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# Not So Magical: Issues with Racism, Classism, and Ideology in Harry Potter

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NOT SO MAGICAL: ISSUES WITH RACISM, CLASSISM, AND IDEOLOGY IN  
*HARRY POTTER*

By

Tiffany Walters

THESIS

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Not So Magical: Issues with Racism, Classism and Ideology in *Harry Potter*

This thesis by Tiffany Walters is recommended for approval by the student's thesis committee in the Department of English and by the Assistant Provost of Graduate Education and Research.

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## ABSTRACT

### NOT SO MAGICAL: ISSUES WITH RACISM, CLASSISM, AND IDEOLOGY IN *HARRY POTTER*

By

Tiffany Walters

Although it is primarily a young adult fantasy series, the *Harry Potter* books are also focused on the battle against racial purification and the threat of a strictly homogenous magical society. This thesis examines the intricacies and depth of the racial ideologies presented in the books, as well as how they can be equated with historical and real world issues. More specifically, this thesis will study the delineations of human and non-human beings, and how the institutional biases they struggle against are supported by traditional principles. Though these are important ideas worthy of discussion, I also hope that further examination of these aspects within the seven book series will add to the series' literary merit.

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## INTRODUCTION

Whether or not you've read the books or watched the movies, you've probably heard of Harry Potter. The success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has made the name a permanent fixture in popular culture, and like all popular pieces it has also become a target for criticism. However, despite some of the controversy surrounding the books, the Harry Potter story continues to be read. With the last four books in the series setting records for fastest-selling books, and the series as a whole being one of the best-selling series in history, the extensive popularity of the books brings into question just what value there is in reading *Harry Potter*.

Some critics, such as Harold Bloom (in a *Wall Street Journal* article), have argued that there is little to no value, but the continued sales of the books suggest that there is something to be considered. Thus my discussion is intended to support the examination of the series' literary merit, and to further look at how the series not only deals with racial ideologies, but whether or not the messages that Rowling is providing to her readers are ones which are of value and worthy of study. There can be no doubt that some of the most prevalent themes in the series include political corruption, racial prejudices and the consequential social inequalities that stem from those themes.

Issues of racism, felt by both human and non-human beings, is the most significant conflict represented in the series. As the series develops so too do the themes of prejudice and inequality, and each successive book adds to and reveals the underlying racial ideologies that the protagonists find themselves in conflict with. This is one reason why I will make many references to books nearer the end of the series instead of the books which were first published; many of those subjects are only addressed as the protagonists mature and become aware of the social, and their own individual, racial ideologies.



In the first chapter I'll look at the race categories that exist in the *Harry Potter* series, and I'll also discuss how and why those issues became a part of the *Harry Potter* world. Chapter one will also include some thought about how racism functions as an ideology and how that significantly impacts the series. The second chapter will discuss how and why racism becomes so prevalent, namely by equating Lord Voldemort with Adolf Hitler, and the political and social maneuvers which they have in common.

In the final two chapters I will discuss the less addressed, but no less prevalent, issues of race discrimination experienced by other, non-human races (because it is, after all, a fantasy series) and how they compare with the human issues. Examining the non-human issues further demonstrates how the races are or are not comparable. My intention in these chapters is to reveal how all members of the *Harry Potter* series have the ability to fight for equal rights, even if no such outcome occurs within the time frame the series is set; there is a lot of evidence to suggest that Rowling is setting up opportunities for just such things to happen, and as the series reaches its resolution the theme seems to be hopeful, though perhaps not idealistic, suggesting that with some hard work and political restructuring a more egalitarian society is possible.

Overall the goal of my thesis is to look at the investment the series makes in not only mimicking, but confronting and reducing institutional and social injustices (and the complexity of these issues within the series), as well as how the series as a whole works to teach readers how to empathize with stigmatized groups.

## CHAPTER ONE: RACE AND IDEOLOGY IN *HARRY POTTER*

“Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.”

–*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (723)

A first look at J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series gives the impression of a world where the lines between good and evil are clearly defined and where the young hero confronts and defeats a dark wizard. However, as the series develops so too do the intricacies of the fictional world, and the populations of J.K. Rowling’s imagination reveal a society rife with prejudices and ethnic othering. As the students age (specifically the trio of Harry, Hermione and Ron), the definitions previously attributed to their surroundings and the characters they interact with begin to expand, revealing the driving force of the plot: namely the battle against racism.

Although the story appears to be about good versus evil the principles backing the “good” characters and “evil” characters are primarily race-based principles. The characters that are on the “good” side, or Harry Potter’s side, are the characters which work to understand and ameliorate discriminatory beliefs maintained by those who follow Lord Voldemort and the principles he advocates. Of course issues surrounding racism or a single character are rarely so easily defined, and as the series progresses readers get a better look at the contradictions present in some characters, and the ambiguities present in the wizarding world’s social mores.

The main focus of this chapter will be to examine how racism functions as an ideology, and how that ideology is perpetuated within the series. Because it is a world of fantasy, concerns about racism in the series move beyond human races to incorporate the even more complex relations with other sentient beings. Because of this, I would like to be clear about what I mean when I use the term “race.” When I use the word “race” I will most often be referring to the

social concept of a group of people who are viewed as having something in common (whether it be a physical trait or not), and this includes *both* human and non-human beings.

Regardless of the largely anti-racist sentiments that are delivered to both humans and non-human classes throughout the series' events (which I will discuss in more depth soon), there have been arguments that "the texts' attitudes toward race are contradictory, simultaneously embracing both radical critique and conservative traditionalism" (Horne 78). Through my examination of how racism functions in the series, though, I hope to counter those arguments and show that overall the texts are liberally orientated and provide hopeful, ameliorating examples for readers to empathize with.

Though race distinctions are briefly mentioned in the first *Harry Potter* book, it is not until the second book that racial differences are established as a serious concern in the magical community (indeed they become the main focus on which the series culminates). Unfortunately, and in part because racism is so intricately entwined in the social fabric of wizard communities, few characters question whether the traits attributed to the different race categories are based on *genuine* differences, causing racism, and the negative connotations associated with certain races, to endure with little dispute. It is primarily the characters who have been raised in the Muggle world which begin to question the magical world's traditional ideology and stereotypes.

In "Ideology and Race in American History" Barbara J. Fields, professor of history and general scholar, writes that "classes may have struggled over power and privilege, over oppression and exploitation, over competing senses of justice and right; but in the United States, these were secondary to the great, overarching theme of race" (143). This too can be said to be true of Rowling's wizarding world, where the problem of race discrimination becomes all-encompassing and essentially add to (and in some situations creates) class struggles as well as

other social problems. Though Rowling may not have had Fields' ideas in mind when she was writing the *Harry Potter* books, many of Fields' ideas about how racism exists as an ideology are relevant to the wizarding world, and much of her discussion of racism in American history runs parallel to issues of racism in wizardry history; more so than any other theme, the theme of keeping "pureblood" wizards in a place of power is central to the plot of the *Harry Potter* series.

Before delving too deeply into detailed examples, however, it seems necessary to first specify just what race divisions there are in the *Harry Potter* series. The issues which are most openly addressed are the ones occurring between human characters, and these include:

- 1) Muggles (non-magical persons)
- 2) Muggle-borns (witches/wizards with magical abilities but non-magical parents)
- 3) half-bloods (witches/wizards who are not pure-blooded, but also not Muggle-born)
- 4) purebloods (those with complete magical ancestry)
- 5) Squibs (a non-magical child with magical parents)

Less acknowledged, but none the less important, are those concerns expressed by the other sentient beings, namely house elves, goblins, centaurs, and giants. However, for the sake of organization, and also because of the different responses each receive within the series, I will first focus on the human issues before looking at the issues which the non-human beings experience (which will be discussed in chapters three and four).

Fields writes that the first mistake in defining racism is to think of it as "an observable physical fact, a thing, rather than a notion that is profoundly and in its very essence ideological," (144) but what is racism in a world where people can change their appearance at will, or with the aid of a spell or potion? Many of the characters in *Harry Potter* who subscribe to racist ideologies back up their prejudices with the idea that race differentiations are based on genetic, or blood, composition, much as scientist in World War II Germany broadcasted supposed genetic differences to identify the Aryan race from those of Jewish decent, or those identified as being

non-Aryan. Of course there are no firm genetic inequalities in either of these instances, which is why “scientists in Germany were bribed, threatened, or brainwashed into publicly presenting evidence that demonstrated a racial hierarchy” (Barratt 70). Likewise, this type of political and social bullying occurs in the *Harry Potter* series.

In spite of the constructed nature of the blood status evidences Rowling’s blood categories became a way of determining a person’s magical abilities. However, this focus on a “physical fact” distracts from the inconsistencies of blood type stereotypes, but it seems that those inconsistencies can be overlooked when the ideas about race reflect old, and sometimes comforting, prejudices and myths that have for so long been built up to distinguish race identities. By looking more closely at characters from different bloodlines it quickly becomes obvious that the focus on blood as a determining factor has no real foundation, and is much more a fabricated and descriptive feature used to differentiate groups of persons in the same way that dissimilarities in appearance are used to categorize racial groups. In the next few paragraphs I will show how the assumptions of blood status are arbitrary, and how many contradictions to those stereotypes exist.

Purebloods, such as Draco Malfoy and Neville Longbottom, each exhibit different magical abilities; although a pureblood, Neville is at the bottom of his class, often relying on Hermione’s (a Muggle-born) assistance. (Likewise, two minor characters Crabbe and Goyle, who are also purebloods, are at the bottom of their class, though there is some suggestion that coddling or inbreeding has to do with their failures.) Clearly, being pureblooded doesn’t automatically make someone more powerful – and yet the stereotype that purebloods are superior continue to be propagated.

Tess Stockslager, author of “What it Means to Be a Half-Blood” writes that “being a pureblood comes with privilege [...] but it also comes with expectations” (122). Neville, in his failure to live up to the expectations of a pureblooded wizard, consistently becomes a target for bullying; his family worries for some time that he might be a squib, though later events in life prove this to be untrue. Unfortunately, most of Neville’s failures in school have to do with the psychological pressure put on him: his parents were respected for being courageous and powerful magical people, but Neville (a late-bloomer) is often dismissed as being an improper representative of pureblooded persons; even his grandmother is ashamed of him for much of the series. It is only with careful mentorship that Neville learns, despite his initial abilities, that he can be a capable wizard and overcome the psychological and social pressures that impede his success.

