

# The Human Experience: From Human Being to Human Doing



# The Human Experience: From Human Being to Human Doing

*An Introduction to the Humanities*

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OPENSLCC  
SALT LAKE CITY



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# The Human Experience: From Human Being to Human Doing

*To the displaced, the unheard, the unseen.  
You are welcome, you are heard, you are seen.*

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# Introduction: Why Study the Humanities?



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## The Humanities: Exploring What It Means to Be Human

The humanities can be described as the study of human experience and the way in which people define and document their experience through philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history, politics, and language. Viewing the human experience through a humanities lens provides insights that extend beyond statistical data and field reports. Humanities facilitate our understanding of things we may never experience directly, by viewing people and events in the context of their surrounding circumstances. Incorporating context allows us to appreciate the extensive breadth and depth of human

experiences from different cultures, locations, and time periods.

This reader explores the humanities by documenting and processing people's interpretations of what it means to be human. These human experiences are divided into four themes: ***Diversity & Difference***, ***Human Rights & Genocide***, ***Reform & Revolution***, and ***Happiness & Spirituality***. For each theme, selected humanities artifacts are presented in the context of their historical, social, political, personal, cultural, economic, and other settings.

## Reverse Teaching

This humanities reader utilizes a teaching and learning method called *reverse teaching*. It means we will approach the humanities a little-back-to-front in comparison to traditional textbooks. Instead of presenting humanities artifacts as a collection of conceptual or theoretical categories, we will actively explore each humanities artifact in the context(s) that helped create it. This in-context analysis facilitates a fuller, more meaningful understanding of how humanities artifacts represent human experience.

## Cogito, Ergo Sum—Proof of Human Existence

*Cogito, ergo sum* is a Latin phrase by the French philosopher and mathematician [René Descartes](#) that translates into, “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes proposed that human self-awareness was evidence of human existence. Other facts or ideas can be disproved, but our ability to question whether we

exist proves that we do. In other words, “[W]e cannot doubt of our existence while we doubt.”

The following excerpt from [A Discourse on Method \(1637\)](#) further refines Descartes’ argument:

*[English] “Accordingly, seeing that our senses sometimes deceive us, I was willing to suppose that there existed nothing really such as they presented to us. And because some men err in reasoning and fall into Paralogisms, even on the simplest matters of Geometry, I am convinced that I was as open to error as any other; rejected as false all the reasonings I had hitherto taken for Demonstrations. And finally, when I considered that the very same thoughts (presentations), which we experience when awake, may also be experienced when we are asleep. While there is at that time not one of them true, I supposed that all the objects (presentations) that had ever entered into my mind when awake, had in them no more truth than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately upon this, I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be something. And as I observed that this truth, I think, therefore I am, was so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the Sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search.”*

*[French] “Ainsi, à cause que nos sens nous trompent quelquefois, je voulus supposer qu’il n’y avait aucune chose qui fût telle qu’ils nous la font imaginer; Et parce qu’il y a des hommes qui se*

*méprennent en raisonnant, même touchant les plus simples matières de Géométrie, et y font des Paralogismes, jugeant que j'étais sujet à faillir autant qu'aucun autre, je rejetai comme fausses toutes les raisons que j'avais prises auparavant pour Démonstrations; Et enfin, considérant que toutes les mêmes pensées que nous avons étant éveillés nous peuvent aussi venir quand nous dormons, sans qu'il y en ait aucune raison pour lors qui soit vraie, je me résolus de feindre que toutes les choses qui m'étaient jamais entrées en l'esprit n'étaient non plus vraies que les illusions de mes songes. Mais aussitôt après je pris garde que, pendant que je voulais ainsi penser que tout était faux, il fallait nécessairement que moi qui le pensais fusse quelque chose; Et remarquant que cette vérité, je pense, donc je suis, était si ferme et si assurée, que toutes les plus extravagantes suppositions des Sceptiques n'étaient pas capables de l'ébranler, je jugeai que je pouvais la recevoir sans scrupule pour le premier principe de la Philosophie que je cherchais."*

## Meta-Cognition: Thinking About Thinking

Given this fantastic capacity to think and to question, we could argue that thinking is what sets us apart from other living things. This process of thinking about thinking is called [metacognition](#). Metacognition is invaluable for humanities studies, or any critical analysis, because it forces us to challenge our preset values and principles.

We humans look at the world through a lens, one shaped by

personal interests, family and peers, religion (or lack thereof), and other factors. We gravitate towards people and opinions that align with our own. We resist data that could change our minds. Being aware of our tendency to stick with what is familiar and affirming will help us recognize that what we perceive as truth is highly dependent on our personal knowledge and experiences.

## How Do We Humans See the World?

An [optical illusion](#) takes advantage of how the human brain organizes and prioritizes visual information. These images trick the human brain into perceiving something that is not present or choosing one image over another.

The following illustration merges two images into the same picture. The brain interprets the visual information and chooses which image it wants to see. Because of the way the illustration is drawn, most people readily see a young woman. It takes a bit more concentration to discern an old crone. Notice it is difficult to perceive both women simultaneously because the brain chooses to see one image or the other but not both.



*This picture looks like a pretty young woman or ugly old crone.*

Credit: W. E. Hill, "[My Wife and My Mother-in-Law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Wife_and_My_Mother-in-Law#/media/File:My_Wife_and_My_Mother-in-Law.jpg)." Puck.  
Library of Congress. Public Domain.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Wife\\_and\\_My\\_Mother-in-Law#/media/File:My\\_Wife\\_and\\_My\\_Mother-in-Law.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Wife_and_My_Mother-in-Law#/media/File:My_Wife_and_My_Mother-in-Law.jpg).

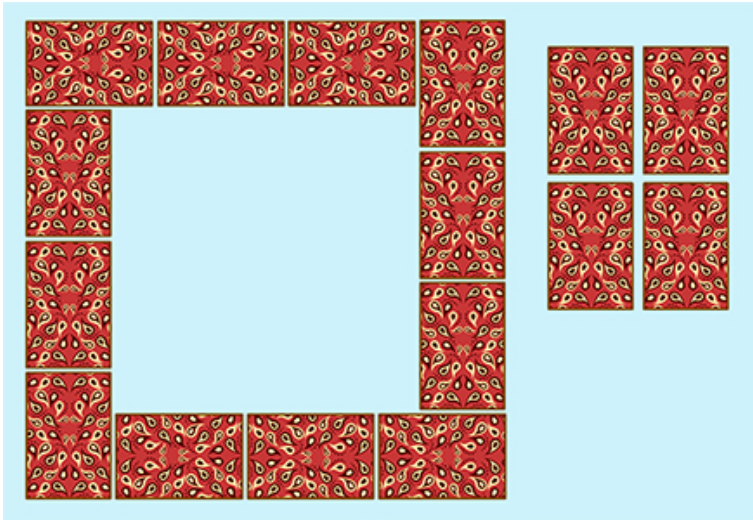
[Rubin's Vase](#) is a famous optical illusion created by Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin to show how the brain prioritizes visual information. His theory explains that when two images share a common border, the brain automatically assigns one image to the foreground (positive space) and the second to the background (negative space). The yellow color draws the brain's attention, making the vase the primary image.



*Can you see the secondary image in Rubin's Vase?*

*Credit: [John Smithson](#). Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubin\\_vase#/media/File:Rubin2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubin_vase#/media/File:Rubin2.jpg).*

British puzzle master [Henry Dudeney](#) created a puzzle that exploits the human brain's inability to envision negative spaces. The illustration shows playing cards laid out into a square. The goal is to create a swastika inside the square using only four cards. Try to figure out the solution using playing cards, or click on the image to reveal the solution.



*Create a swastika inside the square using only four cards.*

Credit: [sabakuINK](https://sabakuink.net/). CC BY-SA 4.0. <https://sabakuink.net/>.

These examples highlight how easily our brains automatically lead us into seeing what we want to see. In the next chapter, ***Creative & Critical Thinking***, we will look at methods to overcome these mental obstacles.



# Critical & Creative Thinking



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## Key Concepts

This chapter will prepare you to:

1. Explain the concepts of critical thinking.
2. Evaluate the merits of the questions, not just the answers.
3. Evaluate the origins of our values.
4. Discuss the implications of perceptions and stereotypes as they relate to an individual.
5. Identify historical, geographical, and cultural contexts.

In the **Introduction**, we presented the idea of metacognition, which is the first step in applying critical and creative thinking to our study of the humanities. We all view the world through a

lens; one shaped by our personal experiences. So, to objectively analyze a news story, cartoon, painting, photograph, essay, song, or any number of ways we express our human experience, we begin by being aware of how our brain works.

You may hear the phrase “critical thinking” used many times in a humanities course. In the context of humanities, critical thinking is the process of reflection about our personal values, paradigms, and experiences. Creative thinking is another important tool for studying the humanities. By “creative thinking,” we mean challenging what you think you know and asking you to think outside the box. Creative thinking also acknowledges and explores how other people may see or experience the world differently from us.

Throughout this book are **Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking**. These questions may present novel situations or be tough to answer. They are designed to help you reflect on why you perceive the world the way you do and perhaps why someone else might see things differently. Some questions may prompt you to expand your personal perspective.

The **Looking Exercises** and **Listening Exercises** included at the end of this chapter will help you practice these approaches to critical and creative thinking.

## Creative Approaches to Critical Thinking

### What is Critical Thinking?

A key component of critical thinking is analyzing a person or event from multiple perspectives. The opposite of critical thinking would be characterizing a group of people based on a singular experience with one individual. Not only does this

limited perspective interfere with critical and creative thinking, but it may also lead us to treat people or situations with unrealistic expectations.



*A TED element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=22>

Credit: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. "[The Danger of a Single Story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)." TEDGlobal 2009. July 2009. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International. [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discusses the damage caused by people's limited perceptions. She starts by sharing her perceptions of people from her childhood in Nigeria. She then moves on to other people's perceptions of her and Nigerian culture when she was a student in the United States.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Have you ever been subjected to a stereotype?
- Where do you think the basis of this assumption came

from? Is there any truth to the idea?

- Do you feel like these stereotypes limit you or encourage you?

## What Do We Know?

Our reaction to information—whether it comes via images, sound, or words—is informed by our value systems. Our value systems, in turn, are shaped by personal experience and learned knowledge.

Consider something as fundamental as clothing. The sight of a man wearing a skirt in Salt Lake City would be unusual enough that he would probably elicit some stares. However, maybe not from people living in Scotland or the Pacific islands. This is an example of a response informed by cultural context. In this case, about what is regarded as normal or acceptable attire for men to wear in public. There are also historical imperatives. In present-day society, men *and* women frequently wear jeans or pants. However, 100 years ago, a woman wearing pants was neither a common nor acceptable fashion statement.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

Can you choose which of the following historical factors were at play to allow women in the United States the freedom to wear “men’s” clothing?

- The suffrage movement for women’s right to vote
- World War I and World War II (Hint: military conscription of men necessitated a female workforce.)
- The birth control pill

Think about what people considered normal in earlier historical settings and reflect on your own reaction.

- Do you think they are silly? Funny?
- Or were their standards acceptable because they were based on the information available at the time?

Let us look at another example, this time a symbol most likely associated with negative reactions. The [swastika](#) symbol was adopted by the Nazi party during World War II. Because of this, most people perceive the swastika as a symbol of murder and destruction.



*Cloth banner displaying Nazi swastika.*  
Credit: [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection](#), Gift of Peter Storm. No restrictions on access. No restrictions on use. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn515313>.

The origins of this symbol reach back much further than 20<sup>th</sup>-century Germany. The oldest known swastika is estimated to be about [15,000 years old](#), which puts it in the Paleolithic Period (Stone Age). Throughout history, the swastika was used in regions all over the world, including China, Japan, India, and southern Europe. It has been used to represent good luck, prosperity, and the sun. If not equipped with this knowledge before traveling abroad, it would be easy to assume that Nazi sympathizers had lived in these countries.



*Ceramic vase decorated with repeating swastika pattern. Late 19th century, Japan.  
Credit: [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/46692). CC0 1.0  
Public Domain. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/46692>.*



*Swastikas decorating a building in China's Forbidden City.*

*Credit: [Gisling](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E6%95%85%E5%AE%AB%E4%B9%BE%E6%B8%85%E9%97%A8%E6%A4%BD%E5%AD%90%E4%B8%87%E5%AF%BF%E5%BD%A9%E7%94%BB.JPG). CC BY 3.0. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E6%95%85%E5%AE%AB%E4%B9%BE%E6%B8%85%E9%97%A8%E6%A4%BD%E5%AD%90%E4%B8%87%E5%AF%BF%E5%BD%A9%E7%94%BB.JPG>.*

## Questions to Critical & Creative Thinking

- Prior to reading about the history of the swastika, what conclusions might you have reached if you visited a building displaying a swastika on the wall?
- A swastika symbol on Japanese maps indicates the location of a Buddhist temple. In preparation for the 2020 Olympics, Japan's national mapmaking department is considering [changing the map symbol](#) to something else. Do you think they should or should not change the symbol? Why or why not? Can you think of another way to resolve this issue?

## What Is a Creative Approach to Critical Thinking?

As you might imagine from the swastika example, challenging long-held values or beliefs can cause conflict among people, and perhaps discomfort for an individual person. However, it is important to remember that critical and creative thinking does not require you to change your mind but rather, evaluate how you got there. One way to look at it is to imagine that critical thinking is like taking something apart, while creative thinking is like recycling or repurposing something. In the end, you may still end up with the same beliefs. Or you may discover you have acquired some new values.

Again, the goal is to get you thinking about how you think. In an early scene from the movie, [The Matrix \(1999\)](#), the character Orpheus offers the protagonist Neo a blue pill and a red pill.

*“You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”*

Likewise, by encouraging you to think critically and creatively, this course offers you a similar choice. You can superficially engage with the various artifacts presented throughout this book, skip the critical and creative thinking questions, and finish the book with your points of view pretty much unchanged. Or you can accept occasionally feeling uncomfortable as you delve deeper into how people across the centuries and around the world have tried to make sense of the human condition. Blue pill or red pill? You choose!



## How to Approach an Artifact

Another critical thinking tool is the use and analysis of artifacts. A humanities artifact could be a piece of writing, music, painting, drawing, sculpture, dance, film, or any number of created works. In her article "[A Method for Reading, Writing, & Thinking Critically](#)," Kathleen McCormick explains that we should consider the historical and cultural context when analyzing an artifact of written text. Additional contexts for approaching any type of artifact include economic, political, geographical, social, and religious, to name a few. These contextual pieces offer clues as to what may have motivated a person to compose or create an artifact. Analyzing context can also help us to determine how relevant an artifact is to our contemporary experiences.

In addition to considering context, it is important to ask a series of questions when approaching an artifact of the humanities. Critical and creative thinking encourages us to be actively engaged with a piece of text, music, or art. Some questions you should be asking yourself as you engage with the artifacts presented in this chapter, as well as the rest of the book include:

- Who is the author or creator of the artifact?
- What do we know about the artifact's historical context, i.e., what was happening when the artifact was created?
- What was the inspiration or motivation for creating this artifact? For example, was it a commissioned piece or spontaneous creation?
- For written text, is there a narrative voice? If so, is it first person or third?
- Does who is speaking make a difference for a narrative?
- What is the main message the author or creator is trying to convey?

- Who, if any, is the author or creator's intended audience?
- Does this artifact present a familiar concept or message?  
Is it something new for you?
- Does the author or creator's message align or conflict with your values?

When we engage with humanities artifacts and then apply critical and creative thinking, we are not merely going through a process of decoding. Hopefully, this book helps you understand that analyzing the humanities using this approach is a sincere thoughtful process that helps broaden your understanding of what the humanities are and why understanding them is so important.

## Looking Exercises: Architecture and Painting

These exercises will help you practice using critical and creative analysis of a humanities artifact through a couple of visual examples: building architecture and political painting.

The visual arts are a broad umbrella encompassing artifacts that are appreciated by looking at them. These arts include painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, printmaking, crafts, architecture, textiles, and much more. These artifacts are the result of people trying to make sense of their physical and inner worlds, and conveying that understanding to other people.

An important first question to ask when considering a visual arts artifact is, was the work commissioned? Meaning, was the piece created at the request of someone else, such as a government, individual, nonprofit group, political group, or otherwise? Naturally, the sentiment embodied in the artifact and the intended audience will likely align with the values of

the group or person who commissioned it rather than the artist who created it.

Other important questions might include, when was the piece created? What political issues were prominent at the time? What historical events were happening? By gathering as much contextual information as possible about the artifact, we are better equipped to interpret the artifact's message or intention.

## Architecture

The built environment reflects the age and cultural context in which it was produced. Architecture gives us easy access to visual arts artifacts for analysis. Some contextual questions we can ask:

- What does the style of architecture in my city tell me about the cultural influences of my society?
- Is there a philosophical influence?
- How old is the city?
- Does it maintain some of the influence of the original settlers? If so, how and where did that influence come from?

