among specific groups, such as Indigenous veterans, with American Indigenous and Alaskan Native populations being 1.51 times more likely to complete a suicide attempt than White non-Hispanic people (Brenner et al). The economic and social struggles veterans face upon returning home also contribute significantly to the high suicide rates. Many veterans, like Henry and my father, find it difficult to reintegrate into civilian life. They often face unemployment, financial instability, and social isolation. These struggles are compounded by the barriers to accessing mental health care, leading many veterans to feel hopeless and alone.

The irony is those suffering from these conditions are very far from alone. A 2014 study estimates that over 1 in 4 veterans are living with a diagnosable DSM-5 mental illness such as anxiety, panic disorder, major depressive disorder, etc., and 1 in 10 are living with multiple conditions (Kessler et al.). Research suggests that family members of service members are also at risk for poor mental health outcomes (Carmichael et al.). In this way, the trauma from war becomes multigenerational. The cumulative stress of managing mental health issues, navigating bureaucracy, and coping with the aftermath of suicide can lead to chronic stress and familial burnout. This places a large burden on the healthcare system and increases a feeling of instability in our society. If those who paid the ultimate price aren't taken care of, what does that mean for the rest of us?

The impact of these suicides extends beyond the individual, affecting families, friends, and entire communities. In "The Red Convertible," Henry's suicide leaves Lyman devastated, reflecting the broader societal impact of veteran suicides. My father's transformation after the war contributed to his divorce, financial ruin, and health issues, and left the rest of us traumatized in its wake. As you can see, veteran health isn't just a matter of honoring our service members, it's crucial to the wellbeing of our entire society.

Conclusion

The enduring high rates of suicide among veterans, as illustrated in "The Red Convertible," and my father's journey reflect persistent systemic failures in addressing PTSD and mental health issues. To improve the situation, it is crucial to address these systemic barriers. This includes ensuring accessible mental health care, reducing the stigma associated with seeking help, and providing comprehensive support for veterans and their families. Advocacy and policy changes are needed to allocate sufficient resources and funding to veteran mental health programs.

By understanding the complex multitude of factors contributing to veteran suicide, we can better support those who have served our country. Addressing these issues is not only a matter of honoring the sacrifices of our veterans but also of ensuring their well-being and reintegration into civilian life. As a society, we must commit to providing the care and support our veterans deserve, helping them heal and thrive after their service. At the very least, I wish I could go back and fill my dad's fridge. God knows he deserved it.



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

PROFESSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This personal reflection piece was written by Kristan Hennessy as part of Professor Teresa Gazella's English Composition II course at ACC.

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Kristan Hennessy is a student at Austin Community College in Austin, TX. As a witness to the profound struggles her father faced after his military service, she is deeply committed to shedding light on the persistent issues of PTSD and veteran suicide.

THE POTENTIAL ECONOMIC

Impact

Of A Local Library Closure On A Community:

Swannanoa Library, Buncombe County, NC

Abstract

The closure of a local public library can have economic repercussions on its community, impacting residents, educational outcomes, and overall social welfare. This paper delves into the potential economic consequences of the closure of Swannanoa Library in Buncombe County, NC, and examines how modern economic theories, especially Mankiw's theories of trade-offs, opportunity costs, and marginal costs vs benefits, can provide a convincing argument for keeping the library open.

Drawing on insights from several sources,

which highlight the impact of library closures on communities, this study investigates the decision by the Chamber of Commerce of Buncombe County to shut down the Swannanoa branch due to maintenance costs. Partially motivated by my personal ties to the community, I employ a multidisciplinary approach, combining research on library community impacts, income distribution, and budget analysis to assess the implications of this closure. Comparative analysis of the Swannanoa community's economic indicators against those of greater Buncombe County reveal stark disparities



KELDA HARRISON

“I’m so grateful to finally be back in school after 15 years and following my dream of studying economics! I truly feel that I’m right where I was always meant to be. I’m so honored to have my writing featured in Curiositas!”

in income, property value, and poverty rates, indicating the library’s vital role in serving a predominantly low-income population. Budgetary data from Buncombe County underscores the feasibility of repairing and retaining the Swannanoa library within the broader framework of library funding.

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center, “Some 90% of Americans ages 16 and older said that the closing of their local public library would have an impact on their community, with 63% saying it would have a “major” impact. When asked about the personal impact of a public library closing, two-thirds (67%) of Americans said it would affect them and their families, including 29% who said it would have a “major” impact (Pew Research Center).”

In February of 2024, the Chamber of Commerce of Buncombe County, NC announced that it was closing down the Swannanoa branch of its library system: claiming that its ongoing maintenance of the facility would be too costly (McCormick, Fred). I developed a particular interest in this story, as I used to reside in the Swannanoa community as a young, low-income, single mother, and I often frequented the library there with my son. In this paper, I research library community impacts,

analyze Buncombe County income and budget data, and explore the potential opportunity cost to residents caused by this action of the local government as well as the potential benefits of keeping the library open.

The Issue According to Buncombe County

According to the Buncombe County Library website, the Swannanoa library serves over 20,000 visitors per year (around 58 visitors per day). With \$635,000 in repairs needed (a cost of \$31.75 per annual visitor in addition to the regular yearly library budget), the county officials argued in their February 2024 announcement that the cost would exceed the benefit to the county’s residents (Buncombe County). But what really is the value of a library in a community? And what would the opportunity cost for residents be if the Swannanoa library closed?

Swannanoa vs the Entirety of Buncombe County: Income and Property Value Data

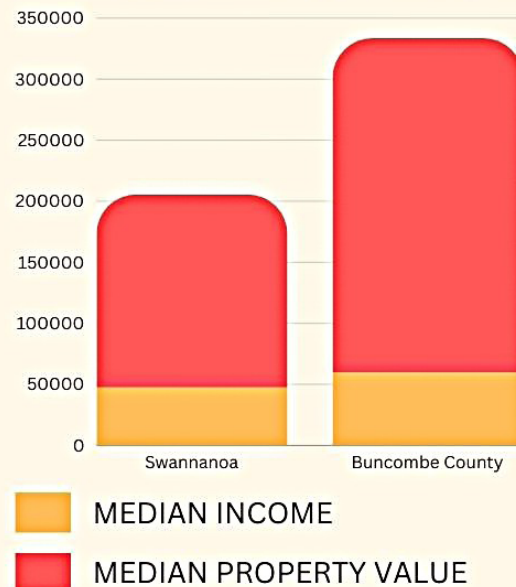
According to Data USA, as of 2021 Swannanoa had a median household income of \$47,633 or a median hourly wage of approximately \$23/hour

per household. The median property value was \$158,000, which was significantly lower than the county as a whole. The poverty rate was 22%. As per their website, “The most common job groups, by number of people living in Swannanoa, NC, are Food Preparation & Serving Related Occupations (268 people), Management Occupations (214 people), and Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance Occupations (184 people).” These industries are generally lower paying and employ a less educated workforce than other industries.

In contrast, the entirety of Buncombe County had a median household income of \$59,699 or a median hourly wage of approximately \$29/hour per household. The median property value was \$273,900 and the poverty rate was 10.9%, less than half that of Swannanoa (Data USA).

One could also reasonably conclude, based on the data, that the closure of the Swannanoa library branch would likely reallocate county resources

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND PROPERTY VALUE AS OF 2021 SWANNANOVA VS BUNCOMBE COUNTY AS A WHOLE ACCORDING TO DATA USA



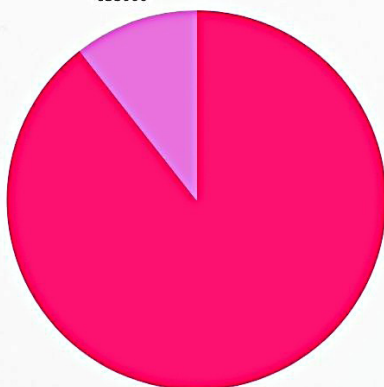
from a neighborhood with less wealth to ones with more, thereby increasing inequality.

Buncombe County Budget Data as it Relates to Public Library Funding

The Buncombe County 2024 budget, easily accessed online, describes both funding sources and expenditures for the year. Most of the county’s funding (around 60%) comes from property taxes, and the county’s revenue has steadily risen each year. Buncombe County’s revenue currently totals \$396,977,496 for fiscal year 2023/2024, an increase in 6.88% over the previous year.

Within the budget, \$8,716,617 is earmarked for Library spending for 12 branch libraries in fiscal year 2024, and an additional \$5,365,778 is assessed as part of the capital improvement program budget on top of the regular library budget for library specific repairs and improvements in the next 4 fiscal years. If divided evenly, the yearly budget for FY 2024/2025 comes out to approximately \$726,385 per library location. This does not include the capital improvement library budget (Buncombe County).

Swannanoa Library Repair Estimate
635000



**BUNCOMBE COUNTY CIP
LIBRARY BUDGET FY
2024-28**

**SWANNANOVA LIBRARY
REPAIR ESTIMATE**

CIP Library Budget
536578

**Buncombe County Capital
Improvement Project Library
Budget FY 2025-2028**

Crunching the Numbers

The \$635,000 investment needed to repair and retain the Swannanoa library location equates to less than 12% of the assessed 4 year capital improvement library budget (Buncombe County).

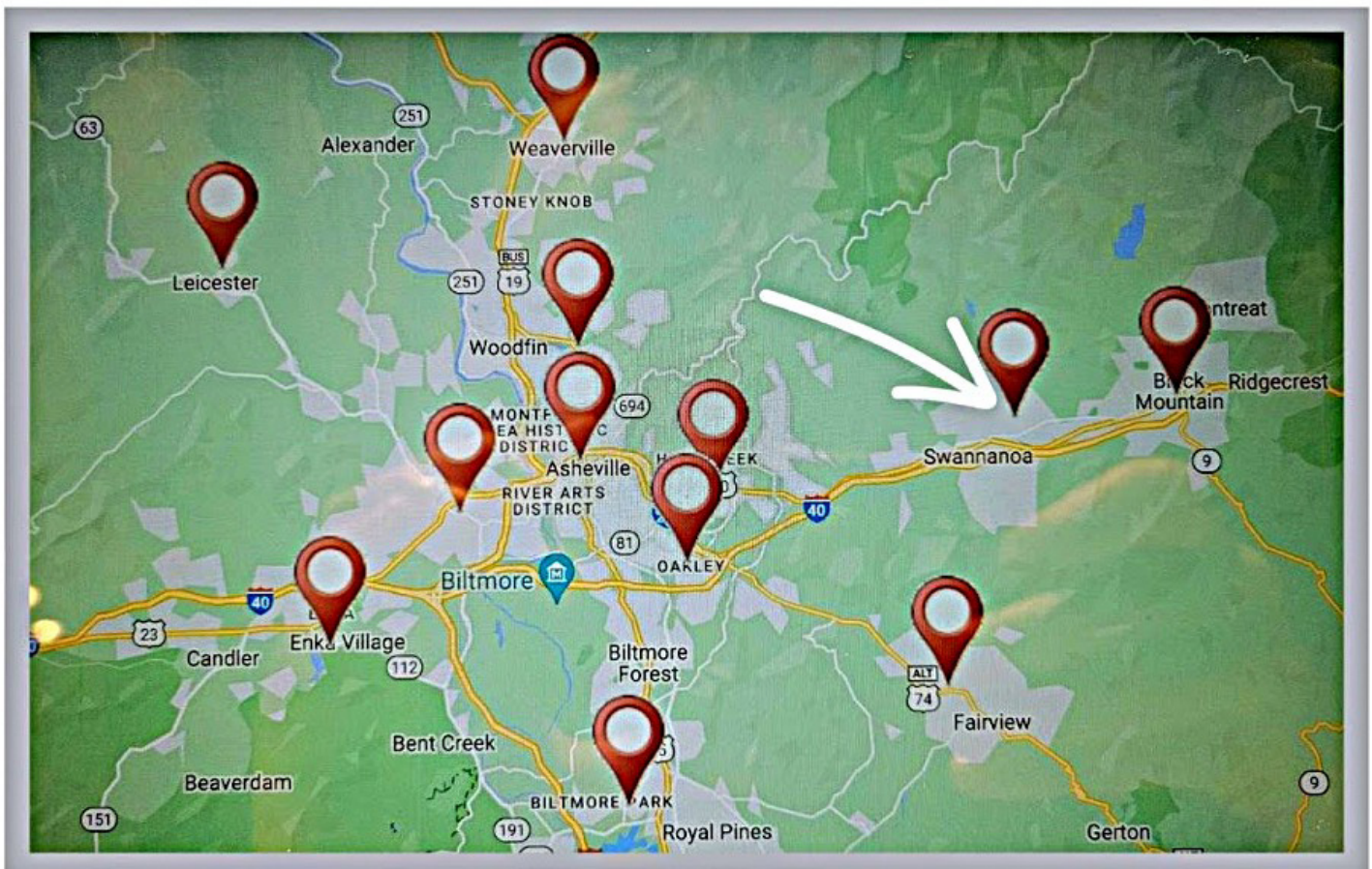
Additionally, if the cost of \$635,000 of estimated library repairs is divided by the population of Swannanoa, which as of 2021 was 4,589, the total per capita expenditure would be approximately \$138 (Data USA).