In addition, it should be mentioned that pureblooded families may produce children, or have blood relatives, with *no* magical abilities, as can be seen in characters such as Argus Filch, the Hogwarts caretaker, and Arabella Figg, Harry Potter’s neighbor. Such non-magical persons are referred to as “Squibs” a term that, by itself, evokes something unpleasant. In a conversation with an older witch, Harry learns that Squibs were “often hushed up” or “shipped off to Muggle schools and encouraged to integrate into the Muggle community ... much kinder than trying to find them a place in the Wizarding world, where they must always be second class” (*Deathly* 155). Neville’s own worries about being a Squib suggest that there is something to fear if you are one; in *Chamber of Secrets* Neville has doubts about his safety because “they went for Filch first, and everyone knows I’m practically a Squib!” (*Chamber* 185). Additionally, readers know that Dumbledore’s sister, who was rumored to be a Squib, never left her house. We learn later that she was not without magical abilities, but because she was so often hidden away people assumed

that she must be a Squib, and that her family kept her existence quiet because they were ashamed of her; hers and other examples demonstrate how stigmatized non-magical persons are in wizarding communities.

Like Squibs, Muggle-borns are equally stigmatized, and are sometimes referred to as “Mudbloods” because of their “dirty” blood. As becomes evident later in the series, such verbal abuse can be exacerbated until it becomes physical violence. However, despite being Muggle-born and brought up away from wizarding communities, Hermione (a Muggle-born) proves to be more skilled with magic than many of the pureblood characters. Harry’s mother, Lily, also a Muggle-born, is similarly described as talented. Many years after her death Lily is remembered by an old professor who describes her as “One of the brightest I ever taught. Vivacious” (*Half-Blood 70*). These two Muggle-born examples further prove how the prejudices of a person’s blood status in no real way reflect the true definition of that person’s magical proficiency.

Nevertheless, because the racist ideas concerning a person’s lineage are so natural to wizarding ideology, even those who suggest they are not prejudiced reveal that biases continue to exist. For example, Professor Slughorn, when remembering Lily, says “Your mother was Muggle-born, of course. Couldn’t believe it when I found out. Thought she must have been pure-blood, she was so good,” to which Harry replies “One of my best friends is Muggle-born [...] and she’s the best in our year” (*Half-Blood 70*). Professor Slughorn apologizes, emphasizing that he is not prejudiced towards Muggle-borns, and tries to make up for his blunder by saying that it was his surprise that unintentionally led to such careless wording, but it would seem (from this example at least) that Muggle-borns are regarded with the same kind of paternal fascination, or condescension, that Muggles are often treated with.

It would seem that the most common blood status belongs to that of half-bloods. The reason that half-bloods may make up much of the population is because the term is used to identify characters who *act* contrarily to pureblooded norms, as much as it is to identify characters who biologically fit the half-blood definition. A person may also be considered half-blooded if someone in their family history is not pureblooded. For example, Harry has two magical parents, but because his mother does not come from a pureblooded family, he is labeled as a half-blood; this term, then, becomes a blanket for a variety of people, who might otherwise be categorized as something more specific, such as a quarter-blooded wizard.

Identified similarly to half-bloods are “blood traitors,” which a character may become by associating and befriending a Muggle-born or half-blood. For instance, Harry’s best friend, Ron, is physically a pureblood, but he and his whole family are identified as blood traitors because of their association with Hermione, and also because Ron’s father tinkers with Muggle objects. A blood traitor is grouped together with half-bloods most often because the terms indicates persons who do not subscribe to race superiority, or who shows interest in, or sympathy for, Muggles.

In the end, the term *half-blood* is essentially flawed and arbitrary since it can be attributed to people that are not physically “half-blooded,” and conversely, a character of half-blooded descent can be characterized as pureblooded. Examples of this would be Voldemort and Dumbledore, who many characters assume are pure-blooded, despite that they are both technically half-bloods; although Dumbledore does not deny his half-bloodedness he also does not advertise the fact, and is generally secretive about his family history. Voldemort, too, is secretive about his family and becomes angered when he is associated with his Muggle lineage. Though they are only two examples, the norm for half-bloods seems to be to hide or lie about their racial classification in order to avoid being harassed or to avoid being the subject of



uncomfortable attention. Ultimately, though, the slipperiness of the term reveals that there are no true differences to which blood prejudices can be bound to.

And yet blood prejudices still exist. Indeed, they are the primary issue around which the *Harry Potter* series function. By looking more closely it is clear that the racial differentiations are created, much as they are in the Muggle world, as a way to perpetuate and manage political and social agendas, and it is worthwhile to examine *why* and *how* racial ideologies ever came about in the series. Although the series is comprised of only seven books, there is a large history built outside of the seven volumes, in side-books and places such as web-based *Pottermore*, where Rowling continues to add to and release information about her fictional universe (such as in books like *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and the *Harry Potter* prequel). Those histories often echo real life history reports, and the two leading reasons that racism and prejudices appear to have begun was a result of the combined need for protection and the (often political) interest in supporting social stratification.

### **Wizard Protection**

Initially, the need to be protected from harmful circumstances is what led to the distancing of wizards from Muggles. In the history that Rowling created, the story goes that as Muggles in the seventeenth century began to prosecute people showing signs of magic (a basic insertion of the 1600s witch trials) and the need for protection from Muggles was widely agreed on, the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy of 1689 was created. This secrecy law effectively separated witches and wizards from Muggles, and like most segregative practices, there began rumors of disfavor and fear about Muggles and Muggle lifestyles. Any material that suggested pro-Muggle relations was confiscated, and associations and sympathy for anything or

anyone Muggle related was subject to attack; in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, Rowling writes that “By the seventeenth century, any witch or wizard who chose to fraternize with Muggles became suspect, even an outcast in his or her own community” (15).

The growing disfavor towards Muggles or pro-Muggle wizards demonstrates that it is easier to fear and be suspicious towards others once those persons have been identified as different. A world in which wizards and Muggles worked and lived alongside each other was replaced by a less troublesome, less integrated, world apart, thus beginning the distancing of the two societies. The ideology of the *Harry Potter* books are certainly built on those histories, and a few hundred years later when the Potter books take place such suspicions and disapproval towards Muggles continue to be believed; in the last book of the series Neville Longbottom describes the corrupt lesson given by his professor of Muggle Studies when he recounts how “We’ve all got to listen to her explain how Muggles are like animals, stupid and dirty, and how they drove wizards into hiding by being vicious towards them, and how the natural order is being reestablished” (*Deathly* 574).

Moreover, the initial barrier between Muggles and wizards led to further divisions within wizarding communities; the closer a person was to being pureblooded, the less they would identify with Muggles. Divergences between half-bloods, Muggle-borns and purebloods worsened as purebloods endeavored to distance themselves even more from Muggle associations. This effectively created ideas about half-bloods and Muggle-borns being different from purebloods, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It boded well for those who were pureblooded, though, and even for those who were not truly pureblooded, because to claim to be pureblooded was a major step towards assuring protection against discrimination. Bethany Barratt wrote that “It is those who themselves feel part of potentially marginalized groups that

are most keen to reify the differences that create “out-groups” of others. The more institutionalized this hierarchy, the more secure their position at the top is” (72-73), and later on she adds to this idea by writing:

purported inferiority can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those that can pass as “normal” or a member of the dominant group become afraid to identify themselves, and therefore the negative stereotypes remain. If the dominant group never sees the “passing” minority members for what they are, they remain unaware of the full diversity within the minority group. (80)

This helps to explain why non-pureblooded characters follow ideas which should technically be considered self-discrimination. Contributing to those race ideologies in order to obtain the protection and comfort of a higher societal position helps maintain the pureblood/half-blood/Muggle-born hierarchy. As the above quote suggests, such discriminative and segregative practices are harmful not only to the targeted group but also to the dominant group.

### **Muggle Protection**

With the growing dislike towards Muggles it could also be argued that the separation of the two communities was likewise a strategy to protect Muggles. It is well known throughout the series that one founder of the wizarding school, Salazar Slytherin (c. 990), rallied against Muggle-borns, and it would not be too implausible to assume that he may have desired more confrontational tactics to the growing problems between Muggle and wizard relations; his more ardent descendants certainly take radical actions against Muggles. A scene in *Goblet of Fire* illustrates just such an attack, in which a humiliated Muggle family is paraded above a crowd:

One of the marchers below flipped Mrs. Roberts upside down with his wand; her nightdress fell down to reveal voluminous drawers and she struggles to cover herself up as the crowd below her screeched and hooted with glee.

“That’s sick,” Ron muttered, watching the smallest Muggle child, who had begun to spin like a top, sixty feet above the ground, his head flopping limply from side to side. “That is really sick....” (*Goblet* 120)

When asked why anyone would attack Muggles in such a way, Arthur Weasley replies, “That’s their idea of fun. Half the Muggle killings back when You-Know-Who was in power were done for fun. I suppose they had a few drinks tonight and couldn’t resist reminding us all that lots of them are still at large” (*Goblet* 143). As the example shows, the separation between Muggles and the wizarding community has continued to deepen over time and we see Voldemort and his followers carrying out Slytherin’s original agenda.

Whether the more extreme theory about Slytherin (the idea that he desired more confrontational attacks against Muggles) is true or not, it is known that Slytherin was a pureblood enthusiast who worried over the dismantling of the wizarding world via relations with non-magical peoples. Subsequently, persons associated with Muggles or being Muggle-born were excluded from Slytherin’s tutorage, and likewise ostracized by others that thought of themselves as “pure” or who identified and sympathized with Slytherin’s pureblood views. His ideas have been important to succeeding generations, especially some of those that inhabit Slytherin’s house at the wizarding school, Hogwarts.

Unfortunately, and as has been mentioned, discriminating attitudes towards Muggles only deepened with time, but so much so that even those who would typically be considered liberal

minded still regard Muggles with a type of paternal fascination; one of the questions which shows this is when a character asks something as simple as “how do Muggles survive without magic?” Barratt wrote that “this kind of fascination is reminiscent of the exoticism often directed toward subjugated peoples under colonialism” (66) – so while Muggle inventions are being regarded with wonder, the people themselves are being differentiated, and in some cases victimized, because theories about their unevolved nature continue to exist in wizard society. Even Mr. Weasley’s departmental title, “Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office” suggests that to study and work with Muggle objects is to study a primitive culture.