Architecture may also reflect a building's function. Public buildings tend to be open and inviting. Some buildings may be designed to deflect attention. The nondescript architecture of homeless shelters helps conceal the vulnerable people living there. This kind of architecture is known as hostile architecture.

For this exercise, use the contextual questions listed above (as well as ones of your own) to analyze the architectural artifact presented by the White House in Washington DC, which was built in 1792. And compare it with Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall, built in Los Angeles in 2003.



*The White House.*

*Credit: [Joyce N. Boghosian](https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house). CC BY 3.0 US. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house>.*



*Disney Concert Hall.*

*Credit: [Pedro Szekeley](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Walt_Disney_Concert_Hall,_LA,_CA,_jjron_22.03.2012.jpg). CC BY-SA 2.0.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/  
File:Walt\\_Disney\\_Concert\\_Hall,\\_LA,\\_CA,\\_jjron\\_22.03.2012.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Walt_Disney_Concert_Hall,_LA,_CA,_jjron_22.03.2012.jpg).*

## Painting

Looking at a piece of art, we can ask whether what we see relates to our contemporary setting. Sometimes, in order to fully understand an artifact, we must be familiar with the historical, political, or social context surrounding its creation.

The painting [Guernica](#) by Pablo Picasso was first displayed in Paris on May 1, 1937. He painted it during the midst of the Spanish Civil War (July 1936–April 1939) as an artistic reaction to the Nazi's bombing of the Basque town on [April 26, 1937](#). The painting is monochromatic, to show the misery inflicted by the aerial bombardment. The images in the painting present the tragedy and suffering of the war: a dismembered soldier and nurse; an all-seeing eye; and the Spanish symbols of a bull and a horse.

One contextual question to ask is, does Picasso's painting only hold relevance to the Spanish Civil War? Two examples of contemporary situations demonstrate that this painting can be relevant beyond what Picasso may have originally intended. In fact, this artifact presents timeless relevancy to the perception, interpretation, and expression of our human experiences during a war.

On [February 28, 1974](#), Tony Shafrazi entered the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and red-spray painted the words "Kill Lies All" over the Guernica. Shafrazi said this was "[a protest](#) against the release on bail of the lieutenant later convicted for his role in the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War." The red paint was easily removed, as Guernica was heavily varnished.

On February 5, 2003, Colin Powell delivered a speech at the United Nations (UN) headquarters to make the case for war with Iraq. He was standing in front of a tapestry of Picasso's Guernica, which hangs in the UN as a reminder of the horror of war and the need for diplomacy first. The [tapestry was covered](#) with a blue sheet.

Reports of the UN's position behind this action vary and the organization did not release an official statement. However, using contextual information, such as the painting's history, we can deduce some logical reasons. The New York Times reported the UN started covering the tapestry because they were afraid a horse's screaming head would be visible next to chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix while he spoke. The article offered an [alternative reason](#), "Mr. Powell can't very well seduce the world into bombing Iraq surrounded on camera by shrieking and mutilated women, men, children, bulls and horses."

An article in the Toronto Star ran [the quote](#), "A [un-named] diplomat stated that it would not be an appropriate background if the ambassador of the United States at the U.N. John Negroponte, or Powell, talk about war surrounded with women, children and animals shouting with horror and showing the suffering of the bombings."

## Listening Exercises: Songs and Music

These two exercises apply to how our values shape our listening choices, both in conversations and songs. As described, we prefer listening to speech and music that agree with our values and ideas. In other words, we gravitate to news channels, influential people, and song lyrics that support our world view. This tendency to seek out similar viewpoints ends up reinforcing our world view rather than expanding it.

There are [several reasons](#) for this behavior:

- Consensual validation: When we meet people who share similar attitudes, it makes us feel more confident about our world view. For example, if you love jazz music, meeting a fellow jazz lover confirms that your love of jazz is OK and maybe even virtuous.

- Cognitive evaluation: We naturally form positive or negative impressions of other people by generalizing from the information we acquire through experience or absorption. When a person has common interests with us, we assume that we must also share other positive characteristics with that person.
- Certainty of being liked: We assume that someone who shares common interests and viewpoints will probably like us. In turn, we tend to like people if we think they like us.
- Preference for enjoyable interactions: It is just more fun to hang out with someone when you have a lot in common.
- Opportunity for self-expansion: We benefit from new knowledge and experiences as the direct result of spending time with someone else. Oddly, people seeking self-expansion will gravitate toward people who are similar to them, even though a person with dissimilar perspectives would likely provide greater opportunities for self-expansion.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

Listen to 15 minutes of news on a network that represents viewpoints contrary to yours.

- How did you feel while listening to a contrary opinion?
- Did you find yourself responding, such as thinking of rebuttals to contradict the information you were hearing?
- Did you learn something new?

The same behaviors influence how we listen to music. Music presents an artifact with many contextual facets. Some people listen to music for entertainment value. Others listen to find meaning in either the music or lyrics, or both. Very often, we attach meanings to music depending on where we were or what was happening when we heard it. Composers will have an

inspiration or recall their personal experiences when creating music. Therefore, when analyzing music, it is important to consider the context that includes our personal response, the composer's motivation, and perhaps outside influences, such as historical events or political movements.

There are fundamental questions we can ask regardless of musical genre:

- When did the artist compose the music?
- How does the genre of music impact its meaning?
- Does the tempo make us feel a certain way, such as sad, energized, relaxed, or irritated? How about the lyrics?
- Who do you think the music was written for? The musician? The listener?
- What do you think is the message is? Is meaning fluid or changeable?
- Does your musical taste change over time? As you get older? Due to events in your life?

## Modern Song Lyrics

The two examples in this exercise present music artifacts from very different genres. The first is "[Blurred Lines](#)," a song written by Pharell Williams and Robin Thicke. Released on March 26th, 2013, it was immediately involved in a legal dispute. Marvin Gaye's family sued on the grounds that the song was "[noticeably ripped off](#)" from Marvin Gaye's song "[Got To Give It Up](#)." The plaintiffs [won their case](#) and were awarded \$5.3 million dollars in damages and 50% of royalties from future sales.

Furthermore, the song was criticized for [promoting rape culture](#). Critics said the "blurred lines" in the title and lyrics were an assault on someone's right to control sexual consent and the song's message promoted the objectification of women as sexual objects.



Here are the [song lyrics](#):

*I hate these blurred lines  
I know you want it  
I hate them lines  
I know you want it  
I hate them lines  
I know you want it  
But you're a good girl  
The way you grab me  
Must wanna get nasty  
Go ahead, get at me*

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- After reading the lyrics, do you think the song is controversial?
- After watching the video clip, does the meaning of the song change for you?

The song faced further controversy when Miley Cyrus joined Robin Thicke on stage at the 2013 MTV Video Music Awards. Cyrus performed twerking dance moves in close contact with Thicke and made sexual gestures using a foam finger. Her dance performance was regarded as an endorsement of the song's message. (Time marker 04:10)



*A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*  
<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=22>

**Credit:** Robin Thicke, Miley Cyrus. "Miley Cyrus VMA 2013 with Robin Thicke SHOCKED." MTV Video Music Awards 2013. [Juan Manuel Cruz](#). YouTube. YouTube. [Fair Use](#) of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content. <https://youtu.be/LfcvmABhmxs>.

## Classical Instrumental Music



*A SoundCloud element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=22>

**Credit:** Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Neeme Järvi, conductor. **“Beethoven Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68.”** SoundCloud. **Fair Use** of limited, personal, non-exclusive, revocable, non-assignable and non-transferable right and license to use the Platform to view Content. <https://soundcloud.com/chicagosymphony/beethoven-symphony-no-6-2>.

A very different example of a musical artifact is Ludwig van Beethoven’s [Symphony No. 6](#), written in 1808. (Making it a *slightly* older piece than “Blurred Lines.”). Historical context is important for analyzing the message in Beethoven’s composition. For example, what made No. 6 different from his other symphonies? A clue resides in the title Beethoven gave to this piece of music, *Pastoral Symphony*. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, [pastoral](#) means “of, relating to, or composed of shepherds or herdsmen.” This suggests an agricultural theme. This is one of only two symphonies titled by the composer, rather than someone else. Beethoven had a lifelong appreciation of nature and frequently took walks in the

countryside. For the premiere, he described this composition as having “[more an expression of feeling than painting.](#)”

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

Listen to Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 and pay attention to how the music makes you feel.

- How does the music affect your mood?
- What images appear in your mind as you listen?
- Can you interpret a message conveyed in the music despite there being no lyrics?

Try practicing your analytical listening skills on other instrumental pieces, such as the movie score to *Fantasia*, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, or *The Lord of the Rings*.

## Conclusion

As you move through this book, you may discover information that is already familiar to you. Those cases are an opportunity to put on your critical and creative thinking cap and use it to reflect on your existing world views and values. Observe, and then, ask yourself lots of questions!

- Does your gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic status inform your interpretation of an artifact?
- What was happening historically when you read, listened to, or observed the artifact?
- Are (or were) there external circumstances, such as laws or events, that may have informed your interpretation of an artifact?
- Do you have acquired knowledge that helps deepen your

appreciation or understanding of an artifact?

- Do you agree or disagree with an artist or creator's message? If you disagree, can you appreciate why they felt compelled to create their message?

Remember, these questions are not intended to force you to shift your ideology. However, they do require you to consider how your personal perspective affects your interpretation of artifacts. And hopefully, these questions will encourage you to look at things from a different perspective than the one you are used to using.

The examples, questions, and descriptions in this book are designed to help teach you to:

- See and interpret patterns in people's behavior.
- View situations from a variety of different perspectives.
- Realize that there may not be definitive answers to questions that arise from the human experience.

For our last example, use your critical and creative thinking skills to reflect on the following quote by [Lawrence Wright](#):

*"We prefer an ordered world, regular patterns, familiar forms, and when flaws or distortions occur, provided they are not too gross, our mind's eye tidies them up. We see what we want or expect to see."*

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Do you agree with Wright? Do you prefer to categorize contemporary and historical events so they fit in with your world view?
- If you disagree, in what way?
- Is it possible that you could be misinterpreting information? Is it possible you do not have possession of all

the facts?

- Do you operate in a clearly defined narrative within a clearly defined paradigm?
- Could you possibly change your mind?

# Diversity & Difference



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## Key Concepts

This chapter will prepare you to:

1. Understand systemic and institutional factors that have contributed to privilege & inequality.
2. Learn about the history of racial inequality in the United States.
3. Think about our perceptions of gender and sex.
4. Examine how disability is affected by concepts of ableism.
5. Describe how someone's sexual orientation could grant a person with social privileges.
6. Understand legal definitions related to immigration and consider the historical and contemporary perceptions of the immigrant experience.

This chapter explores diversity and difference, with an emphasis on the experiences of marginalized groups in the United States. Group identities, which may be fluid and overlapping, shape the way we identify ourselves and others. Identities are complex. They exist in the context of race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, geography, physical ability, and religion, to name a few. The word diversity implies numerous. So, bear in mind that this chapter presents a mere handful of artifacts, categories, and examples. In other words, they are meant to be an introduction to, not a definitive representation of what it means to be different.

We will apply our humanities lens to explore the role of diversity and difference in human rights, social justice, and political activism. The artifacts illustrate stories of identity, good and bad, from self-acceptance to social marginalization. This chapter also reflects on why a failure to understand and respect other people's differences can end up pushing people apart, sometimes violently.

The reader will undoubtedly notice that the race section is significantly longer than the others. The primary reason is that Black people arguably represent the most marginalized group in American history. By "most marginalized," we mean racism in America has a well-documented history and perhaps the longest-lasting. Racism was government-endorsed through the institution of black slavery and the legislation of Jim Crow laws. The breadth and depth of this history have arguably affected more Blacks than any other marginalized Americans.

Many of the race artifacts can serve as examples for other marginalized groups. For example, racial profiling can be compared to profiling gay men as having great fashion sense. Like racism, irrational xenophobia may drive anti-immigration laws and unfair labor practices. Implicit bias covers a wide range of hidden prejudices, including gender bias that creates inequities in hiring, promotion, and pay.



## Historical Concepts of Inclusion

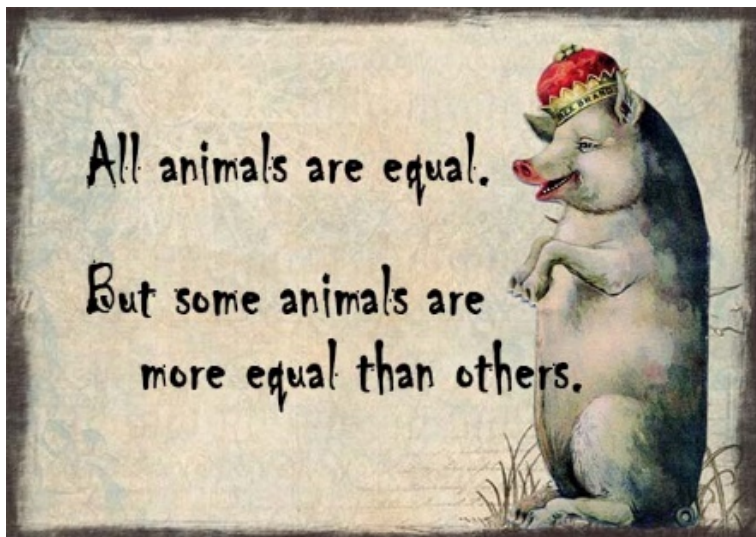
Since the founding days of the United States, people have argued whether “all men are created equal,” was intended to include all people or just some people. Events throughout American history suggest that equality has been and continues to be out of reach for certain groups. In an early draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson railed against British colonialism and the slave trade, describing [them as](#) “a cruel war against human nature.” The irony of this indictment was that [Jefferson owned slaves](#), as did many of America’s founding fathers. In the final draft, Jefferson ended up omitting descriptions of the slave trade at the insistence of several state delegates.

Fast-forward to the present day, and certain groups are still marginalized from society. In the fight for racial equality, universal suffrage, access to healthcare, and same-sex marriage, Americans have sought to redress long-standing inequities. But the question remains, why do these inequities happen in the first place?

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Come up with some examples of unequal treatment or conditions imposed on a specific group of people. Why do you suppose inequities exist for them?

## Inequality and Privilege



Credit: [sabakuINK](https://sabakuink.net/). CC BY-SA 4.0. <https://sabakuink.net/>.

This famous quote comes from [Animal Farm \(1945\)](#), written by George Orwell. In this satirical tale, farm animals try to create an egalitarian society but end up being betrayed by a selfish faction, the pigs. The story begins with the animals successfully driving off their human owners after a cruel whipping. They set up an independent society where two legs are bad, four legs are good, and “all animals are equal.” Unfortunately, this idealism deteriorates when the pigs learn to stand up on their hind legs, start carrying whips, and move into the farmhouse. The pigs delete the original commandments, leaving only the one quoted above. Orwell presents a cynical message about inequality and privilege; people always gravitate to self-serving actions that create an unbalanced division of power.

Many would argue that rising above the crowd is achieved by

working harder than everyone else. And yet, it is hard to deny that the climb is steeper for some than for others. Journalist [Sian Ferguson](#) frequently writes about marginalized groups and social justice. In describing inequality, Ferguson [defines privilege](#) “as a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group.” In other words, some people benefit simply from being associated with a favorable group identity rather than through any deliberate effort. Social privilege facilitates institutional oppression because people who fall into the unprivileged group are automatically denied an equal share of opportunities and rewards.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Can you come up with some reasons why people feel compelled to label another race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation as inferior or superior?
- Do you think embracing diversity and difference means sticking to your own group? Why or why not?

## Race

In a country once known as “[the melting pot](#),” the subject of race continues to divide its people. The term imagines the United States as a crucible, where the [various immigrant nationalities](#) would meld together to form a new race.

This section examines race in the context of racism. Racism is a prejudiced opinion that assigns superior or inferior status to groups of people who share genetic or inherited physical characteristics. This bias against particular races is irrational and frequently hostile. Race artifacts, such as the color line, racial profiling, and hidden bias, illustrate the context and

personal experiences of Black Americans. They also examine how racist attitudes breed abuse and violence.

## The Color Line

Color line was a term created by human rights advocate and American diplomat [Frederick Douglass](#) to describe racism and racial segregation. In his address to the [National Convention of Colored Men \(September 24, 1883\)](#), Douglass explained that the color line arises from popular assumptions made about people because of their skin color. The division presents colored people with a pervasive, inescapable barrier to social mobility:

*“Though we have had war, reconstruction and abolition as a nation, we still linger in the shadow and blight of an extinct institution. Though the colored man is no longer subject to be bought and sold, he is still surrounded by an adverse sentiment which fetters all his movements. In his downward course he meets with no resistance, but his course upward is resented and resisted at every step of his progress. If he comes in ignorance, rags, and wretchedness, he conforms to the popular belief of his character, and in that character he is welcome. But if he shall come as a gentleman, a scholar, and a statesman, he is hailed as a contradiction to the national faith concerning his race, and his coming is resented as impudence. In the one case he may provoke contempt and derision, but in the other he is an affront to pride and provokes malice. Let him do what he will, there is at present, therefore, no escape for him. The color line meets him everywhere, and in a measure shuts him out from all respectable and profitable trades and callings.”*

As Douglas noted, stereotypical thinking can be very damaging to the denigrated group. People commit crimes, stay unemployed, become single parents, seek unhealthy relationships, drink excessively, and prefer certain foods for any number of internal and external reasons. Racism insists that Black people do these things because they cannot help but be Black. Worse yet, racism assumes that Black people cannot stop doing certain negative things because it is an indelible part of their nature.