Library Locations, Trade-offs, and the Potential Social Marginal Cost vs Benefit of the Loss of the Swannanoa Location

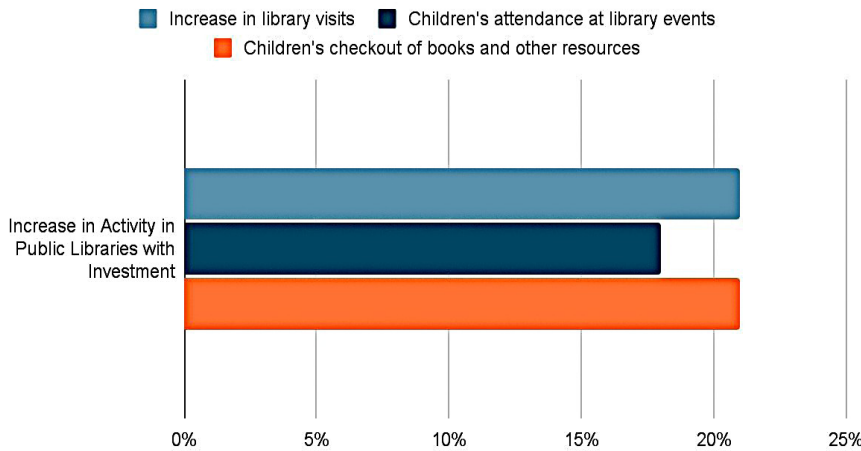
According to Gregory Mankiw, “The principle of trade-offs is quite simple. It states that every time a person acquires something, it is at the cost of something else (University of the People).” This applies to the issue at hand. Keeping the Swannanoa library branch open is a trade-off. Its repair will not

only utilize public funds, but also potentially take resources away from other libraries, so is it worth it?

As seen in the map (Buncombe County), if the Swannanoa library were to be closed, there would be a noticeably larger gap in the library service area when compared with other locations in the county. This closure could result in a significant social opportunity cost for residents of the Swannanoa area. In economic theory, we assume people act rationally, so “consumers will try to choose a product or service which gives them the best price, opportunity cost, and benefit (Mankiw, University of the People).” If the branch closes and families or individuals want to use library resources, they will be forced to drive or take public transport to one of the other libraries. This will result in a commute of up to an hour round-trip; an hour that might otherwise be spent working. The marginal cost of this at the median area wage would be \$23 plus the cost of transportation (Data USA). Considering these factors, a family or individual may choose not to make the trip because, when they weigh the



Increase in library visits, Children's attendance at library events and Children's checkout of books and other resources



as did children's attendance at library events (up 18%), and children's checkouts of books and other resources (up 21%). Student achievement in reading also increased significantly (but, as one might expect, not in math). We then compare the size of impact on student achievement to gains from the construction of a new elementary school building. On average, a new public library results in increases to student reading achievement that are 29% of the size of those associated with the opening of a new

marginal cost vs. the marginal benefit, they might decide the cost is too high.

Libraries and Their Effect on Educational Outcomes

Now let's explore how fewer library visits could also result in a higher than initially perceived cost to the local community, especially in the area of educational resources.

According to *Great Schools*, a national website used to holistically judge schools' performance, all three schools in the area directly surrounding the Swannanoa library are only rated at a dismal 2/10 (*Great Schools*). This is important because studies have shown that local libraries may impact educational outcomes.

According to an article by Gregory Gilpin:

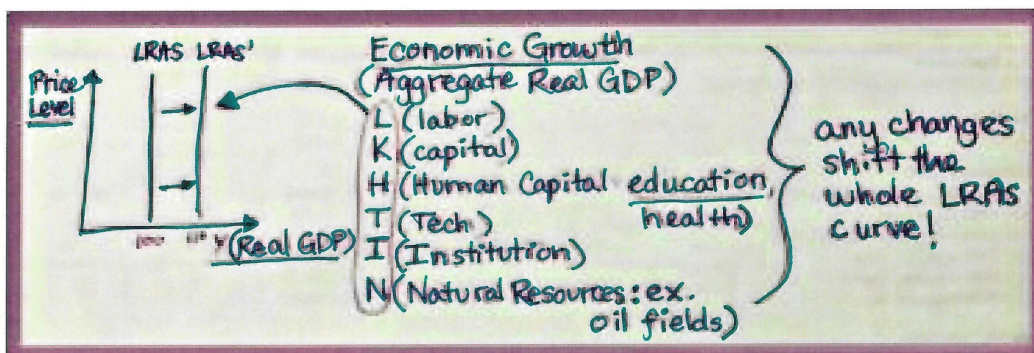
"When a new [library] branch opens or an existing branch is substantially renovated, we found that library visits increased (up 21%),

elementary school building, at 15% of the cost of the new school (Gilpin, Gregory)."

This is a clear argument for the importance of public libraries. What better reason could there be to spend the available county funds to renovate the library in Swannanoa, especially considering the state of local academic institutions?

Broader Theoretical Economic Implications

Now we can see how libraries positively affect educational outcomes, and we know from modern economic theory that government investment in education is one of the factors that can increase GDP and shift the real GDP curve to the right, increasing long-run output. Therefore, according to this model, an investment in the public library may ultimately positively impact the local economy in the long run.





SWANNANOA LIBRARY, SWANNANOA, NORTH CAROLINA. IMAGE COURTESY OF BUNCOMBE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES. WWW.BUNCOMBECOUNTY.ORG/GOVERNING/DEPTS/LIBRARY/BRANCH-LOCATIONS/SWANNANOA.ASPX

Conclusion

In conclusion, the closure of Swannanoa Library in Buncombe County, NC, presents a complex economic dilemma with profound implications for the community.

Careful analysis of Buncombe County's income and property value data reveals significant disparities between Swannanoa and the rest of the county, emphasizing the library's vital role in serving a predominantly low-income population. The county's budgetary allocations suggest the feasibility of repairing and retaining the library, but questions do arise regarding trade-offs and resource allocation.

Considerations of the social marginal costs versus benefits of the decision highlight the potential impact on residents' access to educational resources and overall well-being. Studies cited highlight the positive correlation between library access and educational outcomes and underscore the importance of preserving such community resources.

Moreover, from a theoretical economic

perspective, government investment in educational resources, including public libraries, is recognized as a driver of long-term economic growth. Therefore, investment in the Swannanoa library could yield positive returns for the local economy over time.

In light of all of these considerations, preserving access to educational resources and fostering inclusive economic growth should be prioritized in shaping policy decisions regarding the future of the library.

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PIXELATED

Games
exploring the
“New Old”

Based on a video narrated and created by Aiden Spicer, adapted story for print.

For many gamers, especially those from older generations, modern games may seem to have taken a step backward in terms of graphics. Why, in an era of hyper-realistic visuals, do we see a resurgence of pixelated, retro-style games? To answer this question, let's dive into the world of 8-bit gaming—through the lens of Minecraft.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN8d3wPNSFU>

“This video explores how pixelated graphics are making a comeback, with modern games like Minecraft embracing lower resolutions, creating a ‘new old’ aesthetic as games seem to be regressing in terms of graphical fidelity.”

Special thanks to Professor Crowl for making me fall in love with writing.



AIDEN SPICER

Why?

Do games seem to
be going **back in**
time?

8-bit Graphics -

*"8-bit art is a form of digital art made
with raster graphics software, where
images are edited on the [singular] pixel
level" ("Design Boom").*

www.gamesradar.com

below, **Half Life 2** - 2004



above, **Minecraft** - 2011

THE QUESTION: WHY ARE GAMES GOING BACK IN TIME?

Take a look at two games: Half-Life 2 (2004) and Minecraft (2011). When Half-Life 2 was released, one of its main selling points was its extreme attention to detail, including cutting-edge graphics for its time. By contrast, Minecraft, which launched nearly a decade later, features intentionally low-resolution, blocky visuals reminiscent of early gaming. Yet, despite the graphical contrast, Minecraft has over a million daily active players today, while Half-Life 2 lingers at around 3,000. So why do players continue to gravitate toward pixelated games?

THE POWER OF 8-BIT GRAPHICS

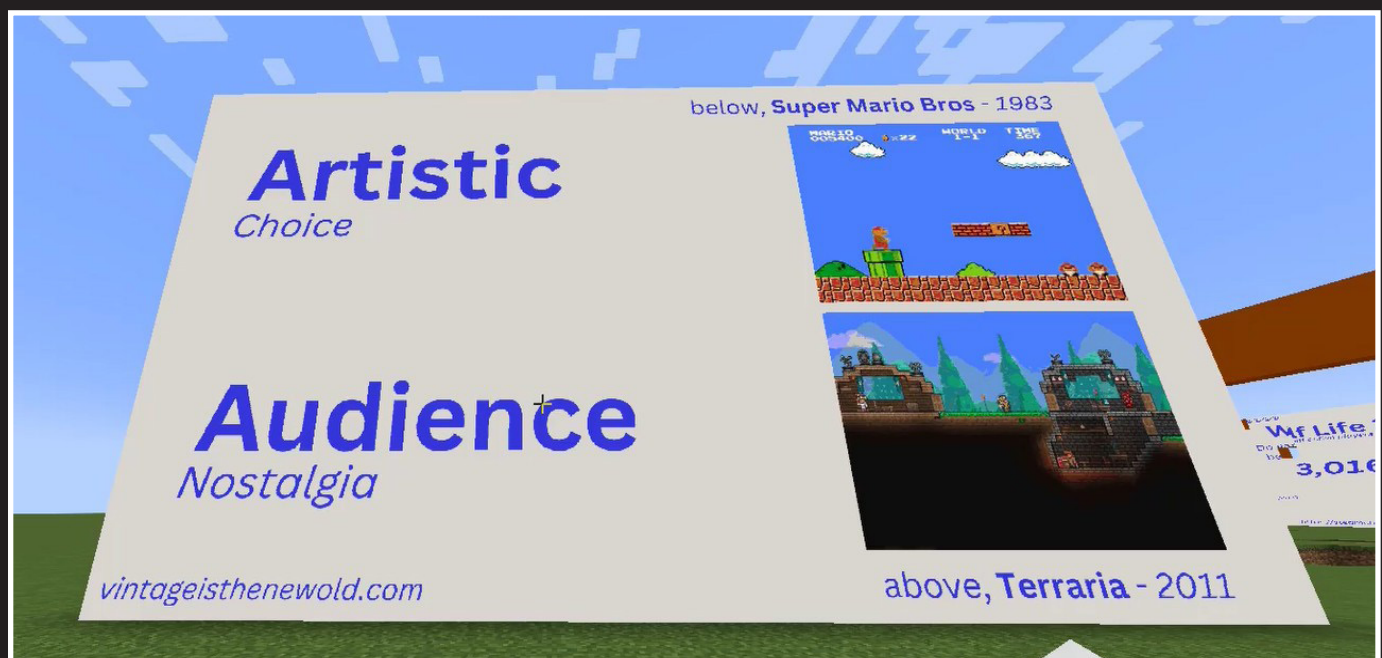
At its core, 8-bit graphics are a form of digital art created with raster software, where images are edited on a pixel-by-pixel level. In simpler terms, these visuals are intentionally lower resolution, allowing each individual pixel to be distinctly visible. This might seem like a step backward, but the reality is that pixel art serves a greater purpose.

One might assume that a game with higher-quality graphics would automatically be more popular. However, the success of Minecraft and other 8-bit-inspired games proves otherwise. The answer lies in two key factors: **artistic choice** and **audience nostalgia**.

THE TWO A'S: ARTISTIC CHOICE AND AUDIENCE NOSTALGIA

Artistic Choice – Many developers choose an 8-bit aesthetic for several reasons. First, it's significantly cheaper and easier to develop than photorealistic graphics. As game development becomes more accessible, independent developers often opt for a pixelated style, which allows them to allocate resources elsewhere—such as gameplay mechanics, storytelling, or innovation.

Audience Nostalgia – Many modern games intentionally draw inspiration from older titles to evoke nostalgia among players. Take Super Mario Bros. (1983) and Terraria (2011), for example. While decades apart, these games share a similar 2D aesthetic that resonates with older players while still appealing to new generations.



VINTAGE INFLUENCE ON MODERN GAMING

Retro-style graphics continue to shape the gaming industry.

The resemblance isn't coincidental. Developers understand that simplicity often fuels creativity and that nostalgia remains a powerful draw for players.