A Ministry wizard, Dedalus Diggle, also provides another example of a hidden, perhaps subconscious, tendency to be patronizing towards Muggles; when discussing cars with Harry’s Muggle uncle, Diggle says (in what he means to be a complimentary tone) “Very clever of you, sir, very clever. I personally would be utterly bamboozled by all those buttons and knobs” (*Deathly* 37). Harry’s uncle, meanwhile, takes this as an insult to his driving abilities and as a reason to question the mental capabilities of the Ministry wizard; who, after all, couldn’t learn to drive a car? Such is the divide between the cultures. Hagrid, too, although one of the most kindly characters in the series, uses the word “Muggle” as though it were a deprecating term: he says “I’d like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him” (*Sorcerer’s* 52) and “an’ it’s your bad luck you grew up in a family o’ the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on” (*Sorcerer’s* 53).

As Vernon Dursley’s reaction to the Ministry wizard demonstrates, discriminative attitudes in Rowling’s worlds work both ways. The Dursleys’ continued hatred and ignorance towards Harry’s culture suggest that an amalgamation of the two cultures is unlikely to take place, at least within Harry’s lifetime. Any mention of magic to the Dursleys is abominable and “as welcome in their house as dry rot,” (*Goblet* 19) and whenever there is a chance to demean

wizarding culture, they do so. Mr. Dursley says “People like you in *government*? Oh this explains everything, everything, no wonder the country’s going to the dogs” (*Chamber* 29) and “I hope you told them to dress properly, these people,” [...] “I’ve seen the sort of stuff your lot wear. They’d better have the decency to put on normal clothes,” (*Goblet* 39-40) and again, “I daresay *their kind* don’t set much store by punctuality. Either that or they drive some tin-pot car that’s broken” (*Goblet* 42). As the last example shows, Vernon Dursley can barely bring himself to speak about wizards, and the word magic is akin to a dirty slur; they refer to it as “the ‘M’ word” (*Chamber* 2). In almost every scene in which Harry and Harry’s culture are brought up it is made clear that “having a wizard in the family [is] a matter of deepest shame” (*Chamber* 5).

The Dursleys obviously do not represent all Muggle attitudes, but in every situation - magical, Muggle, fictional or real - blood biases, or racial stereotyping, are easy concepts to fall back on, and whether or not the characters in *Harry Potter* (or in reality) completely agree with the biases and connotations attached to some bloodlines or cultures, many continue to passively accept those ideas because they are part of their society’s historical foundation, and because they offer a familiar medium in which to understand and assign order to the world around them.

The way in which those understandings might be overcome, Rowling seems to suggest, is through individual efforts; Harry and Hermione are two examples of this<sup>1</sup>, but Dudley, too, could possibly be included as an example; in the very last book Dudley’s handshake to Harry suggests that, given more time and attention to each other, the two might have come to have a better understanding of each other’s differences. At least, Rowling affirms that their children do try to understand each other and get along. Rowling mentions this in an interview about the characters’

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<sup>1</sup> We see them interacting with diverse races and cultures through the series, and each time they do it is with an openness to understand, rather than discriminate against, those races and cultures.

futures: “Harry and Dudley would still see each other enough to be on Christmas-card terms, but they would visit more out of a sense of duty [...] so that their children could see their cousins” (*Open Book Tour*). This focus on individual efforts (which progressively lead to larger group efforts) is also suggested later on the series, specifically when it comes to dealing with non-human beings.

### **Power**

The second motive for the creation of race categories in *Harry Potter* (as in other historical situations) was to create and sustain a social hierarchy. As the magical population went into hiding in the seventeenth century small clusters of communities began to form together, and within these new communities new social structures were created. It appears that these structures were built around race identity; the more pureblooded a person was supposed to be, the more respect and social standing (often in combination with monetary gain) they acquired. This is of course in part because those closer to Muggles (such as Muggle-borns or half-bloods) were thought to have less magical ability, or “dirty blood.”

The wizarding community’s movements towards a more stratified social hierarchy is similar to that created in America’s history. The slaves that were brought to America were essentially thought to be less than human, or less superior, than their white equivalents, an idea that was publicized to keep slaves in a subordinate position; likewise, false beliefs about Muggles, and subsequently Muggle-borns and half-bloods, were spread to assure that a certain hierarchy was maintained.

Martha C. Nussbaum, in her argument about group dynamics, writes that attributing dirty-ness, or disgust, from one group onto another is part of group denigration, a type of

othering which keeps one group superior: “Disgust, as psychological research emphasizes, is full of irrational [...] thinking. It is no surprise that ideas of contamination are ubiquitous in racism and other types of group subordination” (33). As the previous quote from Neville’s Muggle Studies teacher demonstrates, sometimes the stereotypes attributed to Muggles are exaggerated to the point that they are described as animal-like. In fact, when categorization of beings was being written in the history of the *Harry Potter* universe, there were some who “campaign[ed] for the classification of Muggles as “beasts” instead of beings (Rowling *xiii*).

In the *Order of the Phoenix* Harry’s godfather reveals that he had a cousin who tried to introduce a bill to make Muggle-hunting legal, and even more examples illustrate the same idea; when traveling on the Night Bus Harry asks “How come the Muggles don’t hear the bus?” and Stan replies (Rowling uses the word “contemptuously”) “Them! [...] Don’ listen properly, do they? Don’ look properly either. Never notice nuffink, they don’,” (*Prisoner* 36) again preserving the idea that Muggles are less observant and less intelligent than wizards. Furthermore, Mrs. Black rages at the presence of a Muggle-born and “blood traitors” in her home; she calls them “*Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, freaks, [...] abomination, shame of my flesh!*” (*Order* 78).

In her study of race history Field’s notes that it is the social circumstances which largely determine what ideologies will follow, and that the ideologies structured around those circumstances become the context which tell “people which details to notice, which to ignore, and which to take for granted in translating the world around them into ideas about that world” (146), so although there is a lot of evidence to contradict ideas about slaves and Muggle-borns or half-bloods being less evolved than their “superiors,” there was also a lot of sociopolitical ideology to ignore such evidences. Similar to the “one drop” theory in American history, when



any evidence of black ancestry, no matter how far back, could determine a person's racial identity and consequently their opportunities, blood status in the wizarding world also became an important sociological factor, determining a character's social standing and who might associate with them (Rattansi 7). Thus half-bloods or Muggle-borns like Hermione are often considered second-class; Rowling states this openly when she wrote "The Malfoys prided themselves on being purebloods; in other words, they considered anyone of Muggle descent, like Hermione, second-class" (*Goblet* 102).

Additionally, verbal insults work to ensure that racial hierarchies remain in place and remain distinct. When discussing an attractive pureblood character, Ginny Weasley, one who socializes with half-bloods and Muggle-borns, Zabini Smith (also a pureblood) coldly states: "I wouldn't touch a filthy little blood traitor like her whatever she looked like" (*Half-Blood* 150). Malfoy, too, despite being helped with his school work by Hermione, says "don't touch my hand, now. I've just washed it, you see; don't want a Mudblood sliming it up" (*Goblet* 298). Such insults and beliefs about differences in race perpetuate social separation so that (at least in prejudiced families) some relationships and other life decisions become controlled by those prejudices.

This harmful treatment towards Muggle-born and half-blood characters is similar to the discriminations faced by multiracial relationships, and in both instances problems of injustice and violence may occur, even though the description of half-bloods and Muggle-borns (henceforth referred to as HBMB wizards) as "dirty" are clearly debatable; the character Morfin Marvolo, though a more extreme example of a pureblood traditionalist, abuses his daughter for having a crush on a Muggle. He says "*is it true? My daughter - pure-blooded descendant of Salazar Slytherin - hankering after a filthy, dirt-veined Muggle? You disgusting little Squib, you*

*filthy little blood traitor*” (*Half-Blood* 210). Although the scene with the Marvolos is a short one, there is a lot of detail to suggest that the girl is routinely abused and berated for her soft sentiments and fondness for just one Muggle. Furthermore, she is labeled a Squib; in part because of her affections for a Muggle, but also because of her failure to live up to the expectations of her pureblood heritage.

As was mentioned before, the underlying current of doubt and suspicion of non-pureblooded wizards is encouraged, mostly to the advantage of the purebloods. Because of the perceived invalidity of HBMB wizards it became easier to use HBMB wizards as a type of scapegoat for society; signaling out a group to be victimized is where institutional hatred begins. Greed also plays a part in those characters that understand what is to be gained by discriminating against HBMB wizards: that is, the social advantages and privileges associated with purebloods.

Jackie C. Horne writes that social racisms are often found “in the institutions that grant privileges and power to certain racial groups in a society, and restrict other racial groups from the same” (80). This can most clearly be seen in the Prime Minister, Cornelius Fudge, whose affiliations show that he is often more receptive to pureblooded character suggestions and needs. Conversely, Ron’s father, who holds a minor position at the ministry, knows that it is his “fondness for Muggles that has held him back at the Ministry all these years. Fudge thinks he lacks proper wizarding pride” (*Goblet* 711). Ron’s father is as magically accomplished as any of the other Ministry employees, but it is the characterization of being a blood traitor (he established the Muggle Protection Act – an act that was, honestly, frighteningly overdue) which prevents him from being promoted or having much of a voice in the wizarding community.