In the context of racial privilege, the world looks very different to people who have none. Ironically, America's fledgling independence was built using slave labor. African people were forcibly removed from their native countries to be chained up, shipped, traded, and branded like livestock. Once in the United States, they were imprisoned without cause, refused equal rights under the law, and forced to work without being paid. All because their Black African identity was judged inferior to the white European one.

In 1895, [W.E.B. Du Bois](#) was the first Black American to graduate with a Ph.D. from Harvard. Du Bois went on to become a historian, sociologist, writer, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In his essay, [The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind \(1900\)](#), Du Bois uses the color line to include all races of color:

*"The world problem of the 20th century is the Problem of the Color line—the question of the relation of the advanced races of men who happen to be white to the great majority of the undeveloped or half developed nations of mankind who happen to be yellow, brown or black."*

Writer, poet, and activist [Maya Angelou](#) describes the color line being used to predetermine student success or failure. In

[“Chapter 23: Graduation”](#) of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, she describes her feelings of accomplishment and pride over graduating at the top of her class. On graduation day, the entire school is buzzing with excitement. But the upbeat mood quickly dissipates as two white school officials remind the Black students to limit their goals to socially acceptable expectations:

*“The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys, (the girls weren’t even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises.”*

Angelou recognized that this model of racial success had nothing to do with the reality of the present, and everything to do with the history of slavery in America:

*“Which concrete angel glued to what county seat had decided that if my brother wanted to become a lawyer, he had to first pay penance for his skin by picking cotton and hoeing corn and studying correspondence books at night for twenty years?”*

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Is the color line a thing of the past? Or does it only apply to Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, and Maya Angelou?

## Racial Profiling

[Racial profiling](#) is a form of institutional racism that arises when law enforcement officers and organizations show a biased perception of certain racial groups. Although [made illegal](#) in

the United States in 1998, racial profiling continues to subject people of color to public humiliation, personal threats, physical harm, and [even death](#). The term has expanded to include racial attitudes and behavior by all people, not only law enforcement.

On [July 16, 2009](#), Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested while trying to force his way into a house in an affluent neighborhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Gates was handcuffed and held at police headquarters. He was released and the charges dropped because, as it turns out, he was trying to get into his own house. Gates is Black. He is also a tenured professor and chair of the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University, which is located in Cambridge.

Gates accused arresting officer Sergeant James Crowley of racism. Leading up to the arrest, Crowley suggested Gates was being investigated for a possible break-in. Gates responded, “Why, because I’m a Black man in America?”

News of Gates’ arrest was followed by a storm of commentary over racial profiling by law enforcement. Gates’ and Crowley’s accounts of what happened differ significantly. The Pew Research Center called the Gates arrest and the [biggest race-related news event of 2009](#). Even President Barack Obama joined [the debate](#):

*“Now, I don’t know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts, what role race played in that, but I think it’s fair to say, number one, any of us would be pretty angry; number two, that the Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home; and, number three, what I think we know, separate and apart from this incident, is that there is a long history in this country of African-Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately. And that’s just a fact.”*

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- If Professor Gates had been a white professor in this upscale neighborhood, would this scenario have been different?
- Did Professor Gates experience a modern-day color line?

On [May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020](#), Christian Cooper was birdwatching in Central Park in New York City when he witnessed a dog off-leash. Mr. Cooper is a member of the Audubon Society. He asked the dog's owner, Amy Cooper (no relation), to stop disturbing the birds and leash her dog in compliance with park rules. Ms. Cooper refused. When Mr. Cooper tried to distract the dog with treats, Ms. Cooper threatened to call the police. She then called the police, claiming an African American man was threatening her and her dog.

Mr. Cooper captured most of the incident on his cell phone. His sister posted the video on social media, and it went viral. The recording shows a confrontational and agitated young woman speaking into her phone:

*"There is an African-American man. I am in Central Park. He is recording me, and threatening me and my dog. I'm sorry, I can't hear [words inaudible]. I'm being threatened by a man in the Ramble! Please send the cops immediately!"*

The next day, Ms. Cooper's employer announced [she had been fired](#). Ms. Cooper [told CNN](#) she wanted to "publicly apologize to everyone" and said, "I'm not a racist. I did not mean to harm that man in any way." The Manhattan district attorney charged Ms. Cooper with filing a false police report.

Mr. Cooper, who is a writer and editor, explained in [an opinion piece](#) for the *Washington Post* why he decided not to press charges or aid in the investigation. He emphasized the importance of looking past the individual perpetrator to



recognize “the long-standing, deep-seated racial bias against us black and brown folk that permeates the United States.” Cooper added that treating Ms. Cooper’ as though her reaction was an anomaly, lets white bystanders ignore their personal responsibilities to end racism:

*“Focusing on charging Amy Cooper lets white people off the hook from all that. They can scream for her head while leaving their own prejudices unexamined. They can push for her prosecution and pat themselves on the back for having done something about racism, when they’ve actually done nothing, and their own Amy Cooper remains only one purse-clutch in the presence of a black man away.”*

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- How would you describe Ms. Cooper’s physical behavior, choice of words, and tone of voice? What one word would you use to describe Ms. Cooper in this video.
- How would you describe Mr. Cooper’s physical behavior (e.g., how much did the video move or shake), choice of words, and tone of voice? What one word would you use to describe Mr. Cooper in this video?
- Is it significant that Ms. Cooper tells police she is being threatened by an **African American man**? In other words, do you think she exploited racial profiling to get the police to respond?
- What do you think of Ms. Cooper’s apology that included saying she is not racist?
- The incidents involving Mr. Gates and Mr. Cooper (indirectly) are examples of racial profiling. What is the connection between racial profiling and the color line?

## Irrational, Hostile, and Tragic

As was evident in the video, Amy Cooper's extreme reaction did not make sense under the circumstances. Extreme responses to racially motivated bias figures heavily in explaining the disproportionate numbers of [Black people shot by law enforcement](#) relative to other racial identities in the United States. Over 95% of the shooting victims are Black men, and over 50% of the men are 20-40 years old.

Keep in mind the context of racial bias, response levels, and victim demographics as we examine two different shooting artifacts. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, [Terence Crutcher](#) was shot and killed by police officer Betty Jo Shelby. Police videos show an unarmed 40-year-old Black man, Shelby, and several other officers on the scene. Crutcher moved slowly with his hands in the air, followed instructions, and showed no resistance. Transcripts reveal an [officer in the helicopter said](#), "Also, got a feeling it's about to happen. It looks like a bad dude, too. Might be on something." Shortly after, Crutcher collapsed and fell to the ground, and voices shouted that shots have been fired.

Officer Shelby stood trial for first-degree murder and was acquitted. Returning to work at the Tulsa Police Department, she was assigned to administrative (desk) duties and [later resigned](#). The following year she was hired as a deputy by the [Rogers County Sheriff's Department](#) (Claremore). In 2018, Shelby taught a training course called *Surviving the Aftermath*, during which "participants will be exposed to many of the legal, financial, physical, and emotional challenges which may result from a critical incident in an effort to prepare (law enforcement officers) for the aftermath." In 2019, she became a [firearms instructor](#) for the National Rifle Association (NRA).



*Trayvon Martin wearing a hoodie.*

*Credit: [Family of Trayvon Martin](#). Fair Use of copyrighted material. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>*

*File:TrayvonMartinHooded.jpg*

Open displays of institutional racism spill over into the general public, which has tragic consequences when civilians use armed force to enforce their racial prejudices. On February 26, 2012, in Twin Lakes, Florida, [Trayvon Martin](#) was shot and killed by volunteer Neighborhood Watch captain George Zimmerman. The 17-year-old Black man was unarmed. Zimmerman was patrolling the gated community from his truck when he spotted Martin walking through the neighborhood. Zimmerman called the police [to report](#):

*“Hey, we’ve had some break-ins in my neighborhood, and there’s a real suspicious guy. This guy looks like he’s up to no good, or he’s on drugs or something. It’s raining, and he’s just walking around looking about.”*

Eventually, Zimmerman confronted Martin and fatally shot him in the chest with a 9 mm handgun. Zimmerman claims the two men got into a physical altercation and that he was physically attacked and shot Martin in self-defense. Witness calls to 911 offered contradicting reports of who was the one getting beaten. Further complicating matters, Florida laws allow concealed-carry gun permits and “[stand your ground](#)” defense arguments. This controversial law gives people the legal right to defend themselves using deadly force against an attacker if they believe they are in danger of serious injury.

What followed Martin’s death was [a long, meandering legal journey](#). Sanford police, claiming they did not have grounds to do so, waited 47 days before arresting Zimmerman. Soon after the arrest, Police Chief Bill Lee was fired for mishandling the case. The lead prosecutor was replaced twice. The trial judge was replaced once. The prosecutor’s office accidentally released trial documents to the press. Zimmerman sued NBC for editing his 911 call to make him look like a racist who racially profiled Martin. The trial began nearly one year and two months following Martin’s death. After 16 hours of deliberation, the six-woman jury (no men) acquitted Zimmerman of second-degree murder and manslaughter.

Shortly before Zimmerman’s trial began, racial profiling jumped onto the center stage. TV show host Geraldo Rivera shocked viewers with [his comments](#) about the upcoming trial. Rivera said Martin was partially responsible for his own death because he was wearing a hoodie. When asked to clarify, Rivera maintained this was just “common sense” for minorities in

America. People around the world responded by [posting pictures of themselves wearing hoodies](#) on social media.



*A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*  
<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=198>

**Credit:** Howard University students. “[Am I Suspicious?](#)” CourtScrub. YouTube. [Fair Use](#) of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content. <https://youtu.be/rH5bB8HUWFs>.

Law students from Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, DC, released the video, “Am I Suspicious?” to highlight how racial profiling resulted in Martin’s death.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- What does a bad dude look like? Why would police suggest, “he looks like a bad dude”?
- How can someone in a helicopter, several hundred feet from the ground, determine a person’s intent or sobriety?

## Implicit versus Explicit Beliefs

Amy Cooper insisted, “I’m not a racist!” Like Cooper, many people believe they accept diversity and avoid judging people based on race. These same people carry racial stereotypes—positive and negative, correct and incorrect—they are unaware of having. This tendency for our minds to accept stereotypes without filtering or judging them is called [implicit bias](#). The opposite way of thinking is explicit bias, which are generalizations we are aware of or intentionally make. Explicit or implicit, these biases inform our attitudes about people of certain races being more likely to commit a crime, good at playing sports, or skilled in composing hip-hop lyrics.

Harvard developed an online survey called the [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\)](#) that reveals how tricky it can be to avoid implicit bias. Each survey covers a topic such as Arab-Muslim names, facial skin-tones, European-African faces, Asian-American faces and places. There are also surveys for religion, weapons, gender, disability, age, presidents, weight, and sexuality. The survey differentiates between automatic responses (implicit) to certain racial groups and conscious choices (explicit).

## Who Owns History?

This race artifact presents valuable insights into whose version of history is recognized by society. From before its days as a nation, American history is filled with events that persecuted, subjugated, oppressed, and eradicated another racial identity. Seen from the perspective of African slaves and indigenous Native Americans, the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas, signing of the Declaration of Independence, and settling of the “Wild West” could hardly be regarded as celebratory moments in history.

The halftime show of the 2016 Superbowl Championship for the National Football League (NFL) featured a live musical performance by pop singer Beyoncé. [Beyoncé's performance](#) paid homage to the [American civil rights movement](#). It included references to the [Black Panther Party](#), [Malcolm X](#), and [black power salute](#).

Many viewers expressed praise, including [James Corden](#), host of *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, Baltimore mayoral candidate and author [Deray McKesson](#), and the political activist group [Dream Defenders](#). Others, such as Anna Kooiman of Fox News and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, were [highly critical](#).

*Cuz nothing brings us all together better than angry @Beyonce shaking her ass & shouting "Negro" repeatedly. #sb50 pic.twitter.com/70ouQLwfs*

— Michelle Malkin (@michellemalkin) [February 8, 2016](#)

Credit: Michelle Malkin (@michellemalkin). Twitter. [Fair Use](#) of copyrighted material. <https://twitter.com/michellemalkin/status/696509742747820032>.

Much of the outrage focused on elevating civil-rights activists with negative images, rather than beloved icons such as [Martin Luther King Jr.](#), [John Lewis](#), [Thurgood Marshall](#), [Hank Aaron](#), [Julian Bond](#), and [Rosa Parks](#).

In his book [Between the World and Me](#), author Ta-nehisi Coates wonders why teachers present such a one-dimensional view of Blacks during Black History Month (February):

*“Why were only our heroes nonviolent? I speak not of the morality of nonviolence, but of the sense that blacks are in especial need of this morality... I judged them against the country I knew, which had acquired the land through murder and tamed it under slavery, against the country whose armies fanned out across the world to extend their dominion. The world, the real one, was civilization secured and ruled by savage means. How could the schools valorize men and women whose values society actively scorned?”*

The following two artifacts, from a songwriter and a poet, assert that the traditional version of the United States is not universal, begging the question, who is telling the truth?)





*A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*  
<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=198>

**Credit: Childish Gambino. “[This Is America.](#)” Donald Glover. YouTube. [Fair Use](#) of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content.**

The [Childish Gambino \(Donald Glover\)](#) music video “This Is America” was released on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The song and video are filled with references to Black culture and history. They address gun violence and drug use, as well as long-standing issues of racism against Black Americans. Early in the video, Gambino executes a hooded black man in the head with a handgun. He immediately assumes the shambling gait of a [Jim Crow caricature](#). Gambino guns down a [Black gospel choir](#), which some interpret as a reference to the [Charleston church shootings \(2015\)](#). Near the end of the video, Gambino lights up a marijuana joint before the scene fades to black. The video concludes with a terrified Gambino, barefoot and shirtless, being pursued by an anonymous mob.

[Langston Hughes](#)' life spanned multiple formative events in American history, giving him a unique perspective on what it means to be Black in America. Hughes grew up during the depression, experienced discrimination throughout his life, and died in 1967 at the height of the civil rights movement. The title of his poem "[Let America Be America Again](#)," is remarkably reminiscent of the slogan, "Make America Great Again," used by then-presidential candidate Donald Trump.

In the poem, Hughes contrasts traditional images of American life with his personal reflections. Here are the first three stanzas:

*Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.  
(America never was America to me.)  
Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.  
(It never was America to me.)  
O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.  
(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")*

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Can you describe other historical narratives when persecution or violence against another race was OK or rarely questioned?
- Do we tend to downplay or even hide questionable

moments in history?

- What role does the history of marginalized groups play in our national consciousness?
- Whose narrative do you think presents an accurate history of America? The founding fathers? Indigenous people? Enslaved Africans?
- Think of someone you consider a hero. Can you articulate what makes that person a hero to you? How much do they physically resemble you? Have they been involved in violent actions? If so, what were the circumstances?
- Have you ever generalized, positive or negative, about someone based on their race?
- Did you find Beyoncé's performance disturbing? Uplifting? Negative? Positive? Can you articulate why?
- President Trump and poet Hughes would certainly share different versions of what greatness looks like. Can you create a list of criteria of "greatness" for each of them, based on what you know about their spoken and written words?
- What does Gambino's song say to you about his experience of being American? How does his experience compare with yours? Can you describe why his is similar/dissimilar to yours?

## Gender

This section explores how explicit and implicit perceptions of gender create inequality for women. The gender artifacts present relevant linguistic, social, political, legal, and cultural contexts. In these explorations, men, women, and gender are used in the [cisgender context](#). "Cisgender is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were

assigned at birth.” Transgender and other gender identities are discussed in the **LGBTQ+** section of this chapter.

## The F Word

Feminism is frequently a trigger word that sparks passionate debate. What is commonly overlooked is the term feminism defines equality for all sexes, not only women. Britannica.com offers a simple, short [definition](#):

*“Feminism, the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests.”*

Without exception, women in every developed and undeveloped country in the world suffer from higher rates of poverty than men. Women are not paid for doing work—cleaning, childcare, senior care, shopping, cooking, laundry, bookkeeping—associated with their own household. This category of domestic work is not commodified as an economic activity, which severely devalues the financial worth of the woman and the services she provides. This devaluation, in turn, negatively affects how women are perceived as contributors to society. In short, women are expected to work for free and, at the same time, are categorized as social freeloaders.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Do you believe in social, political, and economic equality for men and women?
- Based on this definition, would you characterize yourself

as a feminist?