Vintage Influence

"The 8-bit Aesthetic"

(listed top-bottom)

Terraria - 2011

Super Mario Bros. -

Stardew Valley -

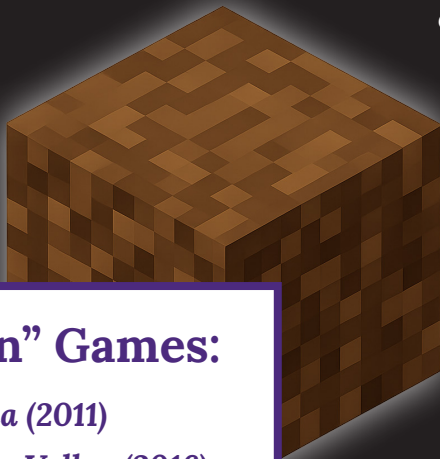
1983

2016

DOOM - 1993

Minecraft - 2011

Sonic - 1991



“Modern” Games:

- Terraria (2011)
- Stardew Valley (2016)
- Minecraft (2011)



“Vintage” Games:

- Super Mario Bros. (1983)
- Doom (1993)
- Sonic the Hedgehog (1991)

“Modern” Games:



“Vintage” Games:



THE APPEAL FOR GEN Z: CREATIVITY OVER REALISM

While older generations may appreciate retro games for nostalgic reasons, Gen Z players find value in their creative freedom. Take *Minecraft*, for instance. Despite its pixelated appearance, the game allows limitless possibilities. Blocks, though simple, can be combined to create anything imaginable—from sprawling cities to functioning computers within the game itself.

Comparing *Minecraft* to *Garry's Mod*, another popular sandbox game, reveals an interesting contrast. While *Garry's Mod* offers more realistic graphics, the added detail actually limits creative freedom. In *Minecraft*, the lower resolution allows for more modular construction, enabling players to build with fewer restrictions. Ironically, by sacrificing hyper-realism, *Minecraft* grants players greater creative potential.



GARRY'S MOD - 2006



MINECRAFT - 2011



THE FUTURE OF 8-BIT GAMING

So, where are we headed? Given the success of pixelated games, it's clear that 8-bit aesthetics are not just a passing trend. Their affordability, ease of development, and creative flexibility make them an appealing choice for new and veteran developers alike. As gaming continues to evolve, the influence of retro graphics will persist, proving that sometimes, simplicity is the key to longevity.

In a world where technology is constantly advancing, the charm of pixelated games reminds us that innovation isn't always about pushing boundaries. It's also about embracing the past.

Pixelated Games

exploring the "New Old"

+

Aiden Spicer

PROFESSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Created by Aiden Spicer, this video brings to life the comeback story of pixelated games, as part of Professor Rob Crowl's English Composition I course at ACC.

"If there's one thing I've learned from capturing my soul into this piece of fiction and connecting with not-so-lost lost souls who share a similar love for the gothic, it is this: "Listen to them. Children of the night. What music they make", from Dracula. Always follow the strange, the wonderful, and the twisted inside you—oh, and don't forget to jumpscare your local normies!"



KAYDEE "DEE" ELOFF

STRANGE CASE OF MR HYDE,

After

DR JEKYLL

“God knows; I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end.”

But what if this was different from how our story concluded? In an alternate storyline where Edward Hyde took over the body of Dr Jekyll before his suicide, how would characters, including Mr. Utterson, react? Where would he go after? And finally, who would Hyde go on to become?

Hyde's first action, I believe, is to ransack the doctor's house before committing yet another violent crime:

EDWARD HYDE'S RECENTLY ACQUIRED FREEDOM

18 – –, Dr Jekyll's house, Leicester Square

In a daddle¹ slanted strangely and a notebook not belonging to me, I write that I, Edward Hyde, am now an unrestrained man. It is my turn now. That toff² scientist thought he could cage me using that highfalutin³ potion of his. But he was wrong, so utterly wrong; this body always belonged to me. Every nasty thought, every private desire, passion, and craving the doctor had I allowed him to act upon, the sensation of unrestrained power infected him until I had him in my cold, bony clutch. Nightly, I battled against his mind; the man was sharp but still was nothing compared to a behemoth⁴ like I am.

The muscles in my hand ached for destruction, and the feeling of liberation pulsed through me. These hands are *mine* to command. There will be no more tugging at the ends of my conciseness, the pathetic man's pleas buzzing in my mind like an aggravating fly. His body, his rules, crumble

in my grasp. The world is mine, mine to ravage. Jekyll's mind is a faded echo of a weak man. And it is glorious.

For my first act of emancipation, I have taken what is owed to me from the geezer⁵ scientist. His 'perfect' life, oh, how I tore through it. I ripped up his precious science papers and his books – dull things they are – I ripped the pages out and flung them carelessly across the room. Oh, but the more I destroyed, the quicker my heart ran, the stronger my uproar continued. I moved as quickly as my bad leg would allow, ripping out the drawer containing the mixture that once gave me life, the glass sparkling and pristine. With a holler, I smashed the bottle. The liquid spilt, soaking into his carpet like blood seeping from a wound. Oh, how he would have begged me not to do what I have done, but I broke it all, didn't I?

The air was thick with destruction; his laboratory stepped in chaos, and I, Hyde, stood in the middle of it. I absolutely *relished* this release of emotion, the destruction of all Jekyll held dear. I could not have been more *alive* in his moment. Alas, this is when I heard the chary⁶ footsteps of that poltroon⁷ Poole. Does he think he could stop a deity⁸ such as myself? I smiled to myself, savouring the tension; he would arrive any second.

“Master Jekyll?” he called, a tremble on his voice.

Flinging open the door, I saw his visage⁹, looking like he had seen a ghost! That Doddypoll¹⁰, his eyes wide with disbelief as he takes in my wreckage. I fed on his fear, sweet, intoxicating fear.

“Ah, Poole. Just in time, sir”, I said, drawing this name out like a curse.

“How nice of you to join me,” I said with a merry smile, never breaking eye contact.

The servant didn’t move at first; the man stood frozen in the doorway. I could almost see his mind racing. Maybe he wished this was only a nightmare he could be awakened from.

“What have you done to the master’s laboratory?” he muttered.

Stepping forward, I respond, “I’ve done exactly what needed to be done, Poole.

Destroyed Henry.” Once again, I spat the valet’s¹¹ name out with venom. “You- you’ll pay for his Mr Hyde.”

I felt the electric tension between us, and my hands itched for action. He must have been thinking of running or calling for help, and I thought, I must act before he does.

“Nothing you do will make a difference. And never defy me again, peasant.” I hissed, my smile dropping.

I stepped forward to the man and drew my hand back. With that, I left Poole batty-fanged¹² and cut my stick¹³.

In indisputable freedom,

Edward Hyde.

The motivation behind Hyde’s destruction of Jekyll’s laboratory comes down to Hyde not wanting another person to recreate the same experiment or tracking Hyde down to somehow change him back to Jekyll. I chose not to write in any attempt by Hyde to find a written down formula for the transformation serum as I believe Hyde’s characters to lack not only the forethought and intelligence but the time to look for it, with his newfound complete control and freedom, Hyde’s wish is to flee the scene and begin a life of perversity and crime, haunting the streets of London. Unfortunately, his haste and uncontrollable temper provoked him to assault the doctor’s servant irrationally. Luckily for the servant, Hyde’s recklessness also drove him only to harm, not murder.

Richard Dury wrote on page 33 of his 2005 work ‘Strange Language of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’, that “[t]here is a pleasure in noticing that things are different (deriving from unexpected sequences and from a fresh way of conceptualising the world) while you are nevertheless still able to follow the language and the ideas perfectly”. I attempted to mimic this writing technique of Stevenson when I say how there was “a tremble on his voice”, instead of “in his voice”, about Poole.

Secondly, there would be a chapter describing the thoughts of Dr Jekyll’s high-class companions in the wake of his disappearance:



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

THE CONCERN OF A RICH MAN'S ASSOCIATES

Mr. Utterson's home was situated on a quiet, respectable street. In this neighbourhood, which embodied the middle class of London, the bundlings themselves, although modest, seemed well-maintained. The bricks are slightly weathered from years in the London rain, and the windows, although spotless, are narrow slithers that permit limited sight into the residence, a sign of a private man, slightly hidden from the outside world. The front garden was kept orderly and lush with well-trimmed bushes, and even the very stones of the walkway were arranged carefully, as though the trail to his door was designed to be precise and direct.



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

Inside the lawyer's home, the lounge is furnished simply but comfortably, with no grand art exhibitions or unnecessary displays of wealth. Every item in the room was well-crafted and not too extravagant; all were practical and functional. The lighting was soft and gentle, with muted lamps sitting on side tables, emitting a warm glow in the home in contrast to the foggy mist of early evening outside. There was a sense of calm and even a bit of loneliness in how his space was organised. Everything is as it should be, just as Utterson

himself was a man of stability over all else, except for in the time of a disappeared scientist.

"Settle down, Gabriel. Surely, he'll turn up in time. Perhaps he required space for a new and exciting experiment. I am sure your friend is all tickety-boo!" says Mr. Guest, in an attempt to settle his cousin.

"How could you say that in a time like this?" The otherwise put together Utterson exclaims.

"I have not seen Jekyll for a week! Was it not you who noticed the similarities between our friend's handwriting and that of the skilamalink² Hyde? There must be something more to this; we must discover what this all means!"

"My cousin, this is unlike you," Mr Guest gently states, once again making a failed attempt at restoring calm.

"I have not been sleeping out of worry. When I last saw the man, he appeared to be in deep inner turmoil. It pains me to see a distinguished man like our Jekyll disappear. A man of his prominence does not simply vanish..." At the end of this exertive sentence, Utterson slumps down in his chair, clearly depleted by anxiety.

"Speaking of nonattendance," he pauses. Where is Dr Lanyon?" Utterson enquires with a sense of exasperation dripping from his voice.

Guest examines his cousin with deep tenderness: "I attempted to persuade Hastie to attend; unfortunately, he and Jekyll fell out recently. Lanyon said their beliefs are too different to get along. He described Jekyll's theories as scientific balderdash." He clears his throat, "he may have wondered if it is for the best if he was gone." Mr Guest squeaks out, cringing.

"That vermin! To turn his back on a friend! How dishonourable of him." Utterson exclaims. A look of disapproval smudged across his face.

"There is only one option left. I can no longer wait as Hyde plagues good men like Jekyll.

Quickly, old chap! Let us call our gentlemen in blue and white³."

In Stevenson's original work, Mr Utterson appears to care deeply about Jekyll, hinting at

a relationship between them that is more than professional, one of companionship. Due to their friendship, Mr Utterson would have called together a meeting at his home with Jekyll's affiliates, a cabinet of Jekyll, if you will. Dr Lanyon would not have been in attendance as he and Jekyll ended on a sour note in the original, primarily due to their disagreement on scientific practises.

In the third section of the alternate storyline, Hyde would have already fled after collecting his belongings at the home Jekyll provided, so he finds another place to stay:

A SAFE PLACE TO HYDE

18 --, Bethnal Green

That dratted¹ pettifogger²! Thinking that he could use a mutton shunter³ to track me down! Seemingly, that fool Jekyll had a few concerned chuckaboos⁴ who supposed they would take matters

into their own hands. I'm not even safe powdering hair⁵! Only a week of time to myself before I heard whispers from the strumpets⁶ in the pubs looking for a dashing man with a chevy chase⁷ resembling mine. Those floozers⁸, do they not know the work I had put into my escape!?

Nonetheless, I have secured lodging in east London. Oh, how the home spoke to my soul. The windows are cracked and clouded with dark yellow filth, as if the light could not conjure the strength to shine through and bother me during the unbearable light hours. The scent of stale smoke and rot clung to the interior, the type of scent the deceased doctor would have simply detested! My wallpaper is stripped of its previous paint, cracked with time, a badge of the house's survival. The place isn't flawed but is a testament to its endurance and what it has withstood. A true mirror of my own survival and a rebellion against the cleanliness of Henry Jekyll. Not to mention the excellent price on the digs⁹! As long as you look past the cramped layout...bugs... and



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

that minging¹⁰ mattress...any road¹¹! I don't spend much time here between dollymops¹², avoiding the peelers¹³, and bumping people off¹⁴. Apparently, there is a nickname for old Hyde! Damfino¹⁵ why these cockneys¹⁶ gave me such a dull name like "Jack The Ripper".

Hyde wanted to do as his name says and escape the watchful eyes of Jekyll's friends; a man with such a respected reputation does not disappear without notice.

Until I feel bothered to write again,
The man formerly known as Edward Hyde.

Hyde would not have stayed in the residence that Jekyll provided because it would have traced back too quickly. Hyde wanted to do as his name says and escape the watchful eyes of Jekyll's friends; a man with such a respected reputation does not disappear without notice.

Although I have mentioned Hyde's lack of forethought, I still accept that Hyde would have a special knack for sneakiness and crime; fleeing a crime scene would be nothing unfamiliar to him. Inconveniently for Hyde, although they may have shared a host body, they do not share a bank account. The options for residence, coupled with Hyde's typical nonchalant attitude, caused him to find residence in an area his long-gone aristocratic friend (Jekyll) would have disapproved of.

A big theme (or perhaps a commentary on Victorian London society) of Stevenson's work is that

word travels quickly throughout London. After all, a reputation can be ruined in a day. Because of this, I believe that Hyde would have been overhearing about Jekyll's investigation in the pubs he frequents.