Though such economic discriminations are worrying, more worryingly still was the segregation of Muggle-borns. In the *Deathly Hallows* the question of how Muggle-borns

obtained magical powers began to be circulated, and those that could not provide evidence of magical lineage were forcefully separated from families and wizarding society. It was theorized that Muggle-borns might have tricked a wizard into gifting them with their abilities because it was not understood how a person without magical parents could be as magically proficient as a pureblood. A “Muggle-Born Registry,” very reminiscent of the ethnic cleansing from World World II, was created, which stated that:

*Where no proven Wizarding ancestry exists [...] the so-called Muggle-born is likely to have obtained magical power by theft or force. The Ministry is determined to root out such usurpers of magical power, and to this end has issued an invitation to every so-called Muggle-born to present themselves for interview by the newly appointed Muggle-born Registration Commission. (original italics) (Deathly 209)*

Further still, the perpetuation of racism via in the most powerful and political institution (the Ministry of Magic) is seen in the Magic is Might statute within the Ministry. It depicts a witch and wizard sitting atop the carvings of Muggles; when Harry looks more closely at the statue he realizes that “what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards” (*Deathly* 242). Of course this statue is instituted in a dark moment when the Ministry is experiencing its most extreme attitudes against Muggles and HBMBs, but it goes to show how the Ministry is not incapable or insusceptible to propagating pureblood opinions. In his youth, even the most Muggle-supportive character, Albus Dumbledore, was impassioned by the idea of the wizarding community’s divine right to be dominate over Muggles, but most distinctly *helpful* and *protective* of Muggles for the Muggles’ own good,

though he realized soon after how those ideas might be misconstrued as power plots (*Deathly* 357).

One final example of how institutions imbed racial attitudes in a culture appears in the series' most worrying piece of propaganda, a pamphlet titled "MUDBLOODS: and the Dangers They Pose to a Peaceful Pure-Blood Society" (*Deathly* 249). Barratt writes that "propaganda can be an extremely powerful tool in shaping public opinion, and doing so is crucial if a leader bases his legitimacy on doing the will of the people," (68) and it seems that the will of the people, or at least the will of the ruling classes, does involve the removal of Muggle-borns at the height of the series' racial conflicts. This is probably a good time to note that not all of the series' powerful figures are bent on supporting racial intolerance. Though he isn't Prime Minister, it cannot be doubted that Albus Dumbledore is equally authoritative in his community, and he spends a good deal of his time trying to convince others of the problems and inconsistencies of racist politics.

One such example of Dumbledore's attempt to instruct the Prime Minister to dismiss his prejudices is near the conclusion of *Goblet of Fire*. Fudge and Dumbledore have an argument about the topic to which Dumbledore replies "You place too much importance, and you always have done, on the so-called purity of blood! You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!" (Rowling 708). Unfortunately the Prime Minister is too scared to accept the truth of Dumbledore's advice, and he is in such deep denial that he works with the power of the press to discredit Dumbledore and undermine all of Dumbledore's progressive efforts. As Dumbledore's reputation is warped, so too are the reputations of those who support Dumbledore, until Dumbledore and his sympathizers are shadowed with doubt and suspicion. In this way the magical community learns to be wary of (or, in some cases, frightened of sharing) Dumbledore's liberal ideas, because to do so might affect them negatively; Barratt

writes that “one of the most toxic modes of intimidation is targeting not the group itself, but its sympathizers” (69), and in this way pureblood beliefs are given precedence.

As was previously mentioned, and as wizarding history confirms, biases towards blood status are not recent developments but ones that have been carried out through wizarding history. Like a ubiquitous and unsubstantiated myth, the majority of the magical community is resistant to questioning the biological support of blood classification, despite the lack of evidence that they are founded on, because those classifications became such a significant way of identifying oneself and others, and of supporting social hierarchies. There can be no doubt that undeserved hatred and violence towards Muggles and HBMB wizards continued to be a problem in the *Harry Potter* series, especially as pureblood enthusiasts gained popularity and exaggerated ideologies about Muggles and HBMB wizards were circulated.

## CHAPTER TWO: VOLDEMORT AND RACIAL PURIFICATION

“I’d say that it’s one short step from ‘Wizards first’ to ‘Purebloods first,’ and then to ‘Death Eaters,’” replied Kingsley. “We’re all human, aren’t we? Every human life is worth the same, and worth saving.”

- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (440)

Although the previous chapter provided some outline for why and how racism began to exist in the *Harry Potter* series, this chapter is focused more specifically on how racist ideologies become so successfully perpetuated near the end of the series. It’s easiest to understand this by looking closely at Lord Voldemort, who is committed to rekindling Salazar Slytherin’s views on Muggles and purity of blood.

First, though, it is necessary to look at Lord Voldemort’s past; Tom Riddle, who later re-named himself “Lord Voldemort,” was brought up in an orphanage in the Muggle world and had no knowledge of the racial ideas permeating the wizarding world. However, these ideas would have become apparent to him once he’d been introduced to Hogwarts (and the social/stereotyped dynamics that are reflected in each school house), and they would, perhaps, have been even more obvious to him since he’d been raised in a society where they did not exist.

His introduction to the prejudices of the wizarding world were likely helped by his own initial prejudices; all the evidence from his childhood suggest that he was unliked and unhappy with the Muggles in the orphanage, and that he felt himself different, but most distinctly *superior*, to them. He says “I knew I was special. [...] I can make things move without touching them. I can make animals do what I want them to do, without training them. I can make bad things happen to people who annoy me. I can make them hurt if I want to” (*Half-Blood* 271). This superiority does not go unnoticed by the other children or Mrs. Cole, the matron of the orphanage, who notes that the other children were frightened of Tom Riddle and that she doesn’t

think “many people will be sorry to see the back of him” (*Half-Blood* 268). It seems that his feelings of dislike and superiority are further supported, or aggravated, by the prejudices he learns about once he attends Hogwarts.

It is safe to assume, too, that the importance of blood status was discussed by those around him in Slytherin’s house, where status really matters; as Tess Stockslager says “one can surmise that he [Voldemort] learn[ed] quickly enough from his Slytherin housemates the stigma attached to being anything but a pure-blood” (129). Voldemort’s leanings have some clinical definitions as well, or what social psychologists would call “normative social influence,” the “desire to fit in with and be accepted by others” (Green 305); that is, in order to be more widely accepted Voldemort would need to identify as a pureblood, and like others he would need to discriminate against Muggles and HBMBs (half-bloods and Muggle-borns). This also comes in part because of Voldemort’s need to be accepted – he has no family, no friends, and no money – and identifying as a pure-blood is one step toward material and social wealth. It seems, additionally, to have been his fear of being recognized as anything less than a pureblood which drove him to quickly adopt wizarding prejudices about blood status.

Voldemort’s decision to identify as pureblooded is further indicative of what Sigmund Freud theorized about in “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.” Freud wrote that “Identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person” (175), and growing up as an outlier in an orphanage, Voldemort’s identification seems to have first been made with his Slytherin house-mates. Additionally, Freud speculated that a father figure is the subject which a child wishes to become, but because Voldemort matures without a father, the first subject, or stand-in-father(s), also may have been fulfilled by his Slytherin house-mates, or the head of Slytherin House. Certainly, Voldemort has strong

connections with Professor Slughorn, who later becomes Slytherin Head of House, though Voldemort seems to do this in part because he is attracted to the status and power Slughorn has connections with.

It may also be assumed that the contempt and loathing that Voldemort builds towards HBMBs and Muggles reflects the self-loathing that he has towards his half-blood identity. At least, this type of psychological self-loathing has been seen before in stigmatized groups; when a specific race has been identified by society as bad or inferior, a member of that race (whether consciously or not) may incorporate and share their society's suggestions about that race, therefore experiencing self-loathing or conflicting perceptions of self. Of course there is more to a person's (or character's) identity than their race, but race is still, undoubtedly, a powerful and important part of a person's self-awareness. Indeed, once Voldemort learns of his half-blood heredity he seem unable to bear such a truth; as Dumbledore recounts: "There he [Voldemort] murdered the Muggle man who had abandoned his witch mother, and, for good measure, his Muggle grandparents, thus obliterating the last of the unworthy Riddle line and revenging himself upon the father who never wanted him" (367). By murdering his Muggle lineage Voldemort in effect rejects and destroys the last living evidence of his half-bloodedness.

Lana Whited, in "The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature," connects Voldemort's self-loathing to Adolf Hitler's racial intolerance of Jews. She writes that:

Hitler's own Jewish ancestry apparently caused him to view himself with the scorn [Voldemort] reserves for "Mudbloods" and has led generations of scholars to surmise that his attempt to exterminate the Jews might have been an attempt to eliminate the part of himself he loathed. (par. 8)



Moreover, Whited compares how Hitler and Voldemort are both leaders who incited violence (and eventually genocide, in Hitler's case – though Voldemort tried) against specific racial groups, though they themselves could be included in those groups. Her essay also agrees that it could partly be the self-loathing for the “weaker” parts of their identity, and their unhappy childhoods, which cause Voldemort and Hitler to inflict injustice on others of that race.

Rowling admits in an interview that “Voldemort is of course a sort of Hitler” (Upton). Like Voldemort, Hitler, too, appears to have developed prejudices in his early childhood. A contributor to the *Leaky Cauldron* writes that “one of the reasons why Hitler hated the Jews was because he blamed them for his poverty and unhappiness; he believed that they were responsible for the loss of the First World War and the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles” (Vick). Of course this theory, which is founded on the idea that Hitler suspected himself to have descended from a Jewish grandparent, cannot be totally verified without historical proof, but the idea itself was enough to worry Hitler so that he “had the Nazi law defining Jewishness written to exclude Jesus Christ and himself” (“Adolf”), and it clearly bothered Voldemort, since he removed his Muggle lineage by murdering them.

Besides these more personal similarities Voldemort and Hitler's political pursuits for racial purity also follow similar patterns. In *The Politics of Harry Potter* Barratt writes that “Hitler established the link between himself and the leading group [...] and created [...] firm mutual interrelationships between those above and below – a plan that guaranteed action as well as continuous control of the followers” (Staudinger 19). Likewise, Voldemort creates a similar connection with his Death Eaters, who are loyal to him because of the strong sense of familial connection that Voldemort creates, but also because of a shared sense of wizarding pride and the

fear of being outside Voldemort's protection, all reasons which ensure "continuous control of the followers."

In particular, both Voldemort and Hitler worked to convince their publics that their intentions were for their societies' benefit. There are slogans which reflect these intentions: Voldemort's predecessor Gellert Grindelwald promoted wizard superiority with the message that it would be "For the greater good," while Hitler promoted propaganda with phrases such as "Free Germany from the Jews" (Snell 31). Such slogans suggest positive messages about unification, strength, and nationalism, instead of overtly violent and hateful messages.