## Gender Labels

The words we choose and how we use them tells a lot about the society we live in. For example, many job descriptions in the American English language are implicitly linked to gender-based power relationships. See if you can answer the following riddle known as the *Surgeon's Dilemma*:

*A father and son are in a horrible car crash that kills the father. The son is rushed to the hospital. However, the surgeon looks at the patient and says, "I cannot operate on this boy because he is my son!" How is this possible?*

[\[Click here for the answer.\]](#)

This example shows how implicit bias reinforces gender stereotypes in specific careers. Presidents, physicians, college professors, priests, astronauts, CEOs, welders, computer technicians, firemen, policemen, and congressmen are assumed to be men. Nurses, kindergarten teachers, domestic workers, personal aides, administrative assistants, dental assistants, childcare workers, and hairdressers are assumed to be women. Not surprisingly, ["male" jobs](#) provide higher pay (and frequently more prestige) than "female" jobs. In fact, men earn more than women [working in the same job](#).

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- If we hear someone talking about a nurse, are we more likely to assume that the person is referring to a female?
- Could the association of women and specific jobs reflect the percentage of women in that profession?

## Women in Politics

The United States has yet to elect a female president. With 24% female representation in the national legislature, the United States [ranks 83<sup>rd</sup>](#) in the world. Despite representing 51% of the population, [women](#) make up only 25% of the members of the Senate and 23% of the House of Representatives. 22% of cities with populations over 30,000 have women mayors. On average, women occupy 29% of state legislative seats.

The article "[Measuring Stereotypes of Female Politicians](#)" published in 2014 in *Political Psychology* concluded the public perception was that:

*"Female politicians are defined more by their deficits than their strengths. In addition to failing to possess the strengths associated with being women...female politicians lack leadership, competence, and masculine traits in comparison to male politicians."*

Attorney [Geraldine Ferraro](#) served in the United States House of Representatives. In 1984, she was the running mate of United States presidential candidate Walter Mondale. Ferraro became the first female vice-presidential candidate to be nominated by a major political party in the United States. News Anchor Tom Brokaw introduced Ferraro at the [Democratic National Convention with](#), "Geraldine Ferraro... The first woman to be nominated for vice president... Size 6!"

In the 2012 presidential election, Sarah Palin ran as the vice-presidential candidate to John McCain. The [news media](#) asked the candidate that if elected, would she continue to cook family meals. They praised the candidate's fashion sense. They obsessed about whether the candidate had breast implants, spawning the nickname "[Boob-gate](#)."

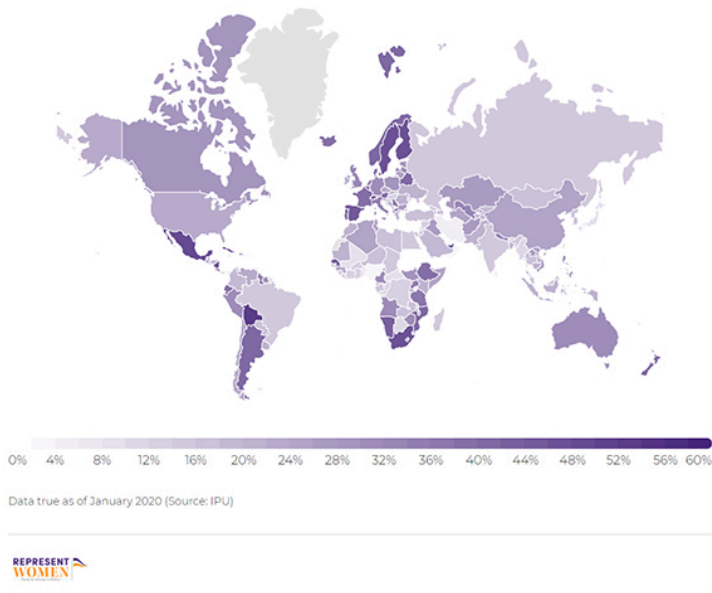
In 2016, the leading presidential candidates were President Donald Trump and Senator Hillary Clinton. Candidate Trump accused Clinton of relying on her gender rather than her qualifications to win the election. [He said](#), “You know, she’s playing the woman’s card. If she didn’t play the woman’s card she would have no chance, I mean zero, of winning.”

Facial expression is another implicit gender-bias female politicians must address. The article [“Forming Impressions: Effects of Facial Expression and Gender Stereotypes”](#) reports that smiling women are perceived as being warmer and more competent than smiling men. Researchers call this perception, the “women are wonderful” effect. The difference, researchers believe, is that women are more likely to be evaluated on appearance than men. From these findings, it is easy to postulate that a female politician who does not smile will be judged negatively.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Can you imagine a male candidate being introduced through his chest measurement? Or waist measurement?
- What are the consequences of identifying women only in relation to how they look? Is this reductive? Does it diminish their accomplishments?
- Do you believe making statements about a woman’s appearance diminishes her accomplishments?
- Do you think a man could be accused of playing the “man card”? Why or why not?
- Do you think gender should qualify a person from being appointed to a public office or running for election?

# Rwanda: Achieving Gender Equity



*Female representation in national legislatures around the world. [Click on image to view the interactive map.] Credit: Represent Women. “[Women’s Representation Internationally](#).” Free to share. Credit to RepresentWomen.*

The United States is automatically assumed to be a leader in the fight for equal rights for all. However, female representation in the national government falls far below that of many countries, including Rwanda, the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, South Africa, Belarus, and the Dominican Republic.

Rwanda tops the international list, with [61% of the national legislatures being women](#). In 1961, Rwandan women were granted the right to run for office. During the 1990s, women members were [18% of the Rwandan Parliament](#). By 2003,



Rwandan women made up nearly 50%. The numbers continued to rise with every election, 56% in 2008, with a peak of 64% in 2008.

What happened to literally change the faces of the Rwandan government was 100 days of genocide in 1994. Following the genocide that took the lives of over [800,000 people](#) and displaced an estimated 2 million more, [70% of the remaining population was female](#). Widowed women became the heads of households, in charge of providing financial support and decision-making. They became leaders.

The genocide forced men and women to think differently about gender roles in society. The post-genocide political leaders rebuilt the government with this new leadership resource, filling it with women. These appointments paved the way for a 2003 constitutional mandate that required [30% female representation](#) in all decision-making organizations, including 24 of the 80 seats in Parliament. [New labor laws](#) guaranteed equal pay for women and men and prohibited gender-based harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Other legal reforms included equal rights of land access and ownership and penalties for violence targeting gender and children.

These political and legal reforms have created sweeping changes in Rwandan society. This is all for the better, says [Rwandan President Paul Kagame](#):

*“The question of gender equality in our society needs a clear and critical evaluation in order to come up with concrete strategies to map the future development in which men and women are true partners and beneficiaries. My understanding of gender is that it is an issue of good governance, good economic management and respect of human rights”*

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- In order to correct social injustices such as gender-based inequality, should governments mandate reform through appointments and legislation?
- Or should gender equality be achieved organically, driven by social, political, and economic forces?

## Immigration

This section explores immigration through the contexts of personal journeys, concepts of home, historical circumstances, and public perceptions. The term immigrant will be used to identify a group that includes immigrants, aliens, refugees, and asylum seekers. While all these people have left their country of origin, each sub-group has characteristics that impact their immigrant experience.

Here are brief definitions of each sub-group:

An [immigrant](#) describes any person residing in, as opposed to visiting, another country who is not a citizen of that country. Note, this definition differs from the legal term described in the [United States Immigration and Nationality Act \(INA\)](#).

An [alien](#) is any person who is not a citizen of the United States. The United States categorizes aliens as immigrant (resident), and nonimmigrant (nonresident), refugee, asylee (asylum seeker), documented, and undocumented (illegal).

A [refugee](#) refers to a person who lives outside their country of nationality to avoid the persecution of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group.

An [asylum seeker or asylee](#) is a person present in or seeking entry into the United States.

## Concepts of Home

*"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." —Robert Frost, ["The Death of a Hired Man."](#)*

Many of us can relate to this sentiment of home, an identifiable place that provides a sense of safety or rest. For over 70 million displaced persons around the globe, however, home does not exist. In 2019, the United Nations (UN) reported that the world is in the midst of the [most massive refugee crisis](#) since World War II (WWII). In the United States, immigrant families are [forcibly separated](#), and people are [denied the legal right to seek asylum](#).

### Questions to Critical & Creative Thinking

- Reflect on your concept of home and imagine what it would mean if you had to leave it or had it taken from you.

## Perilous Journeys, Hostile Receptions

In 2015, scores of humans poured into Europe to escape violence and upheaval in their home nations. Thousands of people drowned trying to cross the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. While some refugees were [greeted warmly](#), many others faced harsh anti-refugee sentiments from the public. Xenophobic rumors accused newcomers of [asylum shopping](#) and [being terrorists](#).

Artist Ai Weiwei documented these mass migrations in the film, "[Human Flow](#)." Weiwei also created an international, traveling exhibit called "[Safe Passage](#)," which attaches lifejackets to the exterior columns of a building. The lifejackets

were worn and discarded by refugees traveling from Turkey to Greece.

Images of the body of drowned three-year-old Syrian boy [Alan Kurdi](#) drew international attention. The tragedy highlighted the impossible choices people are forced to make in their search for a safe place to call home. Kurdi, his older brother, and his mother drowned after their small, over-crowded boat capsized. His father explained that they were given “fake” life preservers that were useless.

Global or multilateral policies on refugee migration are practically nonexistent. Desperate refugees end up paying what amounts to extortion fees to [black-market smugglers](#), with no guarantees of being delivered safely or even arriving at the promised destination.



*A TED element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=198>

Credit: [Alexander Betts](#), “Our Refugee System Is Failing. Here’s How We Can Fix It. TED 2016. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International.  
<https://www.ted.com/talks/>

alexander\_betts\_our\_refugee\_system\_is\_failing\_here\_s\_how\_we\_can\_fix\_it/

Economist and political scientist Alexander Betts believes we need to protect people from having to choose between life-threatening conditions in their home country or an even more perilous journey to escape them. Betts proposes three ideas that would help develop international policies. *Idea one* is to create an economic resettlement zone where refugees can work and establish businesses. *Two* is to match refugees with resettlement areas that match their skills. *Three* would be to issue humanitarian visas allowing refugees to use legitimate travel services.

## Immigration in the United States

The United States is a nation that was founded and built by immigrants. For centuries, people have come to America to escape negative situations and seek out new opportunities. Continuing into present times, people arrive from all over the world, hoping to become citizens. [680,000](#) new American citizens are naturalized every year.

Unless you were born an indigenous Native American, someone in your American family got here by immigrating from another country. For some, this may have been a very recent trip in the family history. People make the journey alone, with their families, or community members.

*"Oh, I love going to Ellis Island to watch the ships coming in from Europe, and to think that all those weary, sea-tossed wanderers are feeling what I felt when America first stretched out her great mother-hand to me!"—David Quixano*

Israel Zangwill's play, "[The Melting Pot](#)," was first staged in 1908.

The play depicts the experiences of a Russian-Jewish immigrant family escaping a fractured Russian society and coming to the United States. Family member David envisages a life free of ethnic divides in “God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!”

The United States establishes quotas for incoming immigrants based on their country of origin. Work visas and residency (green) cards provide immigrants with critical first steps toward achieving American citizenship through naturalization. Immigration policies usually reflect economic, social, and political relationships between the United States and other nations. Unfortunately, they may also reflect irrational, xenophobic attitudes. Examples of these types of anti-immigration laws or government policies include the [Chinese Exclusion Act \(1882\)](#), [Red Scare \(1917-20, 1940s-50s\)](#), [Executive Order 9066 \(1942\)](#), and [Executive Order 13769 \(2017\)](#).

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- How might immigration laws and policies affect how we perceive immigrants?
- Do you know who the first-generation immigrant was (is) in your family and under what circumstances they arrived in the United States?
- How might immigration laws and policies make an impression on the immigrants?

## LGBTQ+

This section examines the experiences of people who self-identify as something other than [heterosexual](#), people who have sexual relationships based on the traditionally perceived genders of men and women. In this section, the term LGBTQ+

includes people who are marginalized because of their sexual identity. The plus symbol (+) signifies this group identity [includes other sexual identities](#) in addition to (L)esbian, (G)ay, (B)isexual, (T)ransgender, or (Q)ueer/(Q)uestioning.

Mainstream society tends to perceive the LGBTQ+ group not only as being different but also as being not normal. This irrational bias is called [heteronormativity](#), the belief that heterosexuality is normal and any other sexual orientation is not. Heteronormativity grants social, professional, legal, financial, and educational privileges to heterosexual relationships and discriminates against relationships that are not. Disparities in taxation, healthcare, marriage, and employment devalue LGBTQ+ people, their spouses, children, and families as [being inferior to](#) and less desirable than those of heterosexuals.

Like racism, heteronormativity grants unearned, significant benefits to certain people solely based on their group identity. Social advocate and author Sam Killerman lists 43 examples of heterosexual privilege, which he calls the “[Why it’s easier to be straight list](#).” Here are some examples from the list, in no particular order:

*Expressing affection in most social situations and not expecting hostile or violent reactions from others.*

*Having positive and accurate media images of people with whom you can identify.*

*Talking openly about your relationship, vacations, and family planning you and your lover/partner are doing.*

*Raising, adopting, and teaching children without people believing that you will molest them or force them into your sexuality.*

*Working in a job dominated by people of your*

*gender, but not feeling as though you are a representative/spokesperson for your sexuality.*

*Receiving paid leave from employment when grieving the death of your spouse.*

*Assuming strangers won't ask, "How does sex work for you?" or other too-personal questions.*

*Sharing health, auto, and homeowners' insurance policies at reduced rates.*

*Acting, dressing, or talking as you choose without it being a reflection on people of your sexuality.*

*Freely teaching about lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals without being seen as having a bias because of your sexuality or forcing your "homosexual agenda" on students.*

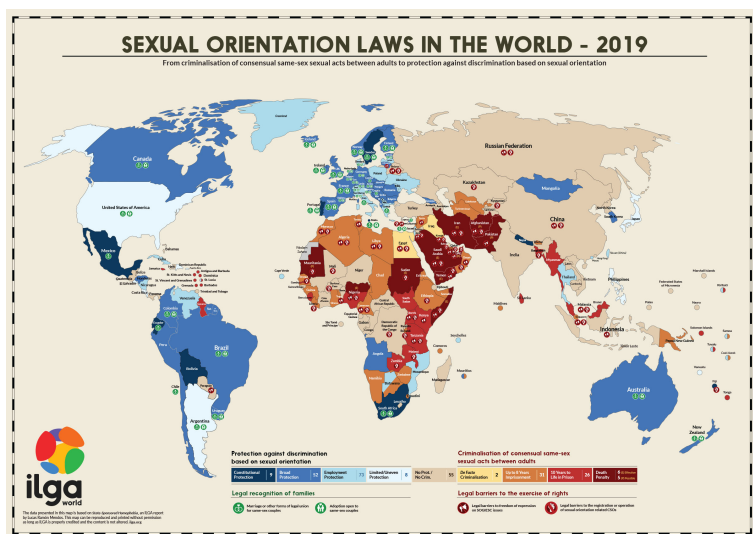
*Having property laws work in your favor, filing joint tax returns, and automatically inheriting from your spouse under probate laws.*

## **Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking**

- Reading through the list, have you experienced any of these privileges?
- Prior to reading this section, were you aware that heterosexual privilege exists?



# Being LGBTQ+ in America



*[Click on image to enlarge the map.] Blue countries legally protect sexual orientation from discrimination. Red/brown/orange countries criminalize same-sex acts between adults.*

**Credit: ILGA World: Lucas Ramon Mendos. “[State-Sponsored Homophobia 2019: Global Legislation Overview Update](#).” (Geneva; ILGA, December 2019). Free to share. <https://ilga.org/ilga-launches-state-sponsored-homophobia-2019>.**

Social movements arise in response to institutional discrimination against and criminalization of particular group identities. For centuries, religious and government institutions have impeded the open acceptance of all sexual identities. In [70 countries](#) around the world, same-sex activity is illegal. In six of them, same-sex activity is punishable by death.

Scholar and historian Bonnie J. Morris suggests that every documented society shows evidence of same-sex relationships, along with its persecution. European and Christian colonizers were shocked upon observing “[two-spirit](#)” love in Native American societies. And yet, Europe had Sappho of ancient

Greece, who wrote about same-sex desires among women. The first known case of someone receiving the death sentence for homosexual activity occurred in what is now Florida in 1566, when Spanish explorers executed a French man.