In conclusion, rewriting the ending of the beloved tale opens up a new understanding of Hyde's character. It especially opens us up to different interpretations of him because, in Stevenson's story, Hyde has no point of view. I feel as though I have written a version of Hyde that

highlights the arrogance, defiance, and irrational actions typical of the character. I attempted to write in a way that a man of Hyde's time, class level and education level would have, incorporating Victorian-era slang I hope I used correctly, and mimicked Stevenson once again in the use of titles for both individual chapters and the work as a whole. Dury discusses the effect of Stevenson's title in "[t]he slight strangeness that makes the reader linguistically-aware starts with the title of this work, where we feel an initial definite article would be more normal, – the author 'refrains from even the exactitude of the definite article. It is "Strange Case,"—a wholly disconnected imaginary succession of events—not "The Strange Case," implying a certain experimental knowledge (34)". The comment about using "experimental knowledge" accurately describes my work, as we have no clear look into the mind of Hyde I used my own perceptions of the character to build around. Overall, this experience has permitted me to research Stevenson's writing techniques, meaning, impressiveness, and works more deeply.

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GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY FOR “STRANGE CASE OF MR HYDE, AFTER DR JEKYLL” BY DEE ELOFF

Chapter I: EDWARD HYDE’S RECENTLY ACQUIRED FREEDOM

1. Daddle: Victorian-era English slang for hand
2. Toff: Derogatory word for someone with an aristocratic background
3. Highfalutin: Victorian-era English slang for pretentious or fancy
4. Behemoth: Someone or something that is abnormally large and powerful.
5. Geezer: Victorian-era English slang for a typically older and unpleasant man
6. Chary: Victorian-era English slang for sorrowful or pathetic
7. Poltroon: Victorian-era English slang for a coward
8. Deity: A supernatural being or divine creature/ god
9. Visage: Victorian-era English slang for face
10. Doddypoll: Victorian-era English slang for a stupid person or blockhead
11. Valet: A word meaning manservant / a man’s personal male attendant in British English
12. Batty-fanged: Victorian-era English slang meaning to be beaten badly
13. Cut my stick: Victorian-era English slang meaning to leave or run away

Chapter II: THE CONCERN OF A RICH MAN’S ASSOCIATES

1. Tickety-boo: Victorian-era English slang for in good order or to be fine
2. Skilamalink: Victorian-era English slang for someone dishonest or underhanded
3. Gentlemen in blue and white: Victorian-era English slang for the police

Chapter III: A SAFE PLACE TO HYDE

1. Dratted: British version of “damn”
2. Pettifogger: British slang for a dishonest or untrustworthy lawyer
3. Mutton shunter: Derogatory Victorian-era English slang for the police
4. Chuckaboos: Affectionate Victorian-era English slang for friends
5. Powdering hair: Victorian-era English slang for getting drunk
6. Strumpets: Victorian-era English slang meaning whore or prostitute
7. Chevy chase: Victorian-era English slang for face
8. Floozers: Victorian-era English slang for a person who tends to mess things up
9. Digs: Victorian-era English slang for rented accommodations
10. Minging: Victorian-era English slang meaning poor quality, disgusting or unpleasant
11. Any road: Victorian-era English slang meaning anyway or anyhow
12. Dollymops: A woman who dabbled in prostitution during the Victorian era

13. Peelers: The London police force
14. Bumping people off/ to bump off: An expression believed to have Victorian roots, meaning to kill someone in a casual manner
15. Damfino: Victorian abbreviation for “damn if I know”
16. Cockney: A person from London

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Empathy:

The Flame Of HUMAN CONNECTION

Throughout history, fear has been a powerful tool to sustain power, often casting marginalized groups as existential threats. This tactic is far from new. Literary critic Edward Said's *Orientalism* reminds us that fear works

through binaries—rigid divisions like “civilized” versus “savage” or insider versus outsider—that simplify and dehumanize. These fear-driven constructs are as old as empire itself, designed to justify domination by framing the ‘other’ as



CHRIS MURPHY

“My favorite part about this essay was being able to apply my own interests and relate my major to the work. I would’ve never thought that post-apocalyptic literature could have so much intrigue to me.”

exploitable or dangerous. The disconnect between the two binaries is eventually enough to dehumanize the “other” beyond empathy, something echoed throughout contemporary post-apocalyptic literature. These works often portray a version of society that has fractured along the lines of exclusion and division under the guise of fear or protection.

Fear-driven systems of control thrive by creating rigid hierarchies that divide and dehumanize, but these systems ultimately undermine humanity’s ability to connect and survive. This framework resonates across *Severance* by Ling Ma, *The People of Sand and Slag* by Paolo Bacigalupi, and *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler, where fear fractures societies and leads to inevitable collapse. Yet, each text also suggests that empathy has the power to subvert these oppressive systems. Instead of a liability, empathy becomes the foundation for resisting division and imagining a future where connection triumphs over fear. In these apocalyptic worlds—and in our own—it is empathy that offers the possibility of meaningful survival.

Fear is a potent tool for oppression, fracturing societies and sustaining hierarchies by fostering division and distrust. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* demonstrates how systems of power engineer fear to justify exclusion and control, often through the construction of binaries—such as “civilized” versus “savage” or “us” versus “them”—that reduce the “other” to a simplified, exploitable caricature. While Said’s critique primarily examines imperialist frameworks of East versus West, the mechanisms he identifies—such as stereotyping, superiority complexes, and the denial of agency—are not confined to that context. The dynamics of exclusion and fear that Said critiques in imperialist contexts also surface in post-apocalyptic literature. In these fractured societies, fear of the “other” fuels dehumanization and division, building walls that isolate and alienate. Said’s critique of fear as a tool of hierarchy resonates here, reflecting how trust disintegrates, empathy weakens, and the connections essential to humanity break down under such pressure.

At its core, *Orientalism* critiques how power leverages fear to dehumanize. The “inferior Orient” is not understood as a complex entity but is reduced

to stereotypes that serve the dominant power. Said explains, “*Orientalism*... [is] a way of thinking based upon a binary distinction between the ‘inferior Orient’ and the ‘superior Occident’” (Said). This binary casts the “other” as inherently threatening, justifying subjugation and the systems that sustain it. Critic Michael Craig Hillmann underscores the relevance of *Orientalism* today, calling for the dismantling of “ethnocentric predispositions and biases” to foreground the humanity of marginalized perspectives (Hillmann).

While Said’s framework addresses historical empires, these dynamics are not confined to the past. They are ever-present in modern societies and vividly amplified in apocalyptic literature. Said’s framework proves essential for analyzing texts like *Severance*, *The People of Sand and Slag*, and *Parable of the Sower*, where post-apocalyptic worlds depict fear as the central mechanism for division, oppression, and above all, control. Each narrative takes Said’s observations of imperialist systems to their logical extremes, showing how fear fractures societies and leaves humanity incapable of meaningful connection.

In *Severance*, Ling Ma critiques the dehumanization embedded in capitalism, portraying a world where its routines strip humanity of connection and prevent individuals from rebuilding meaningful relationships. The narrative follows an apocalyptic-scale pandemic, *Shen Fever*, caused by fungal spores that developed under grueling factory conditions in China. Ma draws a clear metaphor: *Shen Fever*



IMAGE CREATED BY
ADOBE FIREFLY AI
GENERATOR

amplifies the way capitalism dehumanizes workers, eroding individuality, prioritizing productivity, and corroding human connections. Even Candace, the Chinese-American protagonist, chooses to cope with the collapse of society the only way she really knows how—by clinging to the routines enforced by capitalism, reflecting just how deeply it is entrenched into our identities.

Shen Fever captures how capitalism dehumanizes people by turning its victims into lifeless figures repeating their last actions. The infected set tables, fold clothes, or prepare meals on autopilot, stuck in a haunting cycle of routine. These motions, stripped of their meaning, reflect the way workers in harsh conditions are often reduced to tools for productivity, their individuality erased. Survivors like Candace avoid the fevered but remain locked into the same unthinking routines, revealing how deeply capitalism erodes empathy and individuality. While others brush off the fevered as nothing more than hazards—an inconvenience in the way of survival—Candace’s reaction is noticeably different. “They don’t attack us or try to eat us... If anything, we do more harm to them” (Ma 29), she reflects, with an almost reluctant acknowledgment of the imbalance. Her words stand in quiet contrast to the blunt indifference of her companions, who view the fevered as little more than background noise in their scramble to survive. Candace’s detached but uneasy remark hints at a flicker of recognition—of harm, of humanity—that the others don’t even pause to consider. Yet even she can’t break free of the pervasive detachment; the system has dulled any chance for connection, leaving even fleeting empathy to wither.

Candace’s survival is tied to the routines that define her identity. The refrain, “I got up. I went to work in the morning,” repeated nine times throughout the novel, underscores her internalization of capitalist values. Even as society collapses, she continues working at her publishing job, organizing the production of Bibles for a dwindling consumer base. This behavior reflects not resilience but detachment—a symptom of a system that prioritizes productivity over connection. As Candace notes, “I got up. I went to work in the morning. Outside the office windows, the city thinned out” (Ma 210). Aanchal

Saraf critiques this dynamic, observing, “Candace is nearly indistinguishable from the fevered... continuing business as usual, a response not unlike our own in the face of impending global disasters” (Saraf 3). Shen Fever’s origins in Chinese Special Economic Zones (SEZs) further reveal capitalism’s exploitation and invisibility of marginalized labor. Ma writes, “The new strain of fungal spores had inadvertently developed within factory conditions of manufacturing areas, the SEZs in China, where spores fed off the highly specific mixture of chemicals” (Ma 210). These SEZs, zones of high productivity and exploitation, exist far from Candace’s personal experience, yet her job connects her directly to the suffering within them. As a “facilitator,” Candace organizes the production of Bibles, ensuring supply chains function efficiently, even as conditions in these factories deteriorate. Her detachment reflects capitalism’s separation of labor from its human cost, forcing readers to confront what Saraf identifies as the racialized labor embedded in global capitalism. This disconnect mirrors Said’s Orientalism, where Eastern spaces are rendered as tools of Western economic expansion and stripped of humanity.

The rejection of empathy is central to the dehumanization driving these capitalist systems. Detachment seems like the only way for survivors to keep going, but it comes at a cost. For the fevered, there’s no mourning, no recognition of their humanity—just avoidance. Candace’s ability to shut down her emotions allows her to survive, but it also leaves her disconnected, unable to see a life beyond her routines. *Severance* ultimately critiques this alienation, showing the true cost of living without connection: a severance not just from others but from oneself. It is only at the end of the novel that Candace sets out to take a step toward change. Escaping



from Bob's rigid and oppressive control, she ventures into the wilderness with her unborn child.

Marking her first real departure from the monotonous routines that controlled her pastlife.

While *Severance* critiques capitalism's slow erosion of humanity through monotony and routine, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The People of Sand and Slag* imagines a world where these forces have fully severed humanity's ties to empathy, ethics, and the

natural world. Ling Ma's narrative captures a society caught in the grip of capitalism's dehumanizing effects, but Bacigalupi pushes this further, envisioning a speculative future where survival is achieved at the expense of moral connection. In this world, technological enhancements reshape the human body in startling ways—characters survive by digesting toxic waste with the help of implanted micro-weevils and heal from severe injuries like gunshot wounds or lost limbs with almost effortless

regeneration. These modifications enable them to thrive in an environment ravaged by industrial excess, but they also reflect a complete detachment from the natural world. "We transcended the animal kingdom," one character remarks (Bacigalupi 58), framing their enhancements as a victory over both biology and morality. This sense of superiority echoes Edward Said's analysis of hierarchical dominance, where the "other" is devalued to justify exploitation. In Bacigalupi's world, the "other" becomes the natural environment itself, reduced to a mere resource, stripped of intrinsic worth, and reshaped to serve human convenience—a hollow victory that prioritizes technological dominance over ethical accountability.

Amid the barren expanse of a mining site, where relentless industrial activity has hollowed out the earth and filled the air with poison, the dog appears—an unexpected fragment of life. It wanders through the wasteland, its unaltered form stark against the artificial world shaped by human excess. The dog's arrival feels surreal in a world stripped bare of natural life, its existence offers a fleeting glimpse of the Earth before. Imagining the companionship it could offer,

BRISTOL, DEPICTED IN AN AI GENERATED INDUSTRIAL WASTELAND
BY ADOBE FIREFLY



Chen entertains the thought of keeping it, in a life otherwise dominated by isolation.

However, his party members, Lisa and Jaak, quickly dismiss the idea, pointing to Immersive Response, a virtual reality system that simulates experiences like joy and companionship without any of the effort: ‘Immersive Response makes you smile. And you don’t have to clean up after its crap’ (Bacigalupi 67). To Lisa and Jaak, the dog represents nothing but a pointless inconvenience—an entity with no clear function or value in their hyper-practical world. As Christy Tidwell observes, moments like this ‘expose the limits of posthuman ethics, where utilitarian views erase compassion for nonhuman life’ (Tidwell 208). The treatment of the dog highlights a troubling indifference; it’s not merely neglected but purposefully stripped of its worth, its life disregarded without thought. This decision reflects the group’s profound moral decline, where even a hint of compassion is seen as a weakness instead of a strength.