Furthermore, they both worked off their community's fear of difference. In both situations the threats attached to a specific race were perpetuated by newspapers and propaganda that exaggerated and supported certain stereotypes (such as was seen in Umbridge's pamphlet titled "Mudbloods"); this allowed people to project blame, frustrations, and hatred to one group that they viewed as responsible for their society's problems. Purebloods especially did this; Barratt says that "As purebloods lost power after Voldemort's disappearance, they came to increasingly resent their status, and to look for someone to blame" (63). Hitler, too "saw that a middle class badly in need of inspiration was very pleased to have somewhere to point the finger [...] They could not directly target the victorious Allies or the global economy, but they *could* target the Jewish shopkeeper on the corner" (Barratt 63). Barratt notices also that:

In every polity that has engaged in official mass discrimination, some form of registration or documentation of that group has occurred. This can be as primitive as the affixing of a yellow star to the clothing, and as sophisticated as maintaining a biometric database of persons traveling in and out of the country [...] identification allows for singling out members of a target group. (68-69)

As the example that Barratt includes shows, the Third Reich differentiated people by using labels or symbols, such as with the yellow star, but Voldemort's regime does this as well when they create the Muggle-Born Registration Commission. Though there is no symbol to delineate HBMBs and purebloods, the action of taking away HBMB wizards' wands is effectively a form of classifying them as "other" and inferior. It's ironic that this type of superficial identification should occur because the necessity to differentiate groups in this way openly reveals that such differentiations are not natural or noticeably characteristic, but constructed by people and societal stereotyping.

Nevertheless, such prejudices were able to thrive because they built strength and support from traditional and familiar principles. Both Hitler and Voldemort's ideas "were appealing because they offered a new, optimistic world view," all the while containing familiar cultural ideas: in Hitler's case because they "contained elements familiar to Germans in their former ideas of nation, national pride, and folk ideas" (Staudinger 19), and in Voldemort's case because they contained elements of the wizarding communities' ideas about wizard superiority.

Of course not everyone believed or was supportive of discriminative practices or propaganda, but to speak out against such popular movements could be dangerous. Even Dumbledore, who openly contradicted prejudices, was not immune to the risks of supporting his own beliefs; Dumbledore's friend, Elphias Doge, says "Indeed, [Dumbledore's] determined support for Muggle rights gained him many enemies in subsequent years" (*Deathly* 17). This again reflects the normative social influences mentioned earlier, and is recognized by Remus Lupin, who discusses the fear that people have about speaking out under Voldemort's regime; at the height of Voldemort's power Lupin says that people "daren't confide in each other, not knowing whom to trust; they are scared to speak out, in case their suspicions are true and their

families are targeted” (*Deathly* 208). Similarly, people were often fearful of contradicting the Third Reich because their families could be targeted, or they might lose their job, etcetera. Even if someone did not agree with the prejudiced views being circulated, there were still those who continued to support those ideas because of the backing of (or threat from) an authority figure; the famous study done by Stanley Milgram showed that “people would obey authority, even when that authority went against some of their most fundamental values” (Green 306).

As has been shown, Voldemort and Hitler share similar psychological and social patterns which give reason to their comparable political and cultural endeavors. Thankfully there is an end to Voldemort and Hitler’s similarities. Although both men’s administrations successfully managed to convince members of their communities to act indifferent, unkindly, or violently against a targeted group, Voldemort was not wholly successful at enabling mass acts of genocide against Muggles or HBMBs.

By comparing these two men and their tactics, however, we can see how racism was made so prevalent within their communities; the use of familiar and traditional ideologies, the use of differentiating symbols, combined with fear and a group to focus all blame on, assisted the revival of Salazar Slytherin’s intent for a “purer” and stronger wizarding community. This is not to say that the *Harry Potter* series is an allegory for World War II, but there are definitely some similar characteristics and trends shared by the series and the war. The whole point of making these comparisons, however, has been to better understand how racial prejudices may be made predominant, and why they might be so institutionally supported. *Harry Potter* is primarily a young adult fantasy story, but we also see a lot of other historical and psychological factors at work which give further depth to the series.

### CHAPTER THREE: ELVISH WELFARE

“Halfway down the hall was a fountain. A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin, and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard. Glittering jets of water were flying from the ends of the two wands, the point of the centaur’s arrow, the tip of the goblin’s hat, and each of the house-elf’s ears.”

- *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (127)

Before it was replaced by the Magic is Might statue (mentioned in chapter one), there was the Fountain of Magical Brethren, as described in the quote above. What is interesting about this statue is how the non-wand-carrying figures are placed in lower, subservient positions; the statue reflects the traditional ideas that have influenced the hierarchy of magical classes. It must also have been a source of contention to the non-wizarding beings that visited or worked at the Ministry. I have begun this chapter with the description of the fountain because it epitomizes the stereotypes existent in the magical community, and it also hints at the issues underlining those stereotypes.

Farah Mendelsohn, whose essay “Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Constructions of Authority,” argues that Rowling’s series, despite appearing progressive and liberal-oriented, ultimately reaffirms race ideologies. Initially this would appear to be true; although the characters are concerned with the race issues affecting themselves, the series largely glosses over the race inequalities faced by others in the series. Horne also makes a similar observation. She writes that the depictions of race put Rowling “in a difficult double bind as the series progressively increases its focus on its antiracist themes” because, as she says “how can you argue on one hand that Mudbloods should be granted the same rights as pureblood wizards, but suggest on the other that another sentient race is, by nature, servile to another?” (Horne 87). It

would seem that Mendelsohn and Horne would agree that the result of the series “is a muddled morality” and that finally the series embodies “inherently conservative and hierarchical notions of authority” (Mendelsohn 375).

Similar arguments have been made by others, too, such as Elaine Ostry, whose essay “Accepting Mudbloods: The Ambivalent Social Vision of J.K. Rowling’s Fairy Tales” suggests that the series is rife with moral traditionalism, but I hope to prove that, despite the difficulties of racism within the wizarding community, the examples Rowling delivers overall do (although perhaps not extrovertly) lean towards reformist measures which would create a more egalitarian society for the humans and non-humans of her series. Specifically, she shows this through characters’ individual efforts, which tend to be more successful than group, or activist, efforts. For example, I think Rowling is suggesting this when Dumbledore, as soon as the fountain is destroyed, says that it “told a lie. We wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long, and we are now reaping our reward” (*Order* 834).

Within Rowling’s *Harry Potter* world are many different beings, so many different ones that she created a separate anthology which endeavors to explain the many creatures and how the wizarding society classifies them. She does this in *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them*, in which she has a fictional narrator, Newton Scamander, summarize the history of wizard relations with other beings. In this part history, part reference book, Scamander reveals the difficulties that wizards have had over the years in understanding beings that they identify as different from themselves. The two main categories that have arisen from this troubled history are the “beast” and “being” categories. The difficulty of deciding which category someone belongs to is evident when you consider the changes in definition that those two categories have undergone.

The first definition of “being” in the *Harry Potter* series was introduced around the fourteenth century, and was given to any member of the magical community which could walk on two legs (Rowling *xix*). It became clear that it was an inappropriate definition because it included creatures such as trolls but failed to include mer-people or ghosts, both of which were intelligent enough to be rightly offended. The following definition, that “beings” were those who could speak the human tongue, were again limiting, and failed again to include intelligent beings such as mer-people who were excluded because they can only speak within water. The final definition, decided in 1811, which continues into the present of the *Harry Potter* series, decreed a “being” to be “any creature that has sufficient intelligence to understand the laws of the magical community and to bear part of the responsibility in shaping those laws” (Rowling *xii*).<sup>2</sup>

One of the most interesting details about this history, though, is the role that goblins had in altering the opinions of the Wizards’ Council. The mere name of the Council suggest the exclusivity that wizards endeavored to maintain, but there are hints in Scamander’s report which suggest that goblins played a big part in convincing the Council to change their definitions and be more considerate of the diversity within their community. When the first two-legged idea was suggested, it was goblins who invited and presented as many two-legged creatures as they could find, most pointedly including those that clearly shouldn’t have attended, thus revealing to the Council the mistake of their definition. Soon after, when the second definition was decided, it was again the goblins who strove to prove the folly of such a description; they taught trolls a few simple sentences, technically classifying them as “language speakers” and proving to the Council that the definition was still not good enough.

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<sup>2</sup> The only exception that has since been made to that definition was made by ghosts, who felt that it was insensitive to be classified as “beings,” thus a third division, Spirit, was created.

By the end of the series anyone classified as “being” would be “worthy of legal rights and a voice in the governance of the magical world,” (Rowling *x*) but many wizards still failed to acknowledge that right in some beings. Moreover, there is no suggestion that non-humans have any positions in government. The two beings which are most obviously disregarded by wizards in these matters are goblins and house-elves. Interestingly, Scamander fails to mention, entirely, house-elves in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. This might suggest that they are not classified as either beast or being, but more likely it is a consequence of their being overlooked, as they consistently have been, throughout wizarding history, just as other servants and slaves have been in the Muggle reality.

Unlike some<sup>3</sup> of the slaves in American history, the slaves (house-elves) in the wizarding world do not express, at least visibly, interest in their freedom, despite the hundreds (and possibly thousands) of years they have been made to be subservient to wizarding peoples. Even Dobby, who continually expresses gratitude about being a free elf, did not openly ask to be freed; we only know that he, like many other house-elves, was made to regularly physically punish himself on behalf of his family, and that despite all of the emotional, mental, and physical abuse, he would continue to serve the family until he dies, or until he was set free; Dobby says “A house-elf must be set free, sir. And the family will never set Dobby free...Dobby will serve the family until he dies, sir...” (*Chamber* 14). Certainly, his situation as a house-elf for the Malfoy family was not a healthy one, but he never openly complained about the abuse he received from

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<sup>3</sup> This is not meant to be a generalization, there were of course slaves who were uncomfortable with the idea of being free because it was all they knew, and/or because they were afraid of repercussions of acting out.



them, possibly because he was never given the option to complain or to be free. No house-elves are.