In the United States, same-sex activism gained momentum following World War II (WWII). One of America's earliest LGBTQ+ organizations was the [Mattachine Society](#), founded in 1950 by Harry Hay and Chuck Rowland. The group got its name from the French activist group *Société Mattachine*. The société used theatre and song to spread awareness of social injustices against gay people. The Mattachine Society pioneered a two-fold implementation of gay activism: 1) organizing gay people to form grass-roots challenges to anti-gay discrimination, and 2) building a gay community to provide a national network of personal, emotional, and political support. In 1953-54, the group suffered from internal disagreements that divided group leaders. The founding members resigned, and the society faded away following the Stonewall riots in 1969.

The Stonewall uprising marked a pivotal year for gay rights in the United States. Before 1969, homosexuality was illegal in every state except Illinois. The Stonewall Inn in New York City was a gay and lesbian bar. [Early in the morning on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1969](#), police raided the bar, arrested employees for selling alcohol without a license, manhandled customers, and cleared the bar. Several customers were arrested for not wearing "gender-appropriate clothing." Angry customers began fighting back, and the police barricaded themselves inside the bar. The scuffles quickly escalated into a riot, and the bar was set on fire. Police reinforcements arrived to extinguish the fire and disperse the crowd. Rioting crowds gathered intermittently over the next five days. News of the uprising spread throughout the LGBTQ+ community, unifying long-suffering people behind a common cause. The following year, New York City held its first [Gay Pride celebration](#) on the anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

Following Stonewall, the Gay Liberation movement of the 1970s helped [transform public perception of gays and lesbians](#) across the United States. The decade saw the premiere of “[That Certain Summer \(1972\)](#),” the first mainstream TV movie to portray gay men sympathetically. “[Sunday Bloody Sunday](#)” (the 1971 film, not the 1883 music video) featured an on-screen kiss between two men. The film [Cabaret \(1972\)](#) openly celebrated homosexuality and won [eight Oscars and three Golden Globes](#).

The AIDS epidemic of the 1980s was another galvanizing moment when LGBTQ+ people organized to raise public awareness and achieve social justice. The grass-roots organization [ACT UP \(1987\)](#) was born in the midst of [an epidemic](#) that was killing tens of thousands of people. This sometimes-radical group devised [ground-breaking strategies](#) for making drug-testing more inclusive of marginalized groups, speeding up the drug-approval process, and routing federal funding to health education, disease prevention, and testing. ACT UP is also credited with setting in motion the momentum to legalize marriage equality in the United States and abroad.

The first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have seen increasing public acceptance of LGBTQ+ people and their values. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian on her television sitcom. An estimated 42 million viewers watched the [hour-long, celebrity-filled episode](#). A week before the episode aired, DeGeneres appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine with the headline “[Yep, I’m Gay.](#)”

In 2015, former Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner came out as a [transgender woman](#) with her new name, Caitlyn. Jenner appeared on the July 2015 cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine. The [cover story](#) included photographs of Jenner wearing sexy lingerie, slinky floor-length gowns, and curve-fitting dresses. The shots were taken by famed celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz

On June 26, 2015, in the landmark case [Obergefell v. Hodges](#),

the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriages in all 50 states, eliminated state bans on same-sex marriage, and required states to honor out-of-state same-sex marriage licenses.

Of course, the need for social justice for LGBTQ+ people continues. Protection against employer discrimination due to gender and sexual identity is not the law in all 50 states. [House bill HR 5 – Equality Act \(2109-2020\)](#) is intended to prohibit “an individual from being denied access to a shared facility, including a restroom, a locker room, and a dressing room, that is in accordance with the individual's gender identity.”

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- How do you suppose highly publicized coming-out stories of celebrities impact LGBTQ+ individuals struggling privately with issues of identity and acceptance?

## Disability

For the most part, human society defines the world from an [ableist](#) bias. Everything from buildings, to TV characters, to social structures is designed for people without disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines someone affected by [disability](#) as:

*“a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”*

## A Short History of Disability (US version)

The awareness of discrimination against disabled people emerged in the 1960s-70s. However, prejudice against and mistreatment of people with disabilities stretches back many centuries. Phil Pangrazio is President and CEO of Ability360, one of the largest independent living centers for people with disabilities in the United States. Pangrazio traces the [roots of ableism](#) to biblical theology that explains that people with disabilities are being punished for not following God's teachings. Disability-based prejudices continued throughout European and American history, unfairly assuming people with disabilities were victims of demonic or supernatural possession.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, American institutions acknowledged that people with disabilities needed intervention and treatment. Unfortunately, the "solution" was to segregate people with disabilities from the rest of society by placing them in special schools for the physically crippled, deaf, blind, and mentally ill. Popular at the time, Social Darwinism and the Eugenics movement prompted legislation that prohibited people with disabilities from marrying or having children. For example, in *Buck v. Bell* (1927), the United States Supreme Court upheld state laws forcing people with intellectual disabilities to be sterilized. Ugly laws defined people with physical disabilities as "unsightly or disgusting" and forbade them from appearing in public. The Idiot Law (1846) states, "No white person shall intermarry with a negro, and no insane person or idiot shall be capable of contracting marriage."

United States President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#), who was stricken by polio in his late 30s, was a public advocate for rehabilitation. However, he was motivated by the [personal belief](#) that disability was an abnormal condition that should be treated and cured. Disabled WWII veterans pushed for

government reforms that would provide medical rehabilitation and vocational training.

The 1960s and 1970s saw significant advancements in the perception and treatment of people with disabilities living in the United States. Disability activism was no doubt helped along by the [Black-American civil rights movement](#). In 1973, LGBTQ activist Franklin Kameny got the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which was used to diagnose mental disabilities. Laws were enacted to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities in employment and public education.

Perhaps the biggest victory for disability activism came with the passing of the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) in 1990. This law extended civil rights protections to people with disabilities in public accommodations and transportation, in the workplace, in receiving state and government services. It also mandates equal access to telecommunications services.

## Overcoming Inspiration Porn and Other Ableisms

Despite these achievements, people with disabilities still face explicit and implicit bias that encourages damaging stereotypes. Even seemingly benevolent behavior attitudes may detract from genuine challenges and valid accomplishments performed by real people.

Irish novelist and poet Christy Brown's autobiography, [My Left Foot \(1954\)](#), gave mainstream audiences an insider's look at the experiences of someone with disabilities. In the chapter, "[The Letter A](#)," Brown describes how his mother's unflagging love and support helped him first to survive and then to overcome severe physical disabilities. The book was adapted

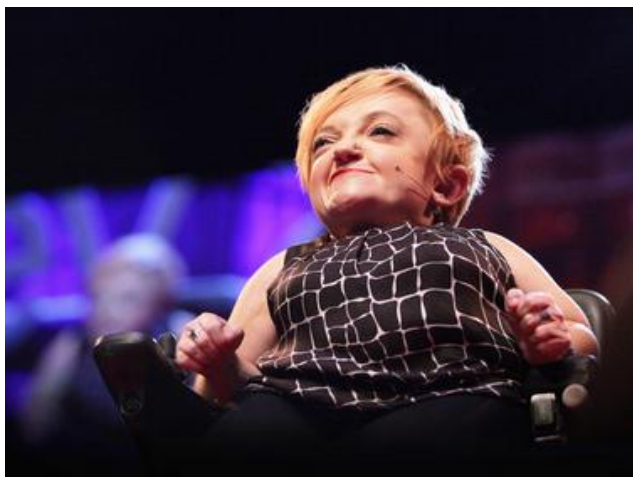
into a film in 1989, starring Daniel Day-Lewis, who won an Academy Award for Best Actor.



*A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*  
<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=198>

**Credit:** Lisa Bufano. Zack B. “[Lisa Bufano](#).” YouTube. **Fair Use** of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content. <https://youtu.be/vWZi2uGRQms>.

When Lisa Bufano was 21 years old, a life-threatening staph infection resulted in the amputation of both her legs and the fingers on both hands. The former gymnast started expressing her experience as an amputee through [dance and performance art](#), using “music, props, prosthetics, and illusion to explore the idea of deformity.” In [October 2013](#), at the age of 40, Bufano committed suicide.



*A TED element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=198>

**Credit: Stella Young, “[I’m Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much](https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much).” TEDxSydney. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International. [https://www.ted.com/talks/stella\\_young\\_i\\_m\\_not\\_your\\_inspiration\\_thank\\_you\\_very\\_much](https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much).**

Stella Young, a comedian, journalist, and activist, was born with a genetic condition that makes her bones very fragile. She complains about “inspiration porn,” a tendency for people to overinflate routine accomplishments by people with disabilities. She recounts being a teenager working in her mom’s hair salon and binge-watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Someone from the community suggested nominating Young for a community achievement award. Her parents voiced their appreciation and pointed out that their daughter was not doing anything particularly noteworthy. After years of similar encounters, Young realized people were treating her like a rare object on display rather than a regular person.



British-born visual and performance artist [Alison Lapper](#) was born with truncated legs and no arms. Lapper challenges stereotypical perceptions of beauty by creating [self-portraits](#) rendered in painting, photography, and digital imaging. Lapper openly challenges viewers to recognize her art, not her disability. Fellow artist Marc Quinn created a sculpture using a pregnant Lapper as his model. The sculpture was displayed at Trafalgar Square in London for many years. When London hosted the Paralympic Games in 2012, Quinn created an [inflatable reinterpretation](#) of the original sculpture that took center stage during the games' opening ceremony.

*"[Mark Twain] treated me not as a freak, but as a handicapped woman seeking a way to circumvent extraordinary difficulties." —[Helen Keller \(1895\)](#)*

# Reform & Revolution



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## Key Concepts

This chapter will prepare you to:

1. Define reform and revolution, including the critical differences between them.
2. Describe a reform or revolution event from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including relevant historical, social, or political context.
3. List various artistic reactions associated with war.
4. Provide examples of artistic movements that led to social reform and assess their effectiveness.
5. Provide an example of civil disobedience and the change that resulted from it.
6. Explain the importance of free speech to reform movements.

7. Describe an example of bearing witness or storytelling that initiates change.

Reform and revolution have been part of our world since the beginning of civilization. This chapter examines the origins and impact of significant reform and revolution moments from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The goal of this chapter is to investigate patterns that emerge from differing conflicts, without judging if a movement is right, wrong, or legitimate. The examples were selected to help illustrate the origins of reform and revolution. We will explore how reform and revolution are documented and how they can lead to open warfare. We will also look at how the arts, culture, personalities, and civil action can work as agents of reform and revolution. We will use our humanities lens to explore reform from the perspective of the individuals and groups engaged in fighting, as well as the public perception created by news media, visual arts, music, and literature.

## Change Is the Imperative of Reform & Revolution

Put simply, reform and revolution are actions people undertake to change an existing institution, system, or practice—with the goal of improving it. Reform involves making internal changes or modifications and without completely removing the existing system. For example, [American civil rights movements](#) (note the plural usage) that began in the mid-1950s resulted in the reform of laws and policies covering civil rights, voting, and labor. These changes strengthened long-denied human rights protections and delivered them to people of color, women, and migrant workers. The reforms did not drastically change the country's political structure. At the same time, they ensured fair

and equal treatment for all citizens regardless of race, creed, gender, class, ability, sexuality, and ethnicity.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Do you believe reform achieves equality, liberty, opportunity, and human dignity for all people? Or is revolution necessary to enact change?

## When Reform Becomes Revolution

When changes are not being implemented or have not gone far enough, reform may become the catalyst for revolution. The goal of revolution is usually an extreme or complete change to the status quo, including the replacement of the existing authority.

The definition of revolution includes two aspects:

- A forced replacement of a government or social institution to establish a new system
- Multiple events orbiting around and driven by the perceived need to initiate progress

Keep both of these in mind as we explore the reasons why people feel compelled to take up arms, as opposed to using reform to enact change within the existing system. The second aspect is essential for contextualizing how a social movement with a singular goal frequently experiences conflicting ideological beliefs on how to achieve it.

The [American Revolution\(1775-83\)](#) led to the eradication of the existing political power structure, colonial rule under Great Britain. From this armed revolution, emerged the United States of America, an independent self-governing nation. Coming on

the heels of the American Revolution, social, political, and agricultural tumult in France would culminate in the [French Revolution \(1787-99\)](#). This violent uprising led to the downfall of the monarchy ruled by King Louis XV and the rise of Napoléon Bonaparte.



***Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution.***

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Closely following the start of the French uprising, the [Haitian Revolution \(1791-1804\)](#) began in the French colony of Saint-Domingue. Saint-Domingue, one of the most successful colonies in the Americas, had been built on the backs of slaves. After the slaves fought for and won their freedom from French

authority, they created Haiti, the first country to be founded by slaves.

The revolution's course was complicated by intervention from the newly founded United States of America. American leaders, such as Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, supported the white population of Saint-Domingue, in part, because of fears that the slave unrest would spread northward. Jefferson found himself in a political conundrum. He firmly believed in the foundational ideas behind the French Revolution. On the other hand, he kept slaves for his financial, cultural, and political benefit.

As the revolution continued, refugees fleeing the war in Saint-Domingue arrived on the shores of Virginia, Philadelphia, and New York of the United States. Most of them were white, and many were slave owners accompanied by their slaves. These outsiders supplied firsthand accounts of slaves violently turning against their masters, which confirmed the fears of alarmed American lawmakers. After all, many of these government leaders acquired their wealth using slave labor. In 1798, the political xenophobia became codified into law as the [Alien and Sedition Acts](#). An increasingly xenophobic American public made life unbearable for many of the recent immigrants. Some decided to return home, despite the still-tenuous political situation in Saint-Domingue. As we can see from this timeline, the Haitian Revolution was influenced (perhaps even driven) by the American and French uprisings that preceded it.

## Revolution Is Not War

While armed conflict is frequently involved, war may not be necessary to achieve revolutionary change. In 1994, military leader [Yahya Jammeh](#) gained control of the Gambian government after a bloodless coup. Then in 2016, a democratic

revolution ousted Jammeh as military and political ruler—a position he maintained with [brutal authority](#) for 22 years. One event among many that prompted the change was the death of opposition activist, [Solo Sandeng](#), who was tortured and killed while in police custody. [Social media](#) made [evidence of the violence](#) readily available for Gambians to see and understand. For the first time in decades, people who had no interest in politics were expressing concern over Jammeh's violent action against a political opponent. Gambian voters understood that their silence meant tacit complicity; they took to the polls to oust Jammeh and his rule of terror.

Following the election, Gambians sought lasting change. They understood that revolutionary actions required follow-up reforms to heal the country's collective trauma. The newly elected Gambian government created the [Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission \(TRRC\)](#). The TRRC provides a platform for sharing stories of trauma, grants reparations for victims, documents acts of violence, and holds perpetrators accountable for their crimes. Interviews with killers, victims, and witnesses are live-streamed and archived on [YouTube](#), making the process transparent.

## Why We Fight: Examining Historical Events

The following examples present several 20<sup>th</sup>-century reform and revolution events. We will examine causes, key developments, and the consequences of war, as well as reconciliation efforts and political initiatives. These artifacts are presented from the perspective of participants, combatants, and civilians, as well as news, art, and literature.

[Alexander Hamilton](#) wrote in [The Federalist](#) papers:

*"To judge from the history of mankind, we shall be compelled to conclude that the fiery and destructive passions of war reign in the human breast with much more powerful sway than the mild and beneficent sentiments of peace; and that to model our political systems upon speculations of lasting tranquility, is to calculate on the weaker springs of the human character."*

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Do you think Hamilton's statement is correct? Or is war an inevitable aspect of life?
- Digging deeper, what reasons would be compelling enough for people to protest or to take up arms rebel against the status quo?
- Do you believe the primary motivation for going to war is the fear of kill or be killed? Or is the reason more complex? What compels countries to spend vast sums of money on troops, weapons, and warfare?
- As we have considered why we fight and how we process those experiences as human beings, have your views on war changed? Do you think it is always justified?

## Whose Story Is It?

One thing often overlooked is whose stories get erased as history is documented and told. To critically analyze an artifact of reform or revolution, we must examine the unofficial, as well as official versions. We must often address contradictory messages about why we fight. For example, are we waging war to defeat political oppression? Or is there another agent driving the conflict, such as religious ideology or financial gain? Keep



these various perspectives and challenging questions in mind as we examine reform and revolution artifacts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Soldiers of the New York Army National Guard's 369th Infantry Regiment—The Harlem Hellfighters.**

Credit: [Eric Durr](#).

New York National Guard. Public Domain.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/Resources/Image-Gallery/News-Images/igphoto/2002042273/>

[\*The Harlem Hellfighters\*](#) by Max Brooks is a graphic novel about the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. This all-black American infantry unit fought during WWI. The homecoming parade honoring the decorated war heroes turns somber when they learn of the notorious race riots of the [Red Summer of 1919](#). The [final panel's caption](#) reads:

*"It'd be a nice story if I could say that our parade or even our victories changed the world overnight, but truth's got an ugly way of killin' nice stories. The truth is that we came home to ignorance, bitterness, and somethin' called the 'The Red*

*Summer of 1919,' some of the worst racial violence America's ever seen. The truth is that our fight, and the fight of those who looked up to us as heroes, didn't end with the 'the war to end all wars.'"*

## Declaration of Independence

The [Declaration of Independence](#) is a textual artifact that marks the birth of the United States. It also defines universal rights guaranteed to all people, not just its citizens. The document was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, as part of the announcement that the 13 American colonies were no longer members of the British Empire. 56 representatives of the 13 newly independent sovereign states signed the declaration.