The scarred, barren landscape isn’t just a setting—it’s a damning reflection of the values that led to its destruction. Bacigalupi paints this grim scene vividly: “mining robots rumbled back and forth, ripping deeper into the earth, turning it into a mush of tailings and rock acid” (Bacigalupi 53–54). The relentless industrial extraction speaks to a world where progress has been prioritized over preservation, no matter the cost. Tidwell emphasizes this point, observing how the story “underscores the interconnected collapse of ecological and moral systems” (Tidwell 211). The destruction of the environment mirrors a deeper moral decay—one in which empathy and ethical



BRISTOL, IN AN AI GENERATED SCENE, “SHAKING HANDS” BY ADOBE FIREFLY

responsibility have been replaced by exploitation and indifference. The environmental degradation is not just an unfortunate consequence of this society’s choices; it’s a symbol of its complete detachment from humanity’s intrinsic connection to the natural world.

Tidwell’s insight drives home the story’s warning: when a society disregards the environment, it’s not just the earth that suffers—it’s the very essence of what makes us human.

Through the group’s treatment of the dog—a rare remnant of the natural world—Bacigalupi exposes how utilitarian thinking corrodes morality and empathy. When Chen first encounters the dog, he sees it as something more than a resource—a

potential companion in an otherwise barren and mechanical world. However, Lisa's reaction to the dog is immediate and harsh. She dismisses it as a waste of resources, saying, "We're burning money feeding that thing" (Bacigalupi 66). For her, the dog's life has no meaning beyond its potential usefulness, and even that is negligible. Jaak, though quieter, reinforces her cold pragmatism with his lack of objection. Chen, however, hesitates. The dog represents something to him—perhaps a fleeting connection to a world where life held meaning beyond survival. He teaches it small tricks, like shaking hands, and briefly envisions keeping it as a companion. But that spark of empathy is quickly extinguished under the weight of his companions' utilitarian logic. Pressured and unable to resist the group's indifference, Chen concedes, and the dog's fate is sealed. Their treatment of the dog—first reducing it to a resource, then discarding it—reflects a deeper moral collapse within their society. The choice they make is not just about survival; it's a quiet surrender of their humanity, showing how their relentless focus on utility has hollowed them out.

While their treatment of the dog underscores this ethical decay, Bacigalupi's narrative hints at the persistence of empathy, even in a world that suppresses it. After killing the dog, the group performs a burial—a gesture that feels hollow, yet significant. The narrator later admits, "I missed the dog a little. We didn't talk about it" (Bacigalupi 67). In this small, quiet moment, the story suggests that the capacity for compassion remains deeply embedded in human nature, even when systems of survival and efficiency work to bury it. This lingering awareness of loss points to a truth that Bacigalupi emphasizes: empathy may falter, but it is never fully extinguished.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler positions empathy as humanity's most vital survival

tool in a world fractured by fear and division. Lauren Olamina, the protagonist, lives with hyperempathy, a condition that causes her to feel the physical pain and pleasure of others. While isolating in some ways, this condition shapes her vision of Earthseed, a philosophy that values adaptability and collective care over the exclusion and fear that dominate other communities. Hyperempathy compels Lauren to see the humanity in others, even under dire circumstances. Lauren sees them not as threats but as desperate individuals shaped by systemic failures. "They see the outsiders as different, dangerous, threatening... I see them as hungry" (Butler 31). Her perspective directly challenges the binaries of "us" versus "them." Robledo, the gated community where Lauren Olamina grows up, represents a microcosm of fear-driven isolation. Its residents live behind fortified walls, clinging to the illusion of safety while the outside world descends into chaos. Robledo's fear of the 'other' sustains this false sense of security, as the community views outsiders as dangerous threats rather than desperate individuals shaped by systemic failures. The residents believe the walls will shield them from violence and decay,

IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR



but their refusal to empathize with those beyond the gates ultimately seals their fate. This failure reinforces Lauren's belief that survival depends on breaking down barriers and embracing connection and adaptability as the only viable path forward.

Earthseed, the philosophy Lauren develops, reflects this belief. She preaches, "Embrace diversity. Unite. Or be divided, robbed, ruled, killed by those who see you as prey. Embrace diversity. Or be destroyed" (Butler 176). In a fractured world, Earthseed's ethos of unity and growth directly challenges fear and isolation. Through this philosophy, Lauren dismantles the binaries that Edward Said critiques—those that divide "us" from "them," fostering dehumanization

and control. Earthseed offers a counter-narrative to Said's "othering," rejecting fear-based exclusion in favor of connection and adaptability, demonstrating that survival requires breaking down the very barriers that fear sustains. Butler juxtaposes Lauren's vision of Earthseed with the destructive paths chosen by others, such as the Paints, a violent, cannibalistic group she encounters on her journey. The Paints symbolize the consequences of a world stripped of empathy. Their "eat the rich" mentality stems from desperation but provides no path forward—only rage and destruction. Completely opposing Lauren's philosophy, the Paints serve as a grim reminder of what happens when suffering and systemic failure go unaddressed: survival becomes hollow, self-destructive, and ultimately unsustainable. The Paints embody a nihilistic worldview, embracing destruction and chaos as their response to societal collapse. But Lauren's approach stands in contrast, centering on empathy and resilience. Rather than succumbing to isolation, like Robledo, or descending into rage-fueled anarchy, like the Paints, Lauren channels fear into collective care through Earthseed, a philosophy designed to unite and adapt. Her vision isn't just about surviving the present—it's about creating something stronger and more meaningful that can endure the challenges

ahead.

What sets *Parable of the Sower* apart from other apocalyptic narratives is its emphasis on hope. In the story, Lauren's hyperempathy, seen by many as a liability, becomes her greatest asset in building a community. When she meets Emery and Tori, two women escaping violence, she chooses to help them, even though it adds strain to her group's resources. Later, she encounters Grayson Mora, a man left behind and injured, and once again decides to extend care. These choices show how Lauren's hyperempathy shapes her leadership—not through

power or fear, but by fostering trust and connection. In a world consumed by division, her ability to see others' pain and act on it

What is the point of survival if it comes at the cost of empathy?

becomes a form of quiet resistance, proving that survival is about more than just enduring—it's about creating something better. As Jim Miller observes, Butler's work "stares into the abyss of the dystopian future and reinvents the desire for a better world" (Miller 336). Earthseed's ethos of change and adaptability offers a path forward, demonstrating that survival doesn't have to come at the cost of humanity. Lauren's philosophy centers on breaking down barriers—both physical and emotional—to create a better future. Jim Miller highlights the hope embedded in Butler's vision, pointing out that Earthseed rejects exclusionary systems in favor of fostering "meaningful human relationships and shared purpose" (Miller 340). Through Earthseed, Lauren offers more than a survival plan—she envisions a way to rebuild society by prioritizing empathy and adaptability. The philosophy channels the pain of a fractured world into collective growth, proving that survival doesn't have to come at the expense of humanity. Instead of reinforcing walls to keep chaos at bay, *Parable of the Sower* calls for breaking those walls down, urging its followers to imagine a future built on trust and connection.

What emerges across *Severance*, "The People of Sand and Slag," and *Parable of the Sower* is not just a critique of fear-based systems but a

profound reminder of what is lost when we forsake connection. These texts challenge the belief that survival is merely endurance or dominance. Instead, they ask: what is the point of survival if it comes at the cost of empathy?

Ling Ma's haunting critique of capitalist monotony, Paolo Bacigalupi's unsettling vision of posthuman isolation, and Octavia Butler's call to revolutionary care all confront the same central truth—humanity cannot thrive without its connections to others, to the environment, and to itself. This message feels especially urgent in today's world, where fears that dehumanize and exploit create profound divisions. Whether it's the fear of the "other" sustaining inequality, the apathy enabling ecological collapse, or the relentless churn of late-stage capitalism eroding our humanity, these stories challenge us to confront the systems we perpetuate. It compels us to recognize others as fully human, to dismantle the barriers built by fear, and to envision futures where survival is meaningful because it is shared.

These narratives offer no simple solutions, but they illuminate a way forward. The task of undoing oppressive systems may be overwhelming, but it begins with something deceptively small: the willingness to care, to see the world—and its people—not as tools or threats but as inherently valuable. That is empathy's power: not just to heal what fear fractures but to redefine what it means to be human.

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CLAIRE BYNUM

"Never accept the world as what it appears to be, dare to see it for what it could be."

EXPLORING *Ethical* COMPLEXITIES: Veganism, Vegetarianism, and the Anthropocentric Dilemma

Last summer, two of my best friends and I were walking around a Central Market grocery store, looking for sandwich ingredients for a picnic. As we walked through the seafood aisle, we passed a massive Black Drum fish

head on top of the ice. One of my friends made a comment about wanting to go fishing together, which sparked a long conversation about casual fishing and hunting. As we talked, I began to think about how different it would be for us to go out



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WHAT IS ANTHROPOCENTRISM?

Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the central or most important entity in the universe, often prioritizing human needs above those of the natural world.

and hunt or catch our food, rather than simply purchase the products right then and there, in-store. As someone more than familiar with literature regarding anthropocentrism (thanks to my speech and debate career), I decided to begin researching the implications that different meat harvesting techniques have on our relationship with other animals. I was curious specifically about what role vegans and vegetarians play in the discussion, and soon found myself immersed in an exploration of ethical considerations of eating, farming, and hunting meat. A quote from one of my favorite authors, Leo Tolstoy, popped into my head: “A man can live and be healthy without killing animals for food; therefore, if he eats meat, he participates in taking animal life merely for the sake of his appetite. And to act so is immoral.” This led me to consider if and how this quote is true, or if, instead, a hidden layer of inconsistencies hides beneath the surface of discussions surrounding veganism and vegetarianism. This essay is a result of that exploration and questioning, and an attempt to reach a clear consensus and understanding of the relationship between non-meat eaters and anthropocentrism.

The vegan and vegetarian population in the

United States has grown significantly in the past few years. From 2014 to 2023, the United States has seen a 500% increase in vegans and vegetarians, according to health and wellness author Lacey Bourassa. In a world where digital resources uniquely enable individuals to research the ethicality behind meat consumption, it is no surprise we are seeing an uptick in people rejecting the consumption of animal products.

Initiatives like PETA's "Meet Your Meat" and Shaun Monson's "Earthlings" have given audiences opportunities to see (almost) firsthand the practices used to put food on their plates – information that was not so widely available until relatively recently. As the popularity of plant-based lifestyles continues to rise, ethical considerations of dietary choices are pulled into focus. At the heart of the vegan/vegetarian movement lies a radical declaration that challenges ancient structures. The aim is to advocate for a shift towards a more compassionate relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. Despite this, an alarming paradox comes from the core of vegan/vegetarian epistemology. While proponents of this diet frequently portray their cause as a defiant challenge to anthropocentric thinking/processes, It's probable that the very practice intended to reinvent our views of non-humans does the exact opposite,

and simply reinforces anthropocentrism. In this paper, I intend to navigate through the complexities of how anthropocentrism functions, moral considerations of the meat/dairy industry, and the intricate relationship between human dignity and plant-based lifestyles, with the intention of understanding whether or not veganism is actually a powerful rejection of anthropocentrism, or if it unintentionally acts as a tool that further engraves it into our society.

In order to understand vegan/vegetarianism's role in anthropocentrism, we must first understand how anthropocentrism operates in the first place. As humans, we view ourselves as isolated and superior to the rest of nature. We paint a picture in which humankind is completely severed from the rest of the world– instead of considering ourselves an element of the whole. Eric Meyer, associate professor of theology at Carroll College, and author of *The Political Ecology of Dignity*, where he highlights all of the ways humans separate themselves from other animals, explains that "All other species are more alike than humanity is like any of them..." (Meyer 01). We view ourselves as an entirely separate, superior entity that reserves the right to dominate and enslave the remainder of the natural world. We grant ourselves a unique form of intrinsic value and agency – a sense of dignity that we do not extend to our non-human counterparts. Meyer explains that we "transcend the conditions of non-human life" so that we "owe one another different treatment" (Meyer 01). This concept, known as human dignity, encompasses notions of physical and intellectual superiority, as well as moral superiority. It states that humans are born with intrinsic value that is not extended to other animals. Because of this, the concept can be used to justify a sacrificial structure in which non-human lives and well-being are disregarded to enhance human comfortability, since humans are the species that possess inherent worth and other animals are not. It's also important to note that human dignity has historically been invoked to defend the oppressed, and has served as a moral beacon to confront systemic injustices. This specific function of the concept will come into play later in our discussion.