Although he cannot speak out against his situation, all evidence suggests that Dobby desires something better. In the *Chamber of Secrets* we see Dobby hinting at the benefits that he has noticed since the downfall of Voldemort (and subsequently the breakdown of many of Voldemort's administrations); talking in the third person, Dobby comments that:

“Dobby remembers how it was when [Voldemort] was at the height of his powers, sir! We house-elves were treated like vermin, sir! Of course, Dobby is still treated like that, sir [...] but mostly, sir, life has improved for my kind since you triumphed over [Voldemort] ...it was a new dawn, sir, and Harry Potter shone like a beacon of hope for those of us who thought the Dark days would never end, sir.” (*Chamber* 178)

Harry, who is not familiar with Dobby's or any house-elf's situation, does not initially understand Dobby's concerns. Nor does Harry seem to connect Dobby's behaviors or vernacular to history lessons about slavery in the Muggle world, such as Hermione does (the use of the word “sir” is without doubt reminiscent of American slavery; house-elves even use the term “master” to sometimes refer to their families).

Like all elves or slaves, Dobby is essentially treated as property, and it would appear, at least externally, that house-elves do not view themselves as individuals with individual identities. The fact that Dobby continually refers to himself as “Dobby” instead of “I” hints at how deeply imbedded the psychological impacts of house-elf slavery are. Even after being freed Dobby has difficulty accepting and adjusting to his newly recognized self-identity. He mismatches clothes and continues to subjugate himself unnecessarily, but perhaps out of habit.

For example, when he finally finds employment at Dumbledore's school Dobby refuses Dumbledore's offer for weekends off and good pay, finally convincing Dumbledore for one day off a month, and 1/10 the original pay value offered (*Goblet* 379). Though he is technically free, many of Dobby's actions and decisions reveal that he is not yet accustomed to freedom; unlike HBMBs, elves appear to have been subjugated for so long that they have grown to believe they are as inferior as wizards suggest they are.

Marcus Shulzke relates Dobby's identity problems, and house-elf identity problems in general, to false-consciousness: the idea that a subjugated class understands their class position in a way which does not accurately reflect that position. In his essay "Wizard's Justice and Elf Liberation: Politics and Political Activism in *Harry Potter*," Shulzke notes how similarly the house-elves and the proletariat of the communist revolution in the early twentieth century act. He writes:

After the failure of communist revolutions throughout Europe in the early twentieth century, some socialists decided that the workers were incapable of seeing that their objective class interest was revolution. They explained this observation with the idea of false consciousness: workers who do not want to fight for a more egalitarian society are being misled by the ruling class's ideology, and they end up siding with their oppressors. (119)

Similarly, house-elves are often seen "siding with their oppressors;" and they become upset when the topic of freedom is brought up; everything they say and do suggests that they *want* to be servants. This portrayal of the happy slave reflects the idea of a "happy darky," which Horne describes as the "simple, loyal, and childlike, happy to serve their betters" misconceptions that African American's were portrayed as being in 1930s and 40s Hollywood (82). Clearly, such

a portrayal of African American's was incorrect, and the issues experience by American slaves and house-elves run so similarly that it does not seem far-fetched to assume that a similar, though repressed, desire for freedom might exist in the elf population. Furthermore, the "happy darky" depiction of the elves does nothing to help their situation, or have it be taken seriously; the result, instead, is to turn the house-elves and their situations into a type of comic relief which distracts from the heaviness of their issues introduced in the series. When they're not being laughed at for their peculiarities, the house-elves basically serve to function as appliances; they are only owned by wealthy families, working at night and only appearing when they are needed.

When Hermione points out how horrible their lifestyle is, and wonders why nobody does anything about it, Ron replies "Well, the elves are happy, aren't they [...] You heard old Winky back at the match ... 'House-elves is not supposed to have fun' ... that's what she likes, being bossed around..." (*Goblet* 125). Maybe there is some truth to what Ron says and what Winky and the other elves repeat, but the history of slavery and the concept of false-consciousness implies more strongly that the elves agree with their suggested inferiority because, as Hermione puts it, they're "uneducated" and "brainwashed" (*Goblet* 139).

It is interesting that Hermione should be the one who so strongly objects to the house-elves' subjection<sup>4</sup>. Shultzke writes that Hermione's "experience of intolerance [as a Muggle-born] gives her a deep understanding of how it feels to be an outsider, and it motivates her to work on behalf of other marginalized groups," (118) but this doesn't explain why the other marginalized characters do not seriously consider Hermione's concern for the house-elves. For example, the Weasley twins, who are poor and labeled as "blood traitors" say that they have met

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<sup>4</sup> It is Hermione's efforts, too, which are often used for comic relief.

the elves, and they claim that “they’re *happy*. They think they’ve got the best job in the world” (*Goblet* 239). Similarly, Hagrid, whose status as a half-breed has made his life difficult, and who could also, like Hermione, empathize with being discriminated against, still agrees and reinforces wizarding ideology when he says “It’d be doin’ ‘em an unkindness” to set ‘em free.” (*Goblet* 265). It seems that because they grew up knowing about the role of elves, Ron, his brothers and other members of the wizarding community do not think to question the status quos of their social hierarchy. Even Dumbledore, the “champion of commoners,” has had a chance for more than a hundred years to do something about elf rights, and has only perpetuated discrimination by not taking action. Arguably, Dumbledore did this because he was working on “the bigger picture” and to let the elves go would have been to leave them without a support system, signifying that a more radical solution may be needed.

Sirius Black, too, falls into the tendency to discriminate against elves. Although he originally seems equitable when he says “If you want to know what a man’s like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors,” (*Goblet* 525) he then goes on to taunt and sometimes abuse Kreacher, his family’s house-elf. There is one excuse for Sirius’ behavior, since Kreacher reminds Sirius of a past he’d rather forget, but even Dumbledore observes: “I warned Sirius [...] that Kreacher must be treated with kindness and respect. I also told him that Kreacher could be dangerous to us. I do not think Sirius took me very seriously” (*Order* 832).<sup>5</sup> Perhaps if Sirius had been able to recognize that Kreacher was just as damaged as he was himself by the Black family’s pureblood traditions, their relationship might have had a less devastating outcome<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Again, individual efforts against discrimination are being encouraged here.

<sup>6</sup> That is, the death of Sirius and the unhappy life led by Kreacher.

In general, the other characters seem to regard Hermione's efforts as misguided, and some fun is poked at the society S.P.E.W. (Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare) she initiated. It would appear that Luisa Grijalva Maza also agrees with the other characters; she argues that Hermione is misguided because of the unconscious ideology Hermione assumes as she becomes integrated into the wizarding community. Maza writes that even though the elves' needs are similar to Hermione's, Hermione "fails to ask the elves their own opinion of their needs" and that to fail to do so is a sign that Hermione is reproducing "the view that house elves are inferior in that they are incapable of constructing their own meanings of freedom and happiness, in this way reinforcing the superiority of her newly adopted magical human identity" (431).

Are her efforts misguided, though? I would argue that even though others might disagree with or ignore Hermione's efforts (or turn them into something to be laughed at), her plan is ultimately a good one; "Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that people living in his ideal participatory democracy may have to be "forced to be free" before they may be able to understand how they were previously misguided (Shulzke 119). Dobby is our only example of a free elf, but the happiness that he expresses after being freed suggests that Rousseau's idea of forced freedom might be a necessary step for the elves. At the very least Hermione's efforts can be seen to suggest a legislative, rather than regulated, opportunity for elves to be free, which is similar to Rousseau's idea of positive liberty. Ultimately, Dobby is an example to suggest that the status quo which elves have lived with for so long is not appropriate for, or appreciated by, all elves.

If this is true then Hermione's attempts to force the elves free by hiding pieces of clothing for them to accidentally pick up is not as erroneous as many of the others in the series suggest. It

is also interesting that Rowling should choose to title Hermione's elf protection society with the acronym S.P.E.W., of all the possible titles she could have created, since the literal definition of the word "spew" means to "expel large quantities rapidly and forcibly" – perhaps she is intending to suggest that something (forceful?) needs to happen (rapidly, soon?) to the large population of under-represented house-elves?

There is quite a lot of evidence that suggests elves, if not for their significant repression, could equally "hold their own" in the wizard community. Yes, Dobby still refers to himself in the third person and does not have a clear understanding of pay for work, but this can be attributed to the lack of education he's been given. Elves have many abilities which equal wizards, and in some cases surpass wizarding abilities; in *Chamber of Secrets* Dobby proves that elves can tamper with wizarding spells without detection (the barrier at 9 ¾, the Malfoy dungeon, and the cave in which Voldemort hides a horcrux), they can perform magic *without a wand* (the flying desert in book two), they can track wizards (both Dobby and Kreacher do this in the final book when locating Mundungus) and they can even break the rules to which their families bind them. For example, Sirius says "no, house-elves can't leave unless they're given clothes, they're tied to their family's house" and Harry responds "They can leave the house if they really want to," (*Order* 504) which we learn to be true as both Dobby and Kreacher do this.

However, despite all of their power and abilities, house-elves continue to be enslaved because they know no other option and are given no other option; elves have been made "inferior" because that is what they have been told they are. This type of inferiority and segregation from society is similar to what black American's endured in recent history; it is noted in a Supreme Court case that "such segregation creates in Negro children a "sense of inferiority" which "affects the motivation of a child to learn"; that legally sanctioned segregation

“therefore has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of [N]egro children” (Brief 11) Dumbledore seems to be hinting at this problem when notes that the house-elf Kreacher “is what he has been made by wizards, Harry. Yes, he is to be pitied. His existence has been as miserable as your friend Dobby’s” (*Order* 832).

Another damaging reason that the enslavement of house-elves continues to go unquestioned is because their servitude enables wizards to remain at the top of the community’s hierarchy. Maza said it best when she wrote that “magical identity was never absolute, transcendental, independent, self-constituted; it is derived from, and maintained through, difference and opposition *vis-à-vis* the Other,” (430) in which, of course, the Other is anyone non-human, including the house-elves, goblins, centaurs, giants, etc. Perhaps Hermione’s awareness of slavery in Muggle history allows her to recognize this biased hierarchy, but it would also appear that she has a much more difficult task ahead in her elf liberation plans, since “the stability of the magical identity fundamentally depends, not on the total annihilation of the Other, but on its *constant exclusion*” (emphasis added) (Maza 430).