This document defines the American view of freedom and revolution, underscoring particular cultural perspectives. The historical context plays a key and disconcerting role. Slave labor was central to the flourishing of the American economy. Nevertheless, the declaration states that **all men** are created equal. This equality did not exist for the slaves, who earned no wages and were treated as property to be sold, branded, and traded. For voting and taxation, they counted as only three-fifths of a person. Interestingly, the original draft alluded to the immorality of slavery. However, this mention was removed for political expediency.

### Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- How does the *Declaration of Independence* shape the definition of freedom? How does the contradiction of slavery affect this definition?
- Do you think the declaration justifies the 13 colonies going

to war against Great Britain? What other contextual factors might be involved?

- The declaration is explicit in defining rights for men. Why do you suppose it omits women, LGBTQ, or non-binary? Why do you think it makes no mention of a man's race?

## French Revolution

For many Europeans, the [French Revolution](#) remains a pivotal moment in history. It is a touchstone event, highlighting the will of the people versus totalitarian institutions. Toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, unrest was growing among urban and rural peasants. France had experienced two decades of poor harvests, triggering rising costs for bread, a staple food item for most of the population. Resentment festered from heavy taxation, necessitated by the excessive spending habits by King Louis XVI. The monarch provided no support or relief for those struggling with crop failure and famine. Public complaints and discontent turned into rioting and looting, which soon spread across the country. Bastille Day, July 14, 1789, marks the start of the French Revolution. On this date, people stormed the Bastille fortress in Paris to obtain guns and gunpowder. This people's revolution resulted in the removal of the monarchy, along with the feudal taxation and social system.

## World War I

[World War I \(WWI\)](#), or the Great War, began on July 28, 1914, and lasted until November 11, 1918. More than 9 million combatants and 7 million civilians died as a result of this armed conflict that involved most of Europe, Russia, the United States, and the Middle East. The triggering event was the

assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, by a South Slav nationalist named Gavrilo Princip. Hostilities between Serbia and Austria-Hungary that had flared up during the Balkan Wars (1912-13) added to the tense situation following the assassination in 1914. Existing European alliances came into play, creating a situation where armed conflict seemed inevitable. These alliances created two armed camps: the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy; and the Triple Entente of Britain, Russia, and France. Russia, an ally of Serbia, mobilized their army to defend against an attack from Austria-Hungary. Germany interpreted this as an act of war, declared war on France, and pulled Great Britain into the conflict.

## World War II

[World War II \(WWII, 1939-1945\)](#), the second global war, is regarded as the deadliest conflict in human history. Total casualties are estimated at 50-85 million people, which include over 6 million people executed in Nazi concentration camps. The roots of WWII began with the reparations of World War I. Several countries, Germany in particular, were discontent with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles (1919). Adolph Hitler used this time of political and economic uncertainty to rise to prominence in the public eye. He spread propaganda that blamed Jewish people for Germany's defeat in World War I. Following his election as Chancellor in 1933, Hitler drafted laws to exile Jewish people from society. And he continued to disseminate propaganda that supported these laws. Because these legislative moves occurred against the backdrop of prosperity and development, they went mostly unnoticed until the Nazi party began enforcing the laws they had put into place.

On the other side of the world, Japan had its own motives

for joining the war. Korea had already [been taken over](#) in 1910, predating WWI. Several years before Germany's annexation of Poland in 1939, Japan invaded China intending to colonize Asia and the Pacific. In September 1940, Japan formally entered WWII by signing the Tripartite Pact, allying with Germany and Italy. The United States entered the war after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941. On August 6, 1945, the US bombers dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of [Hiroshima](#), killing an estimated 70,000 people from the detonation. At least [80,000 more people](#) succumbed to related physical injuries and radiation poisoning. Three days later, US bombers dropped an atomic bomb on [Nagasaki](#). The conservative death toll, which includes immediate and subsequent deaths, is estimated at [75,000 people](#). These are the only two uses of nuclear bombs in warfare history. Japan submitted its intention to surrender to the Allied powers on [August 10, 1945](#).

## Nuremberg Trials

The Nuremberg Trials that were held following WWII became a model for [retributive justice](#), international criminal law, and the definition of a [crime against humanity](#). The trials documented Nazi war crimes and sentenced the perpetrators of murder, torture, mutilation, imprisonment, persecution, enslavement, and other inhumane actions. Truth commissions organized after the trials attempted to apply [restorative justice](#), which investigates war crimes and makes recommendations on preventing human rights violations. These examples of judicial reform are undergirded by dual, complementary aims: holding war criminals accountable for past actions and empowering victims by documenting their stories.

## The Bolshevik Revolution



*Bolshevik army marching near the Kremlin, 1919.*

*Credit: [US War Department](#). National Archives and Records Administration. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.*

*<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/>*

*File:Enemy\_Activities\_-\_Arrests\_of\_Alien\_Enemies\_-\_Bolsheviks\_in\_Russia\_-\_Bolshevik\_Revolution\_in\_Russia.\_Soldiers\_of\_the\_Bolshevik\_Army\_march\_around\_the\_square\_near\_the\_Kremlin.\_In\_the\_foreground\_is\_a\_mounted\_Cossack(...). - NARA - \_31477940.jpg*

[Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov](#), more commonly known as Vladimir Ilich Lenin, was one of the leading political figures and revolutionary thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He masterminded the [Bolshevik Revolution \(1917\)](#) and helped found the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Two personal crises that befell Ulyanov during his youth were strong influences on his anti-establishment views as an adult. The first was when his father died after being harassed by the government. The second blow was the execution of his elder brother, who was convicted of conspiring to assassinate the Russian emperor. Ulyanov pursued a law degree at Kazan University, where he was soon expelled. Despite being denied

readmission, he completed his studies, passed his examinations, and graduated in 1891. In his law practice, he confronted a corrupt legal system that heavily favored the wealthy and upper class.

Ulyanov gave up his practice, moved to St. Petersburg, and became a professional revolutionary. In 1895, he was arrested, jailed, and exiled to Siberia. After returning from exile, he adopted the pseudonym Lenin and spent most of the next 15 years in western Europe. During his time away from Russia, he emerged as a prominent revolutionary. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Worker's Party.

In 1917, Lenin perceived that post-WWI Russia was ripe for change. Lenin returned home and started working against the provisional government, which had overturned the tsarist regime in February. On October 24-25 of that same year, Lenin instigated the [Bolshevik \(October\) Revolution](#), overthrowing the provisional government. Three years of civil war followed, during which Lenin's Bolsheviks assumed total control of the country. During this period of upheaval, conflict, and famine, Lenin demonstrated a chilling disregard for the suffering of his countrymen and mercilessly crushed any opposition to his will. Lenin also had a practical side. When his efforts to transform the Russian economy to a socialist model stalled, he introduced the New Economic Policy. This policy permitted some measure of private enterprise, which the socialist government continued for several years after Lenin's death.

In 1918, Lenin survived an assassination attempt but was severely wounded. The injuries affected his health, and in 1922 he suffered a stroke from which he never recovered. Lenin died on January 24, 1924. His corpse was embalmed and placed in a mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square. His Union of Soviet Socialist Republics lasted for 74 years until political turmoil (another people's revolution) dissolved the union in 1991.

## China's Cultural Revolution



*Sculpture outside the Mao Zedong Mausoleum in Tiananmen Square, China.*

Credit: [Daniel Case](#). Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 3.0.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/>

*File:Sculpture\_of\_revolutionary\_struggle\_at\_Mao\_Zedong\_Mausoleum,\_Tiananmen\_Square.jpg*

[Mao Zedong](#) led an armed peasant revolution that swept out the imperialist Chinese government and replaced it with a communist one. His other accomplishments include founding the Red Army, modernizing Chinese industry and manufacturing, and increasing the country's population.

Born in 1893 to peasant farmers, Mao developed his anti-imperialist, pro-nationalist outlook early in life. When he was 27 years old, Mao organized a branch of the [Socialist Youth League](#) and, soon after, attended the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Mao was forced to flee his home province after organizing an activist network of farmers and peasants. He moved to the large urban city of Guangzhou, where he ran propaganda campaigns for the Nationalist Party and attended the Peasant Movement Training Institute.

After evading a purge of communists by Nationalist Party



leader Chiang Kai-shek, Mao returned to his rural roots. Noting the growing power of the peasant movement, Mao [predicted](#) the peasantry would “rise like a tornado or tempest—a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it.”

In 1927, Mao led a peasant uprising using guerrilla warfare tactics that would later be adopted by the Red Army. By 1930, he was leading the Red Army, and in November of that year, Mao challenged Chiang Kai-shek in open warfare. At first, the battle went in favor of the Red Army; however, they eventually were crushed. The defeated army, Mao, his children, pregnant wife, and younger brother fled the battlefield to make their way home in what is now called the [Long March \(1934-1935\)](#). The Red Army began the trek with 86,000 troops. Along the way, Mao and his communist followers were bombarded from the air and attacked on the ground. Six thousand miles later, only 8,000 survivors managed to reach their destination. Two of Mao's children and his brother did not survive the trek. The Long March was a critical turning point for Mao's leadership within the party. The personal tragedies suffered during the march proved to be a compelling recruitment tool. The CCP and Red Army ranks swelled with new members. The growing threat of invasion by Japan helped unify the nationalist and communist factions, and in 1937, the two parties forged a formal agreement of unity.

From 1936-1940, while many communists were fighting Japanese incursions into China, Mao spent this time writing about his revolutionary goals. In 1943, Mao was officially instated as leader of the CCP. On October 1, 1949, Mao proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a single-party state controlled by the CCP. In 1957, he launched the Great Leap Forward. He planned to use mass mobilization of labor to boost agricultural output, which would facilitate the transition to a modernized industrial economy. However, the strategy backfired, and agricultural output

declined. The diversion of resources into industrialization projects, coupled with poor harvests, caused widespread famine and the deaths of millions of people.

His political authority severely weakened, Mao abandoned his disastrous economic policy and launched the [Cultural Revolution \(1966\)](#). Mao drove his campaign to revive the revolutionary spirit with a totalitarian intolerance for any challenges to his authority. His mandates attacked all forms of traditional culture. Intellectuals—typically, doctors, teachers, artists, musicians, and scholars—were labeled bourgeois traitors to the party. One-and-a-half million people died, and untold centuries of cultural heritage were destroyed. Despite those faltering early steps, China's economy flourished through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and dramatically expanded at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

## Truth Commissions Around the World

The Gambia was not the first country, nor will it be the last, to implement a truth commission in the wake of a revolution. In the last three decades, more than 40 countries, including Ghana, Canada, Guatemala, Liberia, Rwanda, Morocco, Philippines, Kenya, South Korea, and South Africa, have established truth commissions as an act of reform against human-rights abuses. Many of these past injustices are rooted in a sustained, pervasive, and systemic disregard for human rights. These commissions also create permanent public records that officially document the facts surrounding a crime against humanity. These facts include the suffering of the victims, human-rights violations committed, and the identity and actions of the perpetrators. While not perfect and sometimes problematic, truth commissions offer restorative justice that has helped millions of victims of colonialism,

racism, nationalism, totalitarianism, kleptocracy, slavery, bigotry, misogyny, and xenophobia.

## Art as a Medium of Reform

Art's potential to inspire social and political change lies with its ability to communicate people's innermost thoughts and feelings. Whether via poetry or storytelling, through a visual or audio medium, art can provide a comfortable way to engage in an uncomfortable conversation.

## Bearing Witness through Art

The artists, musicians, authors, poets, and filmmakers featured in this section have created works that serve purposes beyond artistic creation. These art artifacts also provide moral accountability and historical documentation. This two-fold function empowers art with the role of bearing witness to reform, revolution, civil rights, genocide, war, ethnic cleansing, oppression, conflict, social justice, prejudice, and the myriad of other human experiences.

In an interview on [Radio West](#), Pulitzer Prize-winning author [Thanh Nguyen](#) spoke frankly about the Vietnam War from the perspective of a refugee. He discussed how American filmmakers and the government represented Vietnam during the war and how they regarded Vietnamese refugees—if they regarded them at all.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Why were Vietnam and its people represented as mere

props in a kind of proxy war with the Soviet Union? Can you think of another historical example of an artifact bearing witness to the human side of war and its aftermath?

- How were street art, poetry, social media, and filmmaking used to organize what came to be known as the [Arab Spring](#) movement that occurred in parts of Africa and the Middle East?
- Can you come up with artwork artifacts associated with the Hong Kong protests that began in [Spring 2019](#)? (Hint: Start with this [ArtnetNews story](#).)

## The Harlem Renaissance

The [Harlem Renaissance](#) was a social, artistic, political, and cultural movement that began near the end of WWI and lasted into the 1930s. Harlem, New York, was a magnet for black writers, painters, musicians, photographers, poets, and scholars. Many of these artists arrived as part of the [Great Migration](#)—a mass exodus of blacks fleeing the South and its systemic racial discrimination.



*[Click on image to enlarge.] “Panel 1. During World War I, there was a great migration north by southern African Americans.”*

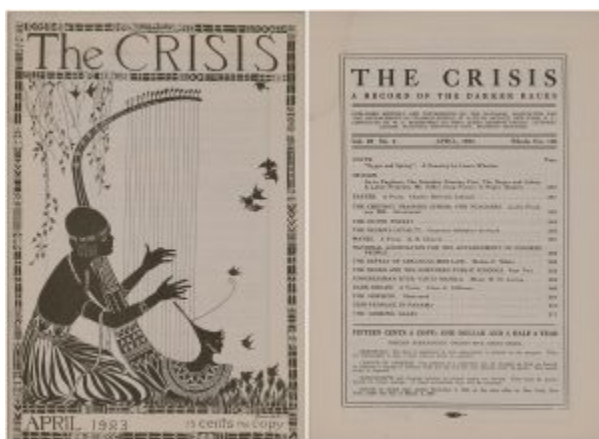
*Credit: [Jacob Lawrence](#). The Phillips Collection. Fair Use of copyrighted material.*

*<https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/>*

*[the-migration-series/panels/1/](#)*

*[during-world-war-i-there-was-a-great-migration-north-by-south-ern-african-americans.](#)*

Millions of black citizens left rural southern states for urban centers in the northern and western states. In 1940, Harlem artist Jacob Lawrence created a 60-panel painting series called [The Migration Series](#) to bear witness to the experiences of these relocated black Americans.



[Click on image to enlarge.] Cover and table of contents of *The Crisis*, April 1923. Credit: [NAACP](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/), Library of Congress. Public Domain. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-new-negro-movement.html#obj13>.

The Harlem Renaissance gave black thinkers the freedom, inspiration, and community support to explore and share their creative passions. W.E.B. Du Bois was editor of *The Crisis*, the official journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The magazine published many poems, stories, and visual works by Harlem artists. Some notable names from this period include Langston Hughes (poet), Countee Cullen (poet), Arna Bontemps (writer), Zora Neale Hurston (writer), Jean Toomer (writer), Walter White (civil-rights activist), Claude McKay (writer), and James Weldon Johnson (writer).



*The NAACP displayed this flag outside the window of their New York office in conjunction with their lobbying for an anti-lynching law.*

*Credit: [NAACP](#). Library of Congress. Public Domain.*

*<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naACP/the-new-negro-movement.html#obj8>.*

Context is critical for understanding how important it was for black Americans to have a thriving, unfettered, cultural community like Harlem. The renaissance was much more than a source for new literature and art. The movement cultivated racial pride, social progress, and political activism in parallel with the [NAACP's New Negro campaign](#) to lobby for a federal law against lynching. Radical musical stylings in jazz and blues attracted trend-seeking white customers to nightspots like the [Cotton Club](#), where interracial couples danced. Nightclubs gave blacks and whites the chance to mingle socially, unjudged, which may have helped relax traditional racial attitudes among younger generations of white Americans.

## War and Poetry

Poetry and art are useful media for processing human experiences, as well as broadcasting these experiences across social boundaries. British poet Wilfred Owen wrote many war poems over the course of WWI, providing an artifacts timetable that tracked his changing opinions. One of his best-known works, [\*Dulce et Decorum Est\*](#) (It Is Sweet and Fitting to Die), describes the horrors of men in trenches being assaulted with [chlorine gas](#). Owen concludes the poem with the following line, “The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori*.” The Latin phrase is an inspirational quote from the Roman poet Horace. In the face of grim reality, Owen rejects this patriotic slogan.



*A TED element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=209>

Credit: Suheir Hammad. “[Poems of war, peace, women, power](#).” *TEDWomen 2010*. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International. [https://www.ted.com/talks/suheir\\_hammad\\_poems\\_of\\_war\\_peace\\_women\\_power](https://www.ted.com/talks/suheir_hammad_poems_of_war_peace_women_power).

Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad is well known



for her political poems about war. In “Break Clustered” (time marker 02:38), she concludes, “Do not fear what has blown up. If you must, fear the unexploded.”

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- How do Hammad’s imagery, tone, and use of point of view to bear vicarious witness to the violence of war and the experiences of women in war? How would you interpret the meaning of the poem’s title?
- What would it be like to fight for freedom abroad while your loved ones are being oppressed at home? What does it mean to fight a war abroad and at home?

## War and Photography

In April 2004, [graphic photos](#) (article includes a photo of a corpse) of prisoners being tortured and abused were leaked to the press. These prisoners of war were being held at Abu Ghraib, an American military prison located in Iraq. If valid, the photos presented proof of human-rights crimes that violated the Geneva Convention safeguards for prisoner treatment in a time of war.

Over the last century, the nature of war reporting in the United States has significantly changed during major conflicts. [During WWII](#), much of the reporting included patriotic messages and shows of public support. This pro-war attitude did a 180-degree flip during the Vietnam War when [positive messages](#) from the White House contrasted sharply with footage taken by journalists [in the field](#) and those covering the [protests at home](#).

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Do you think a report on violence and abuse against prisoners at Abu Ghraib would have been as impactful if it were only verbal descriptions, without photos? Why do you think that is?
- Compare the open access given to journalists during the Vietnam War versus war-reporting policies enacted during the [Gulf War](#).
- How do devices such as cell phones, digital cameras, and social media change the nature of reporting on reform and revolution, particularly during wartime?
- Unlike artists and activists, reporters have a [responsibility to provide unbiased reportage](#). How realistic is this expectation? Do you think this is even possible?
- Do you think some war-related images should not be shown or shared with the public? Or do people have the right to full access, regardless of how shocking or explicit the images are?

## War and Music

Music can profoundly affect the war effort, whether in support of or as a rejection. During WWI, the United States military [assigned song leaders to training camps](#) as a means of fostering healthy activities. Soldiers also adopted singing as a coping mechanism, making it part of the trench culture and giving WWI the nickname the Singing War. The most famous incident involving singing soldiers is known as the [Christmas Truce \(1914\)](#). On Christmas Eve, homesick soldiers from Britain, Belgium, France, and Germany began singing carols in their trenches. The singing led to holiday greetings and signs promising not to shoot. On Christmas Day, allies and enemies emerged from their trenches and exchanged gifts.

During WWII, performers frequently visited war camps and provided live entertainment to boost troop morale. British singer [Dame Vera Lynn](#), the Forces' Sweetheart," became famous for her pro-troops support. She wrote music supporting the war effort and traveled abroad to sing for allied troops. One of her best-known songs, "[We'll Meet Again \(1939\)](#)," promises a reunion for troops stationed across Europe. The chorus of the song says:

*We'll meet again  
Don't know where  
Don't know when  
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day  
Keep smiling through  
Just like you always do  
'Till the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away*

In more recent times, Toby Keith stands out for visiting troops and supporting the war effort. In [December 2001](#), the United States invaded Afghanistan in response to the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, DC. Six months later, May 2002, Toby Keith released the single [Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue \(The Angry American\)](#)." Widely popular with troops and civilians, Keith's song celebrates the legacy of America's armed defense of liberty and justice. [The lyrics](#) reference his father's military service and makes the following promise to the enemies of America:

*Justice will be served and the battle will rage  
This big dog will fight when you rattle his cage  
And you'll be sorry that you messed with  
The U.S. of A.  
'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass  
It's the American way*

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

In addition to reading the lyrics, listen to the music that accompanies these two songs.

- How would you describe the mood or emotion expressed in “We’ll Meet Again?” In “Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue (The Angry American)?”
- Can you find some historical, social, political, or personal context that helps explain the widely divergent messages in these two musical artifacts?

## Reform through Civic Action

The [First Amendment](#) of the United States Constitution guarantees citizens freedom of assembly (protest), petition, speech, and the press. This promise safeguards people who disagree with government policies against retribution or punishment, facilitating political and social reform through non-violent means. These civic actions can take many forms: sit-ins, flashmobs, boycotts, prayer vigils, marches, public demonstrations, hunger strikes.

The Black Lives Matter movement began in protest of [George Zimmerman being acquitted of murder](#) in the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Fast forward to [May 25, 2020](#), when George Floyd’s death while in police custody was captured by the cell phones of onlookers. The video footage went viral, and the Black Lives Matter movement erupted into a tidal wave of [social media](#) protests and in-person demonstrations across the United States.

Other examples of citizens exercising their First Amendment rights include the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (August 28, 1963), Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam

(October 15, 1969), Million Woman March (October 25, 1997), People's Climate March (September 21, 2014), and most recently, [Black Lives Matter \(June 6, 2020\)](#).

First Amendment protections also mean that a single person can elicit change through non-violent protest. During a preseason game of the National Football League (NFL) in 2016, quarterback [Colin Kaepernick](#) demonstrated against police brutality and racial inequality by remaining seated during the National Anthem. Initially, Kaepernick carried out his public protest alone. By season's end, he had been criticized by the president, joined by hundreds of his football peers, and become the topic of national debates. Fans indicated their support by buying his jersey—sales skyrocketed. One might even argue that the surge of support for Black Lives Matter in 2020 had been primed four years earlier by [Kaepernick's silent, personal protest](#).

That is not to say Kaepernick did not suffer for his civic actions. At the end of the season, the team released him. Other team owners, [afraid the publicity backlash would damage profits](#), made no offers to sign him. He has not played in a professional game since. Private organizations are not required to protect free speech. Team owners can force players to comply with policies that establish their own (self-serving?) expectations of appropriate conduct.

Another example of one person being a lightning rod for change comes from Sudan, Africa. In April 2019, a young woman named Alaa Salah led protests calling for the removal of President Omar al-Bashir. The movement eventually sparked an armed revolution that [ousted Bashir by force](#). What makes this civic action particularly significant is that [Salah](#) lives in a predominantly Muslim country where women are expected to be subservient to men. Furthermore, she publicly spoke out against a government with a long history of violent suppression.

In other parts of the world where these freedoms are not

guaranteed, anti-government protests can be deadly for the participants. This [iconic picture](#) of a man standing in the path of oncoming tanks documented citizen demonstrations in China. The pro-democracy protesters, mostly students, marched through Beijing to Tiananmen Square in response to the recent death of Yaobang Hu. Hu worked with the CCP to introduce democratic reform before being forced to resign as General Secretary. Over several weeks, tens of thousands of people joined the students in Tiananmen Square in calling for democracy, free speech, and a free press in China. On June 3 (or 4), 1989, the government sent tanks, artillery, and soldiers to Tiananmen Square. The army killed perhaps thousands of demonstrators in what became known as the [Tiananmen Square Massacre \(June 3-4, 1989\)](#).

The [Arab Spring \(2011\)](#) was a series of anti-government protests that took place in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. Street demonstrations took place in Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Iranian Khuzestan Province, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Sudan. Social media, especially Facebook, was instrumental in coordinating these gatherings. In Syria, the [government responded](#) to the pro-democracy demonstrations by sending tanks, heavy weapons, and troops to slaughter villagers across the country.

## Questions for Critical and Creative Thinking

- How many types of non-violent protest can you come up with? Check your list against this one provided by [The King Center](#).

## Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience is the refusal to comply with a government

law or policy on the grounds it is immoral. The term comes from an essay, "[Civil Disobedience](#)," written by 19<sup>th</sup>-century writer and philosopher [Henry David Thoreau](#). Thoreau wrote the essay after being imprisoned for refusing to pay a poll tax, which he did in protest against the invasion and occupation of Mexico by the United States.

Thoreau believed that the "government which governs best, governs least," for which some people deemed him an anarchist. Thoreau was not in favor of eradicating government, but rather, in fewer regulations telling people what to do. Thoreau puts forward the idea that people have a duty is to live by their conscience. This commitment to moral law overrides the duty to obey an institutional one. Encouraging non-compliance challenges the convention that good citizen is a law-abiding one. Thoreau asserts that a good citizen is someone who follows his conscience, even if it means not abiding by the law.

Another component of civil disobedience is that when people break the law on moral grounds, they do so peacefully. Indian social reformer Mahatma Gandhi exemplified non-violent civil disobedience. During his campaign of civil disobedience against British rule, Gandhi famously said, "They may torture my body, break my bones, even kill me. Then they will have my dead body, but not my obedience."

In a contemporaneous example, University of Utah student [Tim DeChristopher](#) bid on drilling rights to public lands being auctioned to private gas and oil companies. During the [December 2008 auction](#), he bid \$1.8 million to acquire leases on 14 parcels, with no intention of paying for them. DeChristopher used his trial and the surrounding media coverage to explain that he was stopping an illegal auction of publicly owned land rights. During an appeal hearing, his attorney [Ron Yengich said](#), "Mr. DeChristopher's actions effectively stopped the lease process and gave the new administration the opportunity to review it and then move forward."

Yengich was referring to the new administration under President Obama, which in the spring of 2009, canceled [77 of the auctioned drilling leases](#). This act of civil disobedience resulted in DeChristopher serving 21 months in prison. A couple of years later, [DeChristopher](#) told Bill Moyers, “When I went into this, I was pretty focused on the direct impacts of my actions, keeping that oil under those parcels and stopping this particular auction. I think those impacts turned out to be much more important than just keeping that oil in the ground.”

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- In the DeChristopher example, what contextual factors made civil disobedience so impactful as a form of protest?
- Do you believe DeChristopher’s sentence should have been reduced after the drilling leases were canceled? Why or why not?

## Freedom of Speech

Among western democracies, the United States stands alone in upholding free speech to the point of not censoring hate speech. [Hate speech](#) is malicious oral or written language used against a person or people on the basis of race, religion, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and other groups.

This reluctance to regulate the things people say, for better or worse, has a historical context. The American concept of freedom of speech is virtually inseparable from freedom of religion. Both of these freedoms arose as a dissent to the [restrictive Puritanical and Anglican culture](#) of British society. Only clergymen and governors could engage in free expression without fear of reprisal, and they were reluctant to extend this power to the public at large. The idea of giving all citizens the



right to speak their mind with impunity, regardless of social status, made its way into the [First Amendment](#):

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

This background may explain why the United States insists on protecting all speech, as opposed to [preventing or prohibiting some speech](#).

On [August 12, 2017](#), the Unite the Right group held a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Protestors openly displayed Nazi swastikas and [chanted](#), “You will not replace us. Jews will not replace us.” and “White lives matter.” Because this happened in America, the speech and swastikas were protected under the First Amendment.

Government censorship of hate speech and actions is more commonly seen in other democratic countries, such as Germany, Canada, Britain, Denmark, and New Zealand. Two weeks before the Charlottesville incident, [two Chinese tourists were arrested](#) in Berlin for openly using the Nazi salute. They took photos of each other standing and saluting in front of the Reichstag building. Shortly after WWII, Germany banned the public use of Nazi gestures or symbols.

The Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, is a small, independent church that teaches its followers that God hates homosexuals. They also believe high-profile tragedies—such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Sandy Hook shooting, and Boston Marathon bombing—are God’s retribution for allowing sin to spread unchecked. Their [protests frequently target funerals](#), where members display signs reading “God Hates Fags,” “Thank God for Dead Soldiers,” “Thank God for 9/11,” and “God:

USA's Terrorist.” Branded as a hate group by the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center, church members are also banned from entering Canada and the United Kingdom. Despite legal challenges against the church, the [United States Supreme Court](#) ruled its members' actions and slogans are protected under the First Amendment.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Do you think the members of Westboro Baptist Church is using hate speech? Should they be banned and their signs censored?
- Do you think speech should always be free and unregulated? Or should hate slogans and swastikas be censored under certain circumstances?

In 1987, artist Andre Serrano exhibited series of photographs showing religious objects submerged in fluids, including one of a crucifix immersed in urine. In the United States, the public outcry that followed turned into a political debate over whether to withdraw government funding for public art.

- Do you think Serrano's artwork constitutes a type of religious hate speech? Should it be banned or censored? Should it be supported by public funds?

## Bearing Witness through Storytelling

Bearing witness is a civic action that involves observing events without intervening and changing their outcome. On-the-scene news stories and documentary films are examples of bearing witness. As mentioned previously, paintings, poetry, music, and other art forms can also bear witness. What all of

these have in common is that they use storytelling to effect reform and change indirectly. Storytelling can be a powerful motivator for interventionist actions such as civil disobedience, live demonstrations, and armed uprisings.

James Orbinski is a physician, former director of the humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders, and winner of the [1999 Noble Peace prize](#). In his book, *An Imperfect Offering*, [Orbinski asks](#), “How am I to be, how are we to be in relation to the suffering of others?” He asks this question after decades of bearing witness to famine, disease, war, and genocide. Orbinski sees his role in eliciting change as being a witness to people who are suffering, refusing to remain silent, and sharing their stories.

Observing without getting involved can present particularly difficult ethical challenges. American news photographer Malcolm Browne captured the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk during the Vietnam War on film. The monk, Thích Quảng Đức, set himself on fire to protest the persecution of the South Vietnamese government’s persecution of Buddhists. Browne was the only photographer present and shot ten rolls of film. Years later, Browne wondered if his presence contributed to the monk’s suicide; that if he had not been there to [bear witness](#):

*“[The monk] probably would not have done what he did—nor would the monks in general have done what they did—if they had not been assured of the presence of a newsman who could convey the images and experience to the outer world. Because that was the whole point ole point — to produce theater of the horrible so striking that the reasons for the demonstrations would become apparent to everyone. And, of course, they did. The following day, President Kennedy had the photograph on his desk, and he called in Henry Cabot Lodge, who was about to leave for Saigon*

*as U.S. ambassador, and told him, in effect, 'This sort of thing has got to stop.' And that was the beginning of the end of American support for the Ngo Dinh Diem regime."*

Modern technology—such as television, broadband internet, social media platforms, and cell phones—makes it possible for virtually anyone, to bear witness to any event, happening anywhere in the world. Whereas previously, we may have only had access to verbal or written accounts; now, we can see events unfold in real-time.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Consider the responsibility of bearing witness to a reform or revolution event. Does the witness have a responsibility to intervene if it means saving a life or preventing a disaster? What if they are a journalist? What if they are a doctor?
- Do you think non-interventionist storytelling can be as effective in creating change as an armed uprising or military action? For war?
- Have you personally witnessed a reform or revolution event? Did you get involved? Why or why not?

# Human Rights & Genocide



*Credit: [JordanHoliday](#), Pixabay. Free for commercial use. No attribution required.*

## Key Concepts

This chapter will prepare you to:

1. Identify and discuss philosophical ideas about the value of human life.
2. Understand and discuss the term genocide and its legal implications.
3. Describe situational psychology and why people sometimes get involved in outrageous acts of violence against another human being.
4. Describe the process of dehumanization.
5. Provide examples of alternatives to military intervention in instances of mass atrocity and genocide.

6. Evaluate the philosophical concept and policy regarding “The Responsibility to Protect.”
7. List some psychological explanations for why ordinary people could possibly commit horrific crimes.

This chapter explores human rights and responsibilities in a global society, including how we define and measure the value of human life. As part of this analysis, we will look at how genocide, a *crime against humanity*, reduces the value of human life to zero.



Replica of the clay cylinder containing the Edict of Cyrus.

Credit: [UN Photo/Michos Tsovaras](#). Fair Use of copyrighted material.  
<https://www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/144/0144182.html>

The United Nations (UN) pinpoints the [origin of human rights](#) to the Edict of Cyrus, inscribed on a clay cylinder in the year 539 BC. The edict proclaims that when Cyrus the Great [conquered Babylonia](#), he freed Jewish captives and supported freedom of worship. The British Museum has a [translation of the inscription](#). Since then, various civilizations have navigated the concept of human rights within their unique social and power structures. Many have considered whether equal rights and privileges should be extended to all people.

The first part of the chapter examines the historical, social, and political context for acts of genocide and other human rights violations. Looking through our humanities lens, we will consider how morality, hope, and heroics play roles in preventing mass atrocities, as well as facilitating the healing process. The second half unravels the complex reasons behind why people devalue and harm each other. We will examine the value of human life from philosophical, social, and psychological perspectives.

# Genocide: Crimes Against Humanity



*Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site. Credit: [bernswaelz](#). Pixabay. Free for commercial use. No attribution required. <https://pixabay.com/photos/memorial-monument-1115728/>.*

The [Holocaust \(1933-1945\)](#) of World War II is perhaps the highest-profile and best-documented example of genocide in world history. Mass atrocities like genocide are typically preceded by a social, economic, and political context that demonizes and devalues the people being targeted. Public perception views the target as a social ill, economic burden, or enemy of the state. Government-issued propaganda and legislation marginalize the targeted group, cutting them off from the rest of society.