Now that we've laid out our understanding of the groundwork of anthropocentrism, we can shift

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our focus to specifically the meat/dairy industry. As a preliminary step, I define two separate versions of the system: Big Ag and rural farmers. While both contribute to the overall framework of the industry, they contain certain individual components that have different roles in our discussion, so they require us to make separate analyses of their moral ramifications. I'll be defining 'Big Ag' or, in this specific context, factory farms, as large, industrialized facilities that house animals in confined spaces and use antibiotics or hormones to cause quick growth. On the other hand, independent farms are smaller in scale and either family-owned or owned by single farmers and engage in traditional farming practices. The third way we kill and consume animals is traditional hunting. Hunting falls outside of the bounds of the overarching concept of the 'industry,' yet still plays a role in our discourse.

I will first analyze factory farms. When examined through the lens of a critique on anthropocentrism, factory farms (or CAFOS) seem particularly problematic. These facilities have a way of stripping away all sense of autonomy or agency from the animals they use – practices such as gestation crates, forced/overfeeding, cramped and filthy living conditions, etc. make this clear. The process of reducing beings to profitable commodities strikes a dagger through the heart of what it means to be alive. Animals are likened, or rather, completely reduced to raw materials. The processes that go down are not seen as an existential question of life and death, but rather a question of maximizing the instrumentalization of raw materials (Svendson and Koch 4). Industry literature refuses to speak of animals as living things, just as the majority of the human population refuses to learn about “the lives of the animals whose flesh occupies [their] dinner plates” (Meyer 01). B)

While CAFOS are uniquely unethical in their mechanisms of denying beings their intrinsic value, they are also in direct conflict with human dignity. As human dignity is a concept whose purpose is

to stimulate moral thought and action, “one might suppose that human dignity would include vocal opposition to battery cages, gestation crates, and feedlots” (Meyer 04). Yet, we only see this opposition in a few individuals and even fewer organizations. There is a perceived qualitative distinction made between humans and non-humans that allows us to reserve moral concerns for our own species and exploit others. Yet, Human dignity has historically been cited as a moral force that helped put an end to various forms of oppression – oppression

“...if humans are not intrinsically ‘above’ other animals, they would then be on a level playing field, and seeing as non-human animals consume other animals on a regular basis, it would be okay for humans to do so with other species as well.”

that was initially justified via the same “qualitative difference” we are looking at between humans/non-humans. Slavery, colonialism, and gender discrimination are all notable examples of this. We have members of society who do not align with notions of a ‘proper human citizen’ because they have specific differences that aren’t aligned with the dominating class. In this context, there is no reason the graces of human dignity should not extend from other forms of life simply due to differences in characteristics. With that being said, it should be seen as one of the biggest forms of ethical injustice to promote a sense of intrinsic value that one refuses to extend to all living, sentient creatures just because certain types do not align with your idea of a worthy being – especially when ideas of ‘worthiness’ are subjective. While there are differences between us, non-human animals have a variety of similarities with humans that often go ignored. Take for example, the complex emotions of pigs, the advanced thought and problem-solving abilities of crows, the diverse social structures of

elephants, the playfulness of otters, the humor of primates, or the empathy of dogs. If there are plenty of observable similarities among us, why then, would it make sense for worth to only extend to a specific species?

Building on our understanding of the meat/dairy industry, we can now change perspectives and focus on smaller-scale farm operations. First, note that there

while it's safe to say most vegans/vegetarians would prefer traditional farms over factory farms, there is still issue to be taken with it as they deem the slaughtering of animals wrong on principle.

When I bring up hunting in this paper, I am specifically talking about hunting for food, rather than sport or 'therapeutic' hunting. Unlike farming, hunting practices are much more natural. Rather than taking an animal out of its environment, animals remain in the wild until a human kills them, the same as if another predator were to hunt. This maintains a coexistent relationship with humans and the rest of nature, which, in other practices, we seem completely disconnected from. However, it still begs the core question of if we should be consuming animals in the first place, which, of course, will be discussed in detail in just a moment.

Our first step in unraveling any moral inconsistencies with vegan/vegetarianism is understanding what the movement wishes to accomplish. While I do acknowledge that each individual who identifies as vegan/vegetarian has their own unique reasons for their choices, I am going to examine an argument that seems to be widely considered the basis of their ideologies— which is that animals have an equal, or close to equal, moral standing as humans and therefore should be treated as ends in themselves and not used for human convenience. This would mean it should be recognized that animals are here for their own unique purpose, and humans don't have the right to use them for ourselves. We can take into consideration other variations of this, but all forms are more or less based on the same idea. With that being said, there's an interesting fault that lies between the moral goal of the movement and how it is actually enacted. This is that, if humans are not intrinsically 'above' other animals, they would then be on a level playing field, and seeing as non-human animals consume other animals on a regular basis, it would be okay for humans to do so with other species as well. To rephrase, we shouldn't be viewing ourselves as morally superior. For instance, a mountain lion slaughters a deer and



is an obscure middle ground of 'free range' farms that intend to mislead the public into thinking they have associations with the rural farms about to be discussed, even if they carry out many of the same practices as CAFOS. For the sake of our argument, I will be aligning those operations more closely with factory farms. Moreover, rural farms range in size but are all significantly different in that the animals have access to natural environments, feeding, etc. It is ignorant to deny that the treatment of animals on rural farms is far better than that of CAFOS. Still,

eats it over the course of a couple of days. Then, a human goes hunting and shoots a deer, and does the same as the lion. This should then, in practice, be completely reasonable and equally justifiable as the mountain lion's actions. It then seems that vegetarians and vegans, rather than closing the anthropocentric gap, have widened it by placing humans on a moral high ground and therefore further outside the realm of the rest of nature. This right here seems to give us an answer: Vegans/vegetarians are counterproductive because they reinforce the alienation of humans from the rest of the natural world. Advocating for a separation from

then, obviously, is both a product of, and contributes significantly to, our anthropocentric worldview. This means that a rejection of these practices would be considered anti-anthropocentric, or as some call it, biocentric. Considering everything just discussed, the best alternative would be for those vegans and vegetarians to remain as such, however, instead of abstaining from all meat/products, they adopt a, for lack of a better term, opportunistic omnivore lifestyle, like bears, foxes, or chipmunks. This is defined as an animal that will eat meat if the opportunity presents itself, but does not necessarily need it to survive. Horses will eat a mouse if it



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what can be considered the 'natural' process of meat consumption, inadvertently reinforces a divisive perspective that once again places humans outside, and morally above the natural order.

The situation becomes more complex when we shift focus away from hunting practices, and more towards farming. As previously mentioned, farms seem to be wrong on principle.

Rather than becoming part of nature, humanity takes certain beings and places them in an environment together with the intent of later processing them into meat and byproducts. Farming

passes by, but can still survive on shrubs and grasses. That way, there is still a refusal to engage in anthropocentric practices without accidentally putting ourselves on a moral pedestal.

However, there is another valuable perspective to analyze – the argument that humans are unique in the sense that we have the ability to thoroughly reason and ask ethical questions. This allows us to reflect on our actions and their consequences in a way unparalleled among other species. From this point of view, since humans have a higher level of moral agency, we should hold ourselves to a



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different standard. This means we would recognize that, with higher cognitive abilities, comes different moral responsibility. In this case, we would understand that other animals are at our mercy, and since we have the ability to prosper while avoiding unnecessary suffering of an animal, we should. It can be argued that this approach isn't anthropocentric in nature, as it doesn't claim grounds for dominance, just difference. Veganism and vegetarianism are now not seen as a claim of moral superiority, but rather a recognition of our ability to make choices that affect vulnerable members of society. The focus for the plan of action would not be about imitating the behavior of non-human animals, but rather using our human characteristics to minimize harm and suffering and promote a holistic world where we treat the animals at our mercy with compassion.

Deciding between our two solutions – either an opportunistic hunter lifestyle or a purely vegan lifestyle – is difficult because the chances of seeing either be adopted by the majority is highly unlikely. This means we won't be able to 100% accurately evaluate which paradigm shift would truly break down the bounds of anthropocentrism. Regardless, we can deconstruct our two ideas and try to

pinpoint which would have the most positive effect. On the surface, it would make the most sense that, if we were to try to minimize differences between humans and non-humans, our first option would be the best. It seems like the most straightforward way to minimize the gap between species. However, this solution almost seems to play on, for lack of a better term, weaponized ignorance, because by doing this, we would be ignoring the fact that humans do have fundamental differences. Ignoring this distinction reads as turning a blind eye to important aspects of the situation, and perpetuates a form of cognitive dissonance and greenlights unnecessary suffering. There is also the strong possibility that this could be a form of evading responsibility. As I said, people don't like to know where their food comes from – there is a discomfort that accompanies discussions about what it takes to put meat on our plates that is indicative of a broader societal tendency to distance ourselves from the ethical implications of how we treat other animals. Choosing the hunter lifestyle might be an extension of this avoidance, where acknowledging our moral obligations would be sacrificed for the sake of an easy way out, or a way to avoid the challenge of being fully vegan/vegetarian without feeling guilt.

It's apparent our focus should not be on mimicking other animals, but rather on embracing our differences and acting accordingly to the developed sense of morality we hold. If it's true that all animals ought to live 'naturally,' then humans, by using our developed prefrontal cortices and reasoning, moralizing, and using empathy, are simply following that rule, as those are things that come naturally to us. Our second option, embracing compassion, is by far the best option, then. If this is true, though, what about some of the potential arguments I had pointed out about this earlier? Well, I argue that a) recognizing variation among species does not inherently mean we are claiming one is better than another, and b) there's no indication that the second option is advocating for the idea that we are looking down on other species. Therefore, our second option would do the best to mitigate the effects of anthropocentrism by fostering a compassionate approach that helps us mend the broken relationship between us and our world by promoting a complete shift in understanding and worldview.

In essence, the key lies in understanding our differences without resorting to hierarchical judgments. Our moral obligation to other animals should not stem from a sense of dominance, but rather a genuine understanding of acknowledgment of our unique ability to reason with ourselves. The emphasis of vegan/vegetarianism should shift from attempting to erase distinctions between species like certain organizations, like the Animal Liberation Front, the Nonhuman Rights Project, etc. rally for, to leveraging our capacity for empathy and compassion in the treatment of all living beings.

In conclusion, the complexities surrounding veganism and vegetarianism call for a nuanced approach. After understanding different forms of animal consumption, and how those come into play

with our world and how humans view the world, I have come to the final judgment that the majority of individuals who practice a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle are not widely contributing to the problems they aim to solve, but rather providing a unique approach to our relation to nature, and specifically, non-human animals. They uphold a proper sense of not only human dignity but an overarching sense of value for every individual. This might seem like it was the obvious answer from the start, but it is still important to have these conversations and question the unquestioned for the sake of understanding how what we do affects everything around us.

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Authored by Claire Bynum, this piece examines the ethical dilemmas of human-centered thinking and dietary choice as part of the coursework for Professor Dylan Walsh's English Composition I class at ACC.

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CORRELATION

Between FOOD INSECURITY & DIABETES

among Hispanic Communities
in the USA

*"Alone, we can do so little; together we
can do so much."*

Helen Keller



HAVA SHALIT

John F. Kennedy proclaimed at the World Food Congress on June 4, 1963: “The war against hunger is truly mankind’s war of liberation.” Unfortunately, this war is far away from ending, and several communities in the USA are still struggling. It is not about a complete lack of food; it is more about a lack of food security. A community is defined as food insecure when it has a shortage of sufficient and nutrient-rich food (Rancourt 1). Research finds that in 2020, about 10.5% of all American households experienced food insecurity (Lopez 1887). This percentage is much higher and reaches 17.2% among the Hispanic community (1887). In translation from the dry language of percentages, seventeen percent means to look into the hungry eyes of one person, then another and another, and by the last person you will have seen ten-million Hispanic people suffering from food insecurity. 10,880,000 is a vast and heartbreaking number. It can be stated that the Hispanic community in the USA is big (Bureau); it has the highest growth rate among American minorities, and these people need help. Who needs help the most? Is it Latinos who live in the USA but do not speak English? Interesting research about the connection between language, country of birth, and food insecurity reveals that “Spanish-speaking and bilingual Hispanic adults had increased odds of food insecurity when compared with their predominantly English-speaking counterparts only if they were born outside of the USA” (Lopez 1893). In other words, immigrants struggled the most to find affordable, healthy food. Why is it so important to help them fight food insecurity? The lack of nutrient-dense food has not only an immediate impact on people’s lives but also long-lasting consequences. According to the biobehavioral model, a model studying food insecurity and chronic disease, stress impacts eating patterns and results in disordered eating behavior (Rancourt 2), which increases the possibility of developing eating-related disorders such as diabetes (D’Arrigo 2). Simply put, when people worry too much about having food, they do not have the energy and time to think about food quality. Disastrously, this alarming situation has been going on for a long time. Already twenty years ago, Hispanic Americans were “twice as likely to develop type 2 diabetes as non-Latino white Americans” (1). The situation has worsened lately

because of multiple stress factors such as COVID-19, increasing non-legal immigration, and economic inflation. Since food insecurity causes a higher rate of diabetes in Hispanic Americans, community services need to address health disparities and work



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on improving community conditions.