Just as the unfair treatment of house-elves was being recognized, however, interest in them began to wane dramatically. Even though the house-elves’ problem runs parallel to the race issues faced by the human characters, Rowling seems to have recognized that to continue focusing on their problems would take away from the main focus of the plot (that is, the racial purification being conducted by Voldemort’s Ministry). This is perhaps why Hermione is cut off whenever a discussion about house-elves or goblins begins to escalate. For instance, when Hermione says “It’s people like *you*, Ron [...] who prop up rotten and unjust systems, just because they’re too lazy to -” (*Goblet* 125) she is cut off by a noise and the conversation is not brought up again until she tries to stick up for Winky, who is being abused in front of her:

“The way they’re treating her! [...] he didn’t care how frightened she’d been, or how upset she was – it was like she wasn’t even human!”

“Well, she’s not,” said Ron.

Hermione rounded on him. “That doesn’t mean she hasn’t got feelings, Ron. It’s disgusting the way -” (*Goblet* 139).

She is again cut off here. These are not the only two instances in which Hermione is cut off, or where her recognition of non-human abuse is hushed by other characters, but in their defense, the human characters also have a lot to deal with which more directly concerns them, and is perhaps why Hermione’s arguments are so often hindered.

In the end, Dobby’s happiness with freedom, and the many parallels that house-elves share with slaves in Muggle history, suggest that to force elves into freedom, or at least giving them the option to be free, could be the start of a solution. Undoubtedly, house-elves are, without great concern or notice, used for testing poisons, sent into dangerous and sometimes life threatening situations for their masters, routinely abused, accused of crimes of which they didn’t commit, and generally regarded as beings with less than human feelings or abilities, all of which clearly parallel real life accounts of slavery and servitude<sup>7</sup>.

So, despite the resistance the elves face from the majority, the individual efforts from Hermione, and then in her friends, suggest that change is possible. In the final battle of the series we see house-elves siding with Harry and his allies, with Kreacher leading the elf procession: “the house-elves of Hogwarts swarmed into the entrance hall, screaming and waving carving

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<sup>7</sup> Especially in reference to World War II, when people – specifically non-Ayran - were made to leave homes or businesses, were attacked or accused of lying, and generally were portrayed as less than human or animal like (often through propaganda).



knives and cleavers, and at their head [...] Kreacher” who was shouting “Fight! Fight! Fight for my Master, defender of house-elves!” (*Deathly* 734). The dialogue may not have changed yet (Kreacher is still referring to Harry as “master”), but we see a shift in loyalty and activity; here, at the end of the series, the house-elves are taking charge of themselves and supporting Harry because they believe their futures may benefit from his allegiance.

Even Ron, who has been raised in a traditional wizarding setting (where house-elf rights are not mentioned or questioned), proves himself a convert by the end of the series when the battle of Hogwarts is taking place; he says “I mean we should tell them [the house-elves] to get out. [...] We can’t order them to die for us” (*Deathly* 625). An optimistic future for elves seems especially true as Harry begins to recognize that the hierarchal system represented by the Fountain of Magical Brethren is not natural, but constructed (in more ways than one). After a second consideration of the Fountain he notices that the wizard looked “rather weak and foolish,” the witch had a “vapid smile like a beauty contestant” and that it was very unlikely that real goblins or centaurs would ever be caught staring so “soppily at humans of any description” (*Order* 156).

Horne, it seems, agrees. When discussing Harry’s interpretation of the Fountain of Magical Brethren she writes:

Harry recognized that a wizard-made statue [...] was less a depiction of truth and more a fantasy, a fantasy intended to instill the belief in its viewers that the hierarchical relations between humans and racial others is natural and proper. Such a fantasy, Harry recognizes, does not reflect reality, but rather *constructs* a racial hierarchy with wizards at the apex.

(96)

Mysteriously, there is no mention of the type of monument that will replace the Fountain of Magical Brethren or the Magic is Might statue. It wouldn't be too far-fetched, though, what with the increased popularity of Harry, Ron, and Hermione, to assume that any successive monument would reflect the heroes' views about equality, given what they've worked so hard to achieve (if any statue, at all, replaces the others). Even though elf rights issues are too extensive to fully address in the series, there is at least the knowledge that Hermione continues with her S.P.E.W. efforts later in life as she becomes the Deputy Head for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. In the end, individual approaches seem the best solution to reduce prejudices and discriminative actions: we see this through Harry and Hermione's personable efforts, whereas the more activist actions (such as with S.P.E.W. or the goblin rebellions) are more quickly shut down in the series (which will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter).

## CHAPTER FOUR: GOBLINS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

“Wizarding history often skates over what the wizards have done to other magical races.”

*-Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (506)*

It is clear that house-elves are mistreated and made subservient via hundreds of years of social and psychological pressures, but unlike house-elves, the goblins, who are also subordinated and who have also withstood years of social and psychological pressures from wizards, prove to be a race which continually resist the wizards' suggested superiority. In fact, there is a lot of evidence to show that the goblins are amongst the most powerful non-human species in the series, so how do wizards manage to deny them equal rights?

The answer to this question goes hand-in-hand with the proof that goblins are as powerful and equal in abilities as wizards; as each of their capabilities to perform equally with wizards is revealed, so too are the barriers with which wizards keep them subordinate. Some of this evidence comes from Newt Scamander's historical account of the role goblins played in altering the Wizard Council's decision making, but there are more specific examples throughout the series, as well. For example, goblins are an intelligent race who have established themselves as a vital part of wizard society; they run Gringotts, the wizarding bank, which gives them significant control over the wizarding economy. Unfortunately, as events unravel there are hints that goblin control of Gringotts is not definite, and that goblins may no longer have positions in the one institution where they have had equal status with wizards; in the end, the goblins' control of Gringotts is threatened when Voldemort takes control of the Ministry.

Though there are some goblins who remain at Gringotts, full control is taken by Voldemort's supporters; we know this because a goblin on the run notes that “Gringotts is no

longer under the sole control of my race” (*Deathly* 296). We know, as well, that the reason the goblin who is overhead discussing this has gone into hiding is because he “refused what I consider an impertinent request” (*Deathly* 296). What that request was is never specified, but the point of the conversation seems to be to prove that even goblins, who have been able to defend their positions at Gringotts for so long, are no longer able to do so under Voldemort’s governance<sup>8</sup>. If the goblins (who have demonstrated their strength and cleverness despite hardships) cannot defend themselves, how can others such as the giants, mer-people, and centaurs hope to defend themselves against Voldemort?

Harry also remembers while taking a history exam that the International Confederation of Wizards “had met for the first time in France” and that “Goblins had tried to attend and been ousted” (*Order* 726). Again, goblins (as well as all other beings) were secluded from the decision making that governs much of their magical community. While decisions such as those were obviously damaging to wizard and non-wizard relations, the most definitive method of creating power differentiation between wizards and others was the wizards’ decision to deny anyone besides themselves the right to carrying a wand, created in “Clause Three of the Code of Wand Use” (*Deathly* 132). Without wands to extend their powers goblins and everyone else were limited in how they might protect themselves against the threat of Voldemort’s regime. The seriousness of wand rights, and hints at its historical and societal impacts, is shown in a scene in *The Deathly Hallows*:

“The right to carry a wand,” said the goblin quietly, “has long been contested between wizards and goblins.”

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<sup>8</sup> Instead, some have gone into hiding just as Harry, Ron, Hermione and others have.

“Well, goblins can do magic without wands,” said Ron.

“That is immaterial! Wizards refuse to share the secrets of wandlore with other magical beings, they deny us the possibility of extending our powers!”

“Well, goblins won’t share any of their magic either,” said Ron. “You won’t tell us how to make swords and armor the way you do. Goblins know how to work metal in a way wizards have never -”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Harry, noting Griphook’s rising color. “This isn’t about wizards versus goblins or any other sort of magical creature -”

Griphook gave a nasty laugh.

“But it is, it is about precisely that! As the Dark Lord becomes ever more powerful, your race is set still more firmly above mine! Gringotts falls under Wizarding rule, house-elves are slaughtered, and who amongst the wand-carriers protests?” (488-489).

Most significantly, this is the first time in the series where Harry is confronted with an oppressed member of the non-wizard community openly speaking out against institutionally based oppressions. As has been shown, house-elves are consistently silent, but we also never see others such as werewolves, like Remus Lupin, challenging the stigmatization of werewolves. Likewise, both Hagrid and Madame Maxime shamefully hide or deny their half-giant heritage. Even Elphias Dodge is made fun of for championing mer-people rights (Horne 94); and here, goblins are the only beings who openly object to wizard supremacy.

This is not to say that goblins are wholly innocent victims of discrimination and separation. Hermione, who pays attention in her History of Magic class, says that goblins are

“quite capable of dealing with wizards. They’re very clever. They’re not like house-elves, who never stick up for themselves” (source 449). It is not made clear exactly how goblins stick up for themselves, but that their rebellions were continuously violent there can be no doubt; Professor Binns mentions that the goblin riots were often “bloody and vicious” (source 392). Horne notes further that the fact “That Binns is still lecturing on goblin rebellions and riots at Christmastime of the same term suggests that goblin resistance was not merely a single event, but a way of life” (91). Horne, who is schooled in a social justice approach to antiracism, compares the goblin rebellions to “the Scottish insurgencies of the eighteenth century, the Chartist riots of the nineteenth, and the uprisings of the Irish in the twentieth” (91).

But the biases that goblins and others receive from many wizards is just as equally given; although under the protection of wizards at Shell Cottage, Griphook shows clear animosity toward his hosts. Bill Weasley attributes Griphook’s attitude to age-old cultural differences, but their interactions at Shell Cottage suggest that goblins are as prejudiced against wizards as wizards have been towards them. Likewise, the centaurs show some biases towards wizards (they believe wizards have inferior awareness and intelligence) and because of their enforced seclusion, the centaurs respond to wizarding authority by saying “We do not recognize your laws, we do not acknowledge your superiority” (*Order* 757).

Prejudices from either culture is not, however, justification for the continuation of misunderstandings. Harry seems to notice this when he says “arguing with Griphook about whose race is more under-handed and violent isn’t going to make him more likely to help us, is it?” (*Deathly* 506). Harry recognizes that focusing on blame will not lead to progress. Bill Weasley, too, seems to suggest this, though he sounds less optimistic than Harry. In the *Order of the Phoenix* Bill is sent on a mission to gain goblin support, but he says that “They’re not giving

anything away” and Mr. Weasley agrees with him, saying “They’ve suffered losses too. Remember that goblin family he [Voldemort] murdered last time” (85). Unfortunately this conversation suggests that the cultural gap between goblins and wizards is too large for the races to trust each other, despite that they share a common enemy. This cultural gap could come to be each of their downfalls; even though they need the support of the other, Lupin fears that goblins and the other segregated beings may be convinced into supporting Voldemort because “if they’re offered freedoms we’ve been denying them for centuries they’re going to be tempted” (*Order* 85).