Food insecurity among Latinos, especially people born outside of the USA, is affected by the ineffective organization of immigrant reception, which can and must be improved. From the first days of the United States of America’s creation, immigration has been a significant element of American wealth and power. People immigrate to the USA for different reasons, but it all includes the word ‘better’: better education, work, the health care system, and ultimately a better life. Therefore, it is so important to identify weak points of the

immigration process. Developing chronic diseases such as diabetes not only destroys immigrants' health but also turns into an economic burden for all Americans. Research points out that "Latinos with diabetes have higher rates of complications such as kidney disease, eye disease, and vascular disease" (D'Arrigo 1). These diseases reduce people's ability to be active members of

society. The group most at risk is non-documented individuals because they are not qualified to receive government assistance and do not have health insurance at all or have inadequate coverage. For them, "even affording a blood glucose monitor may be a big problem" (2). As a result, ill immigrants fall into a vicious circle of inability to recover without proper medical assistance. Still, at the same time, they are unable to earn enough money for treatment

due to limited ability to work while they are ill. Even those immigrants who are still healthy often work extensive hours under an amount of stress, and their health deterioration goes unnoticed until it is too late. Language barriers and cultural differences

add complications to this situation. Some Hispanic individuals grew up outside the USA with the understanding that visiting doctors

...they see diabetes as more of a spiritual problem than a medical problem.

can happen only in extreme conditions, and they use more traditional ways such as going to a traditional native healer (5). Often, Hispanics born outside of the USA see "diabetes and its complications [...] as the work of 'the evil eye'" (5). This means that they see diabetes as more of a spiritual problem than a medical problem. These groups need health education programs. In general, the Latino immigrant situation needs political decisions and



IMAGE CREATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY AI GENERATOR

changes in immigration policies. What does this leave the regular citizen to do? Should he just wait for change? Every American can make an effort to improve the situation and bring tremendous change on a community level.

In Southern California, the place with the largest population of Hispanics in the USA, an extensive ecological study was conducted with a focus on the “impact of social determinants of health on diabetes disparities among Latino communities” (Cleveland et al. 1). The unique approach of this study helped connect factors on personal and social levels. An example of such an approach can be the interplay between access to supermarkets and vegetable markets and the health level in the community. The study revealed a statistically confirmed exposition of Southern Californian Hispanics to less healthy community conditions, which is strongly associated with a higher level of diabetes and, more than that, with shorter life expectancy (5). One example, Kern County, with 55% Hispanic and unhealthy community conditions, “had nearly a five-year lower life expectancy at birth compared to Orange County,” with a high index of healthy conditions and 34% Hispanics (7). These results bring hard truths, but they also give hope to find ways to change community conditions. Taking social determinants of health into account during planning or rebuilding neighborhoods can radically change the population’s lives. For example, planning accessible transportation, especially to markets with healthy food, outdoor parks for recreational

sports, and green places, may drastically transform the behavioral patterns of the population. The study of the Southern California Latino community demonstrates the strong connection between community conditions and individual health and gives direction to improvement for the general public.

Community services have the power to address health disparities among Hispanic Americans by

working on improving community conditions. Efforts to gain food security and decrease stress significantly reduce the risk of developing diabetes. Work on overcoming language and cultural barriers and low health literacy is crucial for people with diabetes. Social change is hard but possible if American society continues to fulfill the words of John F. Kennedy in his Address to the Nation on Civil Rights on 11 June 1963: “It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color.”



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Analysis and Recommendation for the *Repair* of QUINLAN PARK ROAD

Summary

The creation of this report was initiated due to the perceived poor driving conditions on a specific turn of Quinlan Park Road in Austin, Texas. This report aims to evaluate those conditions, to determine if they violate Department

of Transportation standards, and if so to recommend a solution. This report has found conclusive evidence that the turn in question is indeed in violation of said standards. Therefore, this report can be used as evidence to urge Travis County to repair and modify Quinlan Park Road to rectify the adverse conditions presently found.

"The safety of the public cannot be compromised for the sake of convenience."



EVAN J. ROBERTS

Introduction

For nearly all citizens, the standardization of road safety standards is an agreed-upon necessity. Per [1], the average American will spend roughly 408 days of their life driving a car. Due to this large amount of time behind the wheel, roads need to be as safe and well- designed as possible. One such aspect of safe road design is ensuring the proper degree of superelevation while building a turn. Per [2], superelevation is defined as:

...the banking of the roadway such that the outside edge of pavement is higher than the inside edge. The use of superelevation allows a vehicle to travel through a curve more safely and at a higher speed than would otherwise be possible. Side friction developed between the tires and the road surface also acts to counterbalance the outward pull on the vehicle.

An Improper amount or lack of superelevation can lead to disastrous consequences for riders taking a curve. Unfortunately, this exact situation has occurred on Quinlan Park Road here in Travis County, and multiple drivers have already paid the price. Because of this egregious issue, I recommend the immediate repair of this section of Quinlan Park Road. So far, no previous report has addressed or mentioned this issue before. Therefore, this report seeks to determine the exact nature of the superelevation issue using various forms of evidence and then present the most logical solution to the current predicament.

A great wealth of time and money has been spent to research and develop a variety of safety standards for nearly every aspect of road building and design. Most of these standards have been produced and published by either the federal or state departments of transportation. While slight differences can be found between different departments' regulations, nearly all standards have a high degree of commonality. Therefore, for a report of recommendation such as this, it is appropriate to use a variety of different DoTs' reports. The Wyoming Department of Transportation's Alignment and Superelevation paper [2], and the Iowa Department of Transportation's Superelevation

Tables [4] have both proven incredibly useful in the writing of this report and will be cited.

Problem Description

The exact nature of the superelevation problem seems rather benign at first. If you were to stand next to the turn in question (which for the sake of clarity will be referred to as **Turn-A**), you would hardly notice anything amiss. After all, a negative superelevation of a few degrees is almost unnoticeable to the unwary eye.

Turn-A is a two-lane road, possessing a maximum speed limit of 40 mph, and a recommended speed of 25 mph. **Turn-A** is one of the last turns on Quinlan Park Road before it terminates into the Colorado River. It is roughly 780 ft long, with a curve radius of 740 ft and an interior turn angle of 64o, per **Figure 1**. On its own, none of these characteristics are alarming. The issue arises when you look at a topographical map of the turn. As can be seen in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, **Turn-A** drops nearly 60 ft from start to finish. This results in any descending vehicle receiving a noticeable acceleration from the force of gravity as it descends.

Normally, this would be accounted for by implementing the proper amount of superelevation, which would counteract the centripetal force of the turn and the force of gravity. Unfortunately, **Turn-A** possesses not only an insufficient amount of superelevation but a negative degree of superelevation. In other words, the road slopes down and away from the inside radius of the curve. While all of these facts and figures are useful in quantifying the physical conditions of **Turn-A**, they can fail to convey their impact on the reality of driving down the turn.

I have driven down **Turn-A** hundreds if not thousands of times in my life driving two different vehicles. Because of this, I can describe the experience of going down the turn. If one were to drive down **Turn-A** at the posted recommended speed of 25 mph, one would immediately feel a noticeable pull on the vehicle toward the edge of the turn. If one were to increase their descent speed to the legal speed limit of 40 mph for this section of Quinlan Park Road, the pull of centripetal force would be dangerously difficult to overcome. This

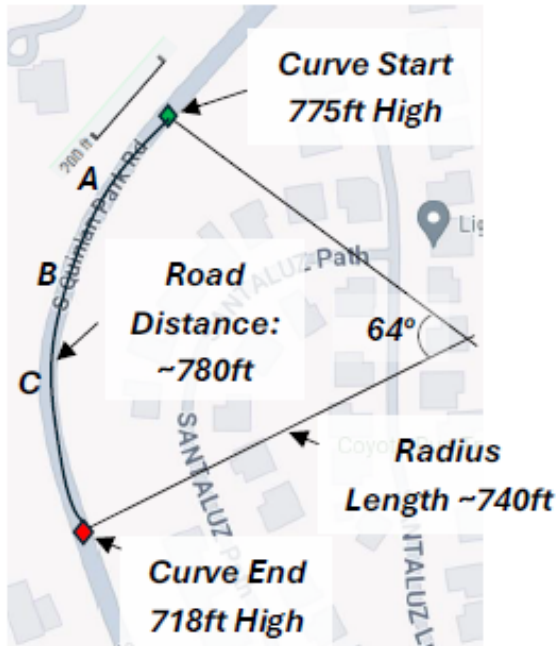


Figure 1: Turn-A Diagram [3]

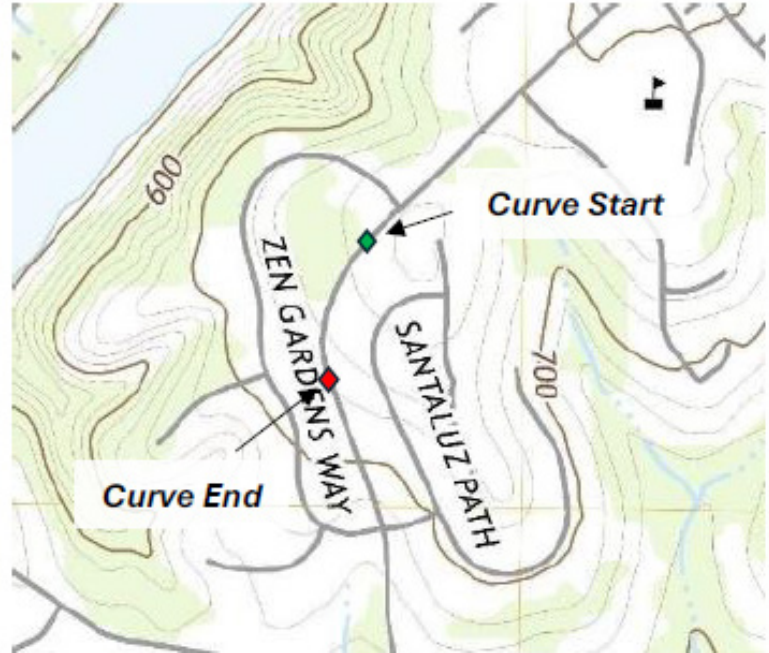


Figure 2: Turn-A Area Topography [3]

does not even mention the effect water or ice would have on the turn amidst inclement weather. This issue, which would be worrying enough by itself, is greatly compounded by a litany of other detrimental factors.

The current condition of **Turn-A** leaves much to be desired. While cracks and potholes in the asphalt have been patched over the years, the asphalt as a whole is beginning to degrade to a point where patching holes would have little to no effect on the general driving experience, per **Figures 3 - 4**. It would be like putting a fresh coat of paint on a rotting house.

The outside edge of **Turn-A** also sits next to a noticeable 5 ft – 10 ft drop-off, with no guardrail present to keep out-of-control drivers from flying off of the road, per **Figure 5**. The inside edge of **Turn-A** is hardly better, sitting right up against a section of woods. Because of this, **Turn-A** is a blind curve, where the inside driver is sandwiched between downhill traffic and the woods, while the outside driver can easily be run off the road by a careless uphill driver. All of these egregious facts compound the initial and most pressing issue of improper superelevation.



Figure 3 - 4: Turn-A Pavement Conditions



Figure 5: Turn-A Drop-Off

Data Collection Procedure:

In order to further quantify this issue, data is required. Open-source data compiled from digital resources per [3] are presented in **Figures 1 – 2**. Beyond this, inclinometer measurements from different sections of **Turn-A** are needed to assess the average superelevation of the turn. This average superelevation would then be compared to official superelevation design standards provided by the Iowa Department of Transportation [4]. Three locations for inclinometer measurements, called locations **A**, **B**, and **C**, would be determined by visually locating the sections of **Turn-A**, most likely to possess insufficient superelevation. If these locations, per **Figure 1**, were found to have an insufficient or negative superelevation, then **Turn-A** would indeed require rework.

Data Analysis:

After taking measurements at locations **A**, **B**, and **C**, along **Turn-A**, the following inclinometer data was collected, per **Table 1**. As can be seen, all three locations possess a negative banking angle, meaning they bank toward the outside edge of the turn. These banking angles were then converted to their percent grade equivalent via Omni Calculator [5]. For percent grade, each percent value is equal to the number of feet of elevation change per 100 ft of travel. So, a 5% grade would have an elevation change of 5 ft for every 100 ft moved. As can be seen in the highlighted cell under the e column of **Table 2**, the recommended percent grade value for a 40 mph

Table 1: Superelevation Measurement Table

Location:	Inclinometer Reading:	Percent Grade Equivalent:
A	-2°	-3.492 %
B	-3°	-5.241%
C	-2°	-3.492%

turn with a turning radius of 725 ft – 775 ft is roughly 5.6%.

This means that between all three locations surveyed, **Turn-A** was 9.1% – 10.8% under-inclined. Even if you instead look at the superelevation value required for the recommended speed of **Turn-A**, 25 mph, which only requires a 3.6% grade, **Turn-A** is still 7.1% undegraded at a minimum. Therefore, it can conclusively be stated that **Turn-A** indeed suffers from a lack of superelevation, to the detriment of all drivers involved.