Furthermore, in *The Goblet of Fire* readers learn that non-wizarding beings are expected to comply with the “Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creature” (*Goblet* 449), and that there are several sub-departments for different classes. There is also a sub-department within that department called the “Goblin Liaison office.” The term “liaison” would suggest that the goblins are given a place to represent themselves equally and cooperatively with wizards, but Winky’s fear that Dobby’s deviations will get him “up in front of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, like some common goblin,” (*Goblet* 98) suggest that the goblins, even with their more established positions, are not given the equal status which the title of the sub-department suggests, but are instead separated and discriminated against within the department. The head of the Goblin Liaison office is not even a goblin, but a wizard named Dirk Cresswell. This type of institutionalized separation is plainly reminiscent of the “separate but equal” policy from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and yet wizards still foolishly believe that goblins and other non-wizards are comfortable with this segregative arrangement.

Just as it was with the house-elves, the issues about unequal treatment is too large a subject to be improved within the space of the seven books, or even in side materials. But just

like with the house-elves, we also see the theme of individual efforts triumphing more than large-group-activist efforts<sup>9</sup> when it comes to alleviating traditional biases between groups. For example, Griphook pardons Harry because Harry lacks the traditional prejudices that exist between their races; he says “If there was a wizard of whom I would believe that they did not seek personal gain [...] it would be you, Harry Potter. Goblins and elves are not used to the protection or the respect that you have shown this night. Not from wand-carriers” (*Deathly* 488). This scene suggests that an understanding between the two might be reached if they were given more time, but unfortunately they are not. Because Harry and his friends are under somewhat of a time constraint, their relationship with Griphook disintegrates and each revert back to their traditional loyalties. In that scene Griphook was also speaking specifically to Harry, and there is an underlying suggestion that the society to which Harry and the others belong is far from being egalitarian, and nowhere near being forgiven.

It’s no wonder that wizards, even ones like Harry, might be regarded with some distrust or wonder<sup>10</sup>, because there are still powerful people drafting discriminative laws against non-wizards. The most extreme example of this (aside from Voldemort) is Umbridge; “her campaign to rid the earth of part-humans, including the rounding up and tagging of Merpeople, is reminiscent of Hitler’s attempts to purify the human race” (Nash 46). Undoubtedly, the battle to promote awareness of diversity and equality, which Harry, Dumbledore, and all of their allies support, has some powerful opposition within the Ministry.

However, all the blame cannot be attributed to one or several individuals; although Umbridge and others like her play powerful roles in influencing how their society is governed,

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<sup>9</sup> Such as the goblin rebellions.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Dobby is initially shocked by Harry – a wizard’s – kindness.



citizens still have the option to disagree. What is most worrying is how the propaganda and ideas suggested by officials in the Ministry can be echoed (or passively accepted) throughout society; an example of this can be seen with Umbridge's anti-werewolf legislation, which [makes it almost impossible for [Lupin] to get a job" (*Order* 302). In an interview Rowling mentions that Lupin's werewolf affliction is a metaphor for HIV, and the stigmas that Muggle HIV sufferers deal with (Warner Bros.), and we can see this stigma perpetuated within the wizarding community, who do nothing to rally against Umbridge's anti-werewolf law<sup>11</sup>.

It is also acknowledged in the series that centaurs live in the Black Forest only because "the Ministry of Magic permits [them] certain areas of land" (*Order* 754), which resembles the segregation of Native Americans in American history. Furthermore, Hagrid also recognizes this worrying attitude many wizards have for non-wizards when he speaks about giants; he says "It's jus' that mos' wizards aren't bothered where they are, s' long as it's a good long way away" (*Goblet* 425). In other words, as long as wizards do not have to interact with different beings, or as long as their interactions are limited, or as long as those beings are alienated and separated from society, wizards may ignore their cultural differences and unfair subjection. For example, the only reason wizards interact with goblins is because of goblin roles at the wizarding bank, though again this only happens when it becomes necessary for wizards to go to the bank, and limited interactions are maintained.

Half way through the series Dumbledore warns about the trouble such attitudes might cause; he says "extend them [non-wizards – specifically giants] the hand of friendship, now, before it is too late [...] or Voldemort will persuade them, as he did before, that he alone among

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<sup>11</sup> Only Dumbledore seems brave enough to ignore the law and employ, and trust, a werewolf, though he receives hate mail for this decision.

wizards will give them their rights and their freedom” (*Goblet* 708). The Minister of the time does not heed Dumbledore’s warning, though, and Voldemort does indeed gain support from some beings who are lured by Voldemort’s false promises.

To bring this chapter back to goblins, though, we can see through Griphook’s accusations how Rowling’s blame may not be placed on a single *bad* or *evil* character, but on the injudicious methods and ideologies of a society as a whole. Where the previous books were focused on blaming a few bad individuals as the cause of a corrupt system - the idea that “racism can be defined [by] cultural and institutional structures and policies that create advantages for dominant group members and disadvantage for people (or creatures) from subordinated groups” (Horne 89) - is finally, and more directly, exposed. But why wait so long to bring forth such realities? One could argue that Rowling’s characters were so wrapped up in their own racial complications that recognition or understanding of other characters’ problems wasn’t made important until those characters’ talents or assistance was required. Furthermore, to address those problems would have led to a much larger series, and Rowling was already being asked to cut back a lot of her material.

In the end, the conversations Harry and his friends have with Griphook and other beings provides readers with a broader view of how animosity between races is socially constructed. Of course, the main focus of the series is not about goblin and wizard relations, but about different racially categorized wizards, so Harry’s relationship with Griphook and other beings remains largely undeveloped. What we do see through these brief interactions is how individual acts of kindness or understanding may help alleviate traditional biases and the inequalities that stem from those biases. We also see the harmful laws that perpetuate inequality, and by placing Hermione in a position of power within the Ministry, readers are given a sense of hope that she

may change the discriminative laws passed when she was an adolescent. The fact that Rowling addresses these issues at all within the series suggests some intention to have them be discussed.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

My contribution to the growing scholarship about *Harry Potter* is intended to help to clarify some of the racial issues present in the book series and to be useful for scholars and readers who want to further discuss those issues. Much of this discussion was intended to add to the series' literary merit, and examine the racial ideologies present in the books, and consider whether Rowling's themes are ones that are of value and worthy of study. However, I have not included a lot of information related to those ideas, and the discussion of the racial issues (faced by both human and non-human characters), as well as the political, ideological, historical and personal identity issues, could be expanded on even more.

If I had more time, I would explore many other directions with this book series. One such possibility for future study is a Freudian investigation of the "lost boys," that is: Harry, Snape and Voldemort. Another research idea with potential is to study the etymology of the many terms and names used (or created) for this series; even a cursory glance at those words reveal that there are some language patterns present, though the definitions and uses of the words themselves would be interesting to look more closely into.

Other important areas of study include a feminist approach (perhaps investigating how the female characters function in the story), a look at the representation (or lack thereof) of LGBTQ characters – other than Dumbledore, because surely the lack of adolescents with such identities are not representative of real life - or, rather, a look at the pedagogical methods and changes that occur within Hogwarts, but another question, and perhaps one of the hardest questions to answer, would be to look at the problematic nature of how Rowling's anti-racist sentiments are designed; that is, should we be discussing (as I have done) the work itself, or her treatment of the work? Though the outlook of this series includes optimistic messages of equality

and ethnic diversity, Rowling has received quite a bit of criticism for the lack of diversity presented in her human characters. However, as the literary merit of the series becomes more established, and more widely used in schools (from primary to university levels), it is probably most beneficial to examine how this young adult series might be further adapted for classroom use and discussion.

Though there are many lessons and activities available for those who want to use one of the *Harry Potter* books, or the whole series, in their classroom(s), the impact and usefulness of those lessons deserves more attention. What type of pedagogies might be (or have been) employed, and what might be (and were) the benefits of those lessons? I think the question “Should the series be used as a school text?” has already been answered, but the extension of this question “how can this series be used in future classrooms?” (where students might not be as familiar with the series’ current cultural popularity) should be answered in more depth.

My intention here has been to demonstrate how the idea of race differentiation as an ideological construction has been established in the *Harry Potter* series; by looking a little more closely at characters and the history that the series is founded on, it is clear that those constructions were created to support social stratification as well as a political agenda (most likely motivated by power, the need for protection, or both). Readers can see how racial biases have little foundation or truth by examining the characters’ dialogue and action, which further show how characters often exist as contradictions to such stereotypes. Most importantly the series suggests how readers might mitigate racial intolerances and inequalities on a personal, and perhaps eventually political, level.

Although Rowling’s series is primarily a young adult fantasy about a boy hero who triumphs over evil, this plot is also intricately related to concerns of racism. The examination of

this series as a whole and as a fictional world representative of our own provides some insight into how self-loathing, fear, and power play significant roles in the perpetuation of racism. Furthermore, by making real world and historical connections, readers may be able to understand and discuss the impacts and importance of these issues within the “safe space” provided by the fictional setting of the *Harry Potter* series.

Even though the issues of racism, classism, and ideology are too large for the series to fully amend, there are examples which suggest that personal efforts of kindness and understanding are what will help lead this series away from its more traditional, and discriminative, history. That is, examples of individual efforts are often seem triumphing more so than the institutional efforts (such as from S.P.E.W., the Ministry of Magic, or the bloody goblin rebellions), so that even though we don’t get to see those efforts come to fruition, there is the knowledge that later in life Hermione becomes a figure with the power to make social change. The other characters – Ron and Harry – also grow up to have jobs with some power to create changes; they become aurors, a type of specialist officer who often work individually.

Most importantly, though, the *Harry Potter* series offers an imaginative world where readers learn about, and perhaps associate with, characters that deal with conflict and difference. This can be related to Rowling’s idea that through imagination, “Humans . . . can think themselves into other people’s minds, imagine themselves into other people’s places” (“Fringe”) and in this way create a more considerate, and perhaps egalitarian, reader and society.

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