Recommendation:

In a perfect world, infrastructure budgets would be unlimited, and every issue like the one identified above could be improved upon and completely fixed. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Road building is an expensive task, and even more so when a road needs to be rebuilt while allowing for continued operation at the same time. The ideal solution to the current identified issue, per **Proposal A** in **Table 3**, is as follows.

Proposal A involves ripping up, at a minimum,

Table 2: Superelevation Table [4]

radius (ft)	Design Speed (mph)														
	25			30			35			40			45		
	e	L	x	e	L	x	e	L	x	e	L	x	e	L	x
810	3.4	58	34	4.0	73	36	4.6	89	39	5.4	111	41	5.8	129	44
750	3.6	62	34	4.2	77	36	4.8	93	39	5.3	116	41	6.0	133	44
700	3.6	62	34	4.2	77	36	5.0	97	39	5.6	116	41	6.0	133	44

the outside lane of **Turn-A**, adding more fill under certain portions of the turn to correct the superelevation issue, and repaving the demolished sections of **Turn-A** with new asphalt. On the other hand, a simpler and quicker remedy, per **Proposal B** in **Table 3**, is also an option.

Proposal B would entail patching potholes and degraded areas of **Turn-A** and adding a new guardrail along the turn to keep drivers from flying off the embankments of **Turn-A**, per **Figure 5**. A simple qualitative breakdown of the pros and cons of **Proposal A** and **Proposal B** are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Proposal Breakdowns

Proposal A	Proposal B
Pros:	Pros:
• Would completely and permanently correct the superelevation issue. • Would repave all of Turn-A, giving the turn another 20-30 years of life, per [6]. • May not require a guardrail.	• Is cheaper and easier to achieve than Proposal A. • Could be completed on a shorter timetable. • Would not greatly inhibit traffic.
Cons:	Cons:
• Far more expensive and time-consuming than Proposal B. • Would greatly inhibit traffic throughput on Quinlan Park Rd.	• Does not fix the critical superelevation issue. • Would not extend Turn-A's lifespan, and would only kick the can of repaving down the proverbial road.

Conclusion:

Turn-A has conclusively been proven to be a dangerous and improperly built section of Quinlan Park Road. Over the years, multiple drivers have already found this out the hard way, by flying off the embankments due to a lack of proper superelevation. If nothing is done to remedy this issue, more drivers will continue to suffer the same fate, and the physical conditions of **Turn-A** will continue to degrade, thereby exacerbating the problem. The solution to this issue sits squarely on the lap of Travis County, which possesses the equity, resources, and authority to fix the issue.

It is not a question of whether Travis County can fix **Turn-A**, but if they will. Above, two solutions have already been presented to remedy the issue. While **Proposal B** is inferior to **Proposal A** in a litany of important metrics, it is still better than

nothing, which is, on the other hand, exactly what is getting done right now. **Turn-A** has already been sitting improperly built in a hazardous condition for more than 15 years, and it will continue to do so if nothing is done. Therefore, I recommend, per the findings of this report, that Travis County implement either **Proposal A** or **Proposal B** at the soonest possible occasion for the sake of public safety.

PROFESSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Written by Evan Roberts, this analytical piece, supported by research, was created as part of Professor Alex Watkins's Introduction to Professional and Technical Writing course at ACC.

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VICTORIA TREVINO

"My favorite part of this project was gaining new insight into a commonly overlooked issue within the homeless community and discovering the resources available to help overcome it."

An INTERVIEW with Frank

VIDEO SUMMARY:

For my final project in Honors Speech 1311, I conducted an interview with a homeless man named Frank, who lives in Austin, TX. Through our conversation, I learned about his past and current struggles. While I anticipated learning about his immediate needs, I discovered that there are many long-term challenges standing in the way of him achieving stable living.



Based on a video narrated and created by Victoria Trevino, adapted story for print.

If you live in Austin, Texas, or any major city, you may have noticed that homelessness is a significant issue within the community. According to Austinecho.org, over half of the homeless population are minorities, with many ranging in age from 25 to 54. Many individuals face hardships such as being survivors of domestic violence, veterans, or parents. Unfortunately, youth homelessness is also a growing concern in Austin.

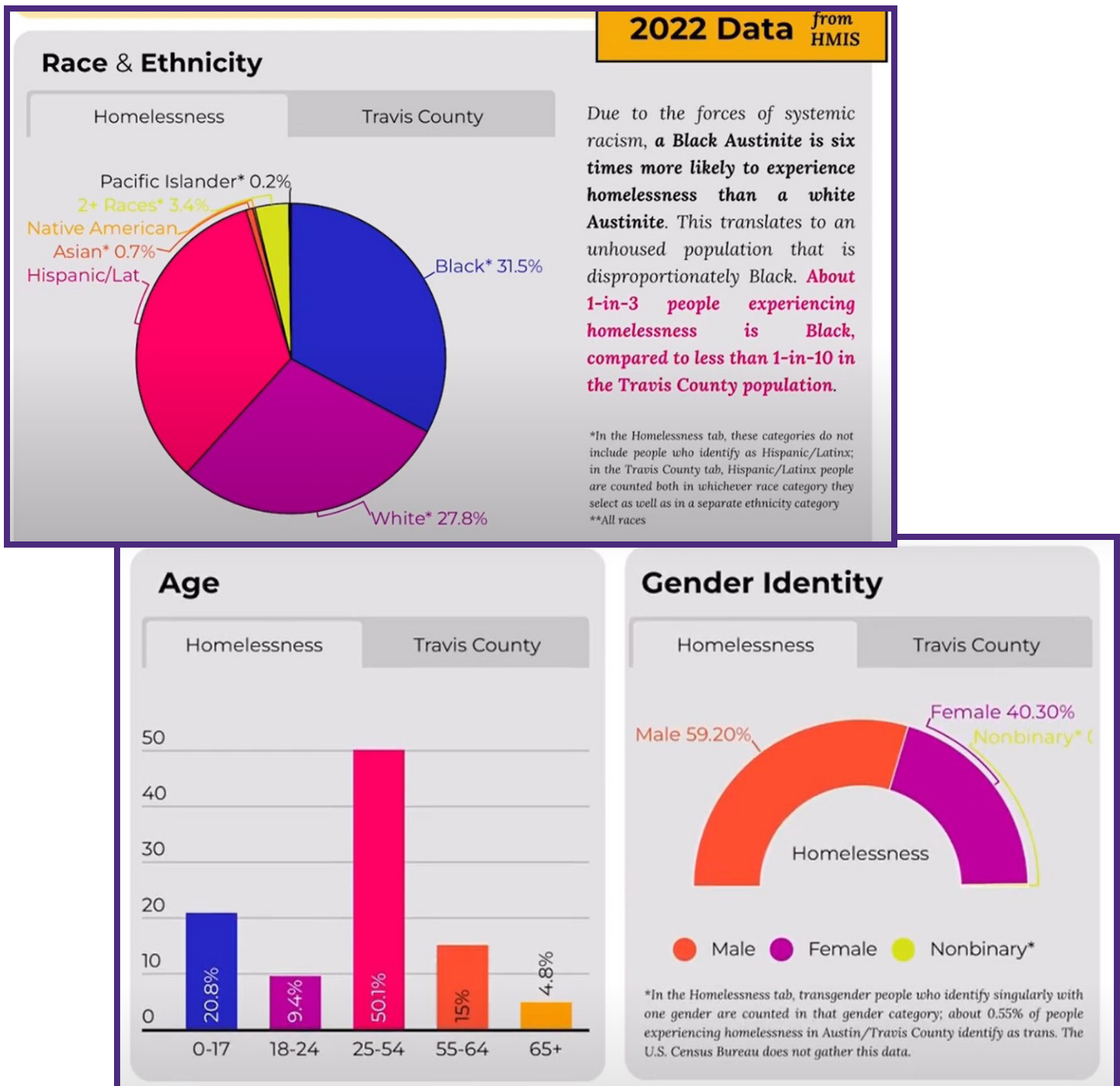
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqnlB2fnN6I>

When I first began brainstorming my project, I asked myself: *What do I use every day? What could I bring to homeless individuals that would provide immediate relief?* My first thought was food; nutritional sustenance to help them get through the day. Then, I considered health and dental care, which are major concerns that can lead to pain and suffering. Finally, I thought about the simple comforts that bring me happiness: a warm shower, shampoo, conditioner, and soap. Basic hygiene items

that can improve self-esteem. I also considered essentials like Band-Aids for emergencies.

This thought process led me to create care packages containing pillows, Band-Aids, snacks, sunscreen, and other necessities. As I distributed these packages around Austin, I hoped to interview at least one homeless individual to gain insight into their experiences.

That's when I met Frank.



Meeting Frank

I stumbled upon Frank's home—an encampment beneath the MoPac bridge. At first, he was understandably wary of me; after all, I was a stranger approaching his personal space. Eventually, he shared his story.

In the 1990s, Frank lived out of his car, making a living as a driver, chauffeuring people from city to city. He traveled extensively, visiting Beaumont, Houston, Austin, and Dallas, drifting from place to place. Though he chose not to delve deeply into his struggles, he did mention attending *Alcoholics Anonymous* while living in Beaumont, Texas.

When I told him I was a college student, his demeanor shifted. He was intrigued. Frank revealed that he had once studied psychology at

Frank revealed that he had once studied psychology at the University of Texas in Tyler.

the University of Texas in Tyler. This revelation surprised me. As a college student, I'm often told that obtaining a degree leads to success, stability, and financial security. Yet, here was Frank, a former student, well-spoken and knowledgeable, experiencing homelessness.

We bonded over the shared struggles of academia, laughing about the challenges of elementary statistics and discussing the complexities of human psychology. But when the conversation turned to housing, Frank's reality became clear. He told me that, for now, he was comfortable living under the bridge, but he worried about aging. In his 70s, he was beginning to feel the physical toll of homelessness. One day, he hoped to settle into a permanent home.

The Barriers to Housing

When I asked Frank what was preventing him from achieving this goal, he explained that the main obstacle was obtaining identification. To apply

for jobs, he needed an ID and a birth certificate, documents he did not have.

While he appreciated the pillow and food I gave him, he mentioned that food wasn't his most pressing need since he received food stamps. Instead, he faced another heartbreaking reality: personal belongings were often stolen from him. Lugging around items made him a target for theft and violence. He even showed me a scar on his hand from a recent stabbing attempt.

This conversation made me realize that my project needed a shift in focus.

Instead of providing temporary relief, I wanted to address the root problem: helping homeless

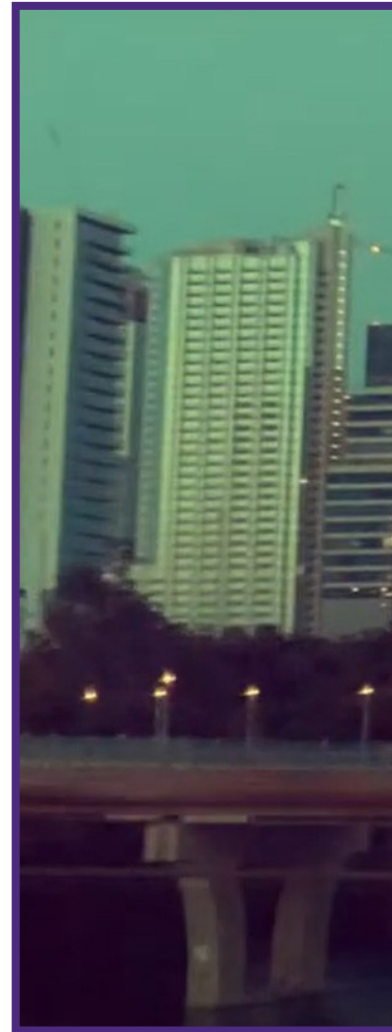
individuals obtain proper identification, which is crucial for employment and self-sufficiency.

The Identification Crisis

When I researched the process of obtaining an ID in Texas, I found frustrating barriers. To apply, individuals need documents such as a physical Social Security card, marriage certificate, or birth certificate—documents many homeless individuals lack. Additionally, pay stubs or rental agreements are often required, which creates a catch-22: they need a job to get an ID, but they need an ID to get a job.

Resources for the Homeless in Austin

One promising resource I found is the Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center, which provides



restrooms, case management, free Narcan, housing assistance, and identification recovery services. Additionally, the Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) offers similar services, including access to telephones and mailing addresses for those in need.

For Austin residents looking to help, these organizations are excellent places to start. You can contact the Downtown Austin Community Court at **(512) 974-4879** for more information.



Reflection

Meeting Frank was a humbling experience. His story highlighted the hidden struggles of homelessness, barriers that go beyond food and shelter. If we truly want to help, we must focus on providing long-term solutions, such as access to identification and employment opportunities.

A special thank you to Frank for sharing his story. His resilience is a reminder that homelessness does not define a person; it is a circumstance, not an identity. By addressing systemic issues, we can create a future where people like Frank have a real chance to rebuild their lives.

PROFESSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Created by Victoria Trevino, this mini-documentary was produced as part of Professor Gretchen Harries's Honors Introduction to Speech Communication course at ACC.

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