## Defining Genocide

The term genocide was first presented by [Raphael Lemkin](#), a Jewish jurist from Poland who served as war advisor to the



United States government. Lemkin was lost 49 relatives during the Holocaust and sought to legally prosecute what he observed were crimes against humanity unfolding on a massive scale. He fused the Greek word *genos* (family, tribe, or race), with the Latin word *cide* (to kill).

The term sets a legal precedent by defining the mass killing of a particular ethnic group as a crime. Prior to Lemkin, only the murder of an individual had legal consequences. In 1943, Lemkin published [\*Axis Rule in Occupied Europe\*](#), which included his definition of genocide. The international community recognized Lemkin's definition and used it in legal arguments during the [Nuremberg Trials](#) following WWII. These trials prosecuted and sentenced military officers and personnel for war crimes committed during the Holocaust.

At the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide \(1948\)](#), the UN ratified its first human rights treaty. They defined genocide as:

*“any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”*

## Hitler's Dehumanization Campaign

During the Holocaust of WWII, millions of people were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, mutilated, and murdered because Germany's [Führer Adolph Hitler](#), labeled them social

undesirables. These social outcasts included people who were Jewish, gypsies, disabled, and lesbian-gay-transsexual-queer (LGBTQ), political opponents, and union members. The Jewish ethnic group was Hitler's primary target; seven out of every ten European Jews died during WWII.



(translation) "He is guilty for the war!"

Credit: [Bundesarchiv Koblenz \(Plak](#)

[003-020-020](#)), United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum. [Fair Use](#) of copyrighted

material. <https://www.ushmm.org/>

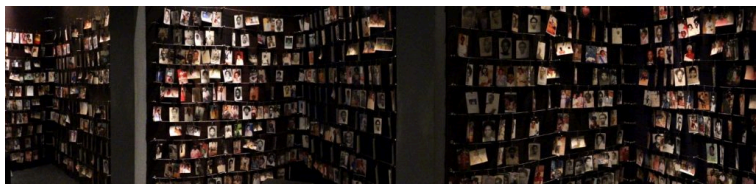
[propaganda/archive/poster-guilty-war/](#).

What historical, social, economic, or political context set this genocide into motion? Following WWI, Germany, along with the rest of Europe and Russia, was straining to recover its balance. As Hitler and the Nazi Party rose to power, they focused their efforts on [dehumanizing the Jews](#), portraying them as [parasites and vermin](#) that were the root cause of

Germany's struggles. After being elected Chancellor in 1933, Hitler passed legislation that banned Jews from specific jobs, such as teaching, legal work, military positions, accounting, and news media. [Nazi propaganda](#) such as the film, "[The Eternal Jew](#)," scathingly criticized Jews for not contributing to society. Hitler enacted laws defining Jews and Aryans in order to exclude Jews from German citizenship. Jews were required to carry passports, denied access to healthcare, and prohibited from marrying non-Jewish people.

Meanwhile, the Nazi Party controlled all aspects of life for German citizens through propaganda and force. Hitler conscripted young Germans into the [Hitler Youth](#), a movement aimed to ensure continuous support of his ideals of Aryan purity and supremacy. It is estimated that by 1935, nearly 60% of German boys were members of the organization.

## The Rwanda Genocide



*[Click on the image to enlarge.] Display of genocide victims at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center, Rwanda.*

*Credit: [Adam Jones, Ph.D.](#) Flickr. CC BY-SA 2.0. [https://www.flickr.com/photos/adam\\_jones/7654918712/in/album-72157630785425198/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/adam_jones/7654918712/in/album-72157630785425198/).*

Beginning in [April 1994](#), Rwanda experienced a genocide that lasted approximately 100 days. The mass atrocities took the lives of almost one million people, left 500,000 children orphaned, and widowed 400,000 women. 130,000 people suspected of committing crimes of genocide were arrested

and sent to prison. In the aftermath, an estimated 1.6 million people were displaced from their home regions.

The origins of this genocide lie in social differences and historical conflicts between two major ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Tutsi society was based on raising cattle and Hutu society on raising crops. The Tutsi represented the ruling class socially and minority in population numbers. The two groups co-existed in a feudal economic and social system that shared a common language and accepted intermarriage.

In 1886, the Germans annexed and colonized the region containing modern Rwanda and Burundi. In 1919, they ceded the region to Belgium. The European colonizers categorized their African subjects by racial characteristics, dividing the Tutsi and Hutu into light-skinned and dark-skinned groups, respectively. The Tutsi were accorded the rights and privileges of a superior, light-skinned race. The Hutu were no longer allowed social mobility via occupation or marriage, cementing their lower-class status. Identification cards ensured preferential treatment for Tutsis over Hutus.

Rwanda became an independent nation in 1961, following a social revolution instigated by the Hutu-led by *Parti du Mouvement de l'Émancipation Hutu* (PARMEHUTU). The new government consisted of only Hutu officials. What followed was a civil war, during which an estimated 20,000 Tutsi died, and another 150,000 fled or were exiled.

By the late 1980s, Tutsi refugees in Uganda had organized into a political and military organization, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). In 1990, the Tutsi-led RPF invaded Rwanda to restore their place within the nation. In addition to staging armed resistance to the invaders, the incumbent Hutu used the journal *Kangura*, to spread propaganda designed to incite public disdain for the Tutsi.

In 1993, the two sides signed the [Arusha Accords](#), a UN-sponsored agreement to end the civil war and create a

transitional, coalition government. Decades of institutional hatred made it difficult for many Hutu to embrace the agreement and negotiations for installing the new government dragged.

On April 6, 1994, the airplane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down and the two men were killed. Both presidents were Hutu. Tutsi and Hutu accused each other of the incident. Almost immediately, extremist Hutu leaders launched a campaign against the country's Tutsi and moderate Hutu. In 100 days, 800,000 people died. Hundreds of thousands of women were raped. According to [the UN](#), "By October 1994...out of a population of 7.9 million, at least half a million people had been killed. Some 2 million had fled to other countries and as many as 2 million people were internally displaced."



*A Rwandan father searches Red Cross photos for his missing child.*

Credit: [Benno Neeleman](#), British Red Cross. Flickr. CC BY 2.0.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishredcross/9082110405>.

The genocide ended in July 1994, when the RPF forcibly overthrew the Hutu-led government. Rwanda was in smoldering ruins, with hundreds of thousands of survivors traumatized, its infrastructure demolished, and over 100,000 accused perpetrators imprisoned. Furthermore, the upheaval destabilized all of central Africa. In 1996, the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo turned into a battleground between remaining Hutu extremists and the newly established government.

Justice, accountability, unity, and reconciliation have been elusive for Rwandans. [On April 25, 1998](#), 22 people convicted of participating in the genocide were publicly executed in Rwanda. The human-rights watch group Amnesty International declared the [executions devalued human life](#) and expressed concerns that the accused did not receive fair trials. Human Rights Watch reported that many of the accused were tried in groups and [not provided with legal assistance](#). In 2007, Rwanda abolished the death penalty.

As demonstrated in Rwanda, the repercussions of genocide have vast and long-lasting effects. In addition to spotlighting the participants involved, scrutiny is directed at other countries and their responsibility to intervene.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- Do countries have an ethical responsibility to intervene in a genocide taking place in another country? What is the responsibility of an individual?
- Should a nation seek external help from other countries to deal with genocide? What type of help should they receive?
- Genocides have not decreased following the Holocaust, which begs the question, who is responsible for protecting ethnic groups from being targeted and persecuted?
- Do you think that capital punishment or execution is an

acceptable punishment for crimes against humanity, such as genocide?

## When Good People Commit Evil Acts

*“All humans are human. There are no humans more human than others. That’s it.”—[Roméo Dallaire](#), UN peacekeeping commander.*

So, what makes people turn a blind eye to the sufferings of others in certain circumstances and offer help in abundance in others? This section explores moral, social, and psychological factors that could lead people to commit them or allow them to happen. Bear in mind that there are no easy answers as to why mass atrocities happen, and the explanations that follow provide food for thought more than they do solutions.

### Moral Rationalization

In a fundamental sense, people tend to use their choices to validate their morality, rather than the other way around. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt believes [morality is an inseparable part of human nature](#) that creates group solidarity. Haidt explains that our “groupish nature” is prone to [moral rationalization](#), “begin with the conclusion, coughed up by an unconscious emotion, and then work backward to a plausible justification.” He adds that group unity is morally neutral; it can drive good acts such as heroism or evil acts such as genocide.

# The Milgram Experiment

Psychologist Stanley Milgram was the son of Jewish Europeans who had survived Nazi prison camps. He was fascinated when Nuremberg Trial defendant Adolf Eichmann, who, when asked to justify organizing the Holocaust, offered [the defense](#), “I was just following orders.”



*A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=219>

Credit: Stanley Milgram. Jeroem Busscher, narrator. “[Psychologie van het beïnvloeden: Milgram experiment.](#)” DenkProducties. YouTube. [Fair Use](#) of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content. <https://youtu.be/yr5cjyokVUs>

Milgram developed a famous [experiment](#) to investigate how people can be ordered into harming another person.



Researchers instructed test subjects to administer an electric shock to another person every time that person incorrectly answered a question. The intensity of the shock increased after every incorrect answer. If the test subject hesitated, researchers verbally prompted them to keep administering shocks. The test subject could voluntarily refuse to stop at any time; verbal instructions were the only thing compelling them to continue.

Out of 40 test subjects, only 14 defied verbal instructions at some point and refused to administer any more shocks. What the test subjects did not know was that the entire quiz was rigged. No shocks were ever administered. The person answering questions would deliberately get them wrong and act like they were in pain.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Do you think you would be susceptible to mind control?

## The Lucifer Effect

Philip Zimbardo researched the psychology of human behavior in what is now known as the [Stanford Prison Experiment](#). 24 young men were screened for physical and mental health. They were assigned to one of two role-play groups, guards or prisoners, and placed in a simulated prison. As a precaution, guards could not physically abuse prisoners. The experiment was scheduled to last two weeks; however, Zimbardo [terminated the study in six days](#):

*“Within 36 hours, the first normal, healthy student prisoner had a breakdown. ... We released a prisoner each day for the next five days, until we ended the*

*experiment at six days, because it was out of control.  
There was no way to control the guards.”*

Zimbardo calls this behavior the [Lucifer Effect](#), which is when a person crosses the boundary between good and evil actions. He explains the prison environment dehumanizes everyone in it, spawning conditions that can induce a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde transformation in an otherwise psychologically healthy person.

## Free Will versus Situational Psychology

The experiments of Milgram and Zimbardo highlight the power of situational psychology to influence people's behavior. Sources of situational psychology can include peer pressure, social conformity, fashion trends, or authority figures.



*A YouTube element has been excluded from this*

version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=219>

Situational psychology can coerce people into complying with the group consensus.

Credit: “[Question the Herd | Brain Games](#).” National Geographic. YouTube. [Fair Use](#) of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content. <https://youtu.be/OIJCXXTMrv8>.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Have you ever bought an item or attended an event because of an advertisement?
- Have you said or done something because friends or family influenced you?

## The Anchor Factor

British illusionist and mentalist Derren Brown tested his powers of persuasion in the television series, [The Heist \(2006\)](#). Using the cover of a motivational seminar, Brown persuaded people to commit what they believed was an armed robbery. The volunteers were average, law-abiding citizens with no record of crime or violence.

Among the human tendencies Brown exploited was [anchoring](#), which is a bias in decision-making that disproportionately favors of one piece of information, the anchor. Once the bias is set, the anchor becomes the basis for all other decisions that follow. Brown anchored feelings of invulnerability, euphoria, and aggression to audio and visual

cues, such as a color, song, and clothing. Along with other psychological tools, Brown used the anchoring cues to skillfully manipulate his unsuspecting participants into “[stealing](#)” £100,000 (\$127,340) from a uniformed security guard using a realistic-looking fake gun.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- What influences our decisions in terms of the stance we take regarding human rights and global issues?

## Bystander Effect: Passing the Buck

The [bystander effect](#) occurs when someone fails to intervene or help another person in distress or need of aid. The effect is more likely to happen when other people are present to witness the scene. In fact, the more witnesses there are, the less likely it is that anyone will take action to help. Even when faced with a victim in extreme danger, a person on the scene is much less likely to intervene if they perceive other people are present.

The term bystander effect became famous following the [murder of Kitty Genovese](#) in Queens, New York, on March 13, 1964. According to *The New York Times* story published two weeks later, 38 people heard or saw Genovese being assaulted and stabbed on the street that evening. None of the 38 witnesses intervened or called the police during the 30-minute attack. Only one witness called the police after Genovese had died.

Some countries have laws that require bystanders to intervene in certain situations. [Three people in Germany were charged and fined](#) for deliberately ignoring an 83-year-old-man who had fallen and hit his head. The man later died.



*An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here:*

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=219>

Tom Williams of Utah Public Radio interviews Dr. Guiora about his connection to and work on the bystander effect.

Credit: Dr. Amos Guiora, Tom Williams. “[The Crime Of Complicity: The Bystander In The Holocaust' With Amos Guiora On Access Utah](https://www.upr.org/post/crime-complicity-bystander-holocaust-amos-guiora-access-utah).” Access Utah, Utah Public Radio. [Fair Use](#) of copyrighted material. <https://www.upr.org/post/crime-complicity-bystander-holocaust-amos-guiora-access-utah>.

[Dr. Amos N. Guiora](#) is a law professor at the University of Utah and former Lt. Colonel in the Israeli Defense Force. Dr. Guiora is a noted counter-terrorism expert who has extensively researched the bystander effect during the Holocaust and in contemporary sexual assault cases. Part of his motivation comes from the experiences of his parents and relatives during the Holocaust. In addition to teaching and conducting research, he lobbies to enact bystander laws in Utah.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- Have you ever held back from speaking or acting because you were afraid of what other people watching you might think?

## From Accepting Responsibility to Taking Action

In 1948, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted the legal definition of genocide. By 2019, [154 countries promised](#) “never again” to the crime of genocide. The convention provides a legal imperative for intervention when genocide occurs. But acting on this promise has been less successful. An article in the magazine Spiegel International estimates [37 genocides](#) have occurred between 1945-2005, including [in countries that ratified the convention](#): Bangladesh (ratified in 1998), Guatemala (1950), Bosnia(1992), Cambodia (1950), and Rwanda (1975).

## The Call for Human Rights



*Eleanor Roosevelt holds a copy of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights written Spanish.*

Credit: [National Archives and Records Administration](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eleanor_Roosevelt_and_United_Nations_Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights_in_Spanish_09-2456M_original.jpg). Wikimedia Commons.

Public Domain. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eleanor_Roosevelt_and_United_Nations_Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights_in_Spanish_09-2456M_original.jpg)

File:Eleanor\_Roosevelt\_and\_United\_Nations\_Universal\_Declaration\_of\_Human\_Rights\_in\_Spanish\_09-2456M\_original.jpg

The UN's [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1948\)](#) defines the universality of human rights. Since 1948, countries around the world have reiterated the call for human rights. The first two articles of the declaration read:

*"1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."*

*"2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and*

*freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."*

## Remembering Our Collective Humanity

Individuals express their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences through various media such as visual art, music, literature, performance, and more. By sharing and engaging with these individual stories, we create a community of shared experiences that transcends political and cultural boundaries. This bond forms our collective humanity, which has the potential to elicit change, enforce justice, heal trauma, and empower others (and ourselves).

The vivid verse of Primo Levi's [If This Is a Man](#) reinforces the idea that humanity must not forget what others have suffered. To be silent is akin to being complicit in the crimes of others. Levi, an Italian-Jewish chemist, was a prisoner in Auschwitz. The unspeakable horrors he witnessed left him emotionally and physically wounded.

African-American poet Maya Angelou celebrates her identity in the face of prejudice and injustice in the poem [Still I Rise](#). Angelou portrays her tenacious spirit, which endures in the face of institutional and personal criticism. She challenges the reader to accept who she is because she has already accepted herself.



## Finding Hope through the Humanities

The humanities may not be able to provide all the answers or offer definitive explanations for the seemingly inexplicable horrors. However, they certainly provide a foundation for establishing positive human relations around the globe. By articulating resilience in the face of oppression and brutality, the humanities can cultivate public awareness. Shining a spotlight on hope is arguably the first step redressing the imbalance of equity on a global stage.

In his opinion piece "[Scrooges of the World, Begone!](#)" *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof cautions against falling into an endless tirade of bad news. Too many negative stories create a self-fulfilling spiral of adverse reactions that are particularly damaging for developing nations.

*"Unfortunately, bad news is news, and good news isn't. We cover planes that crash, not those that take off. But a relentless focus on bad news unfortunately leads people to conclude that places from Haiti to Congo are hopeless, driving away tourists, investors and donors. So, at least once a year, it's worth stepping back and acknowledging progress."*

Irish poet and Nobel Peace Prize (1995) winner Seamus Heaney wrote [The Cure at Troy](#) to criticize South African apartheid and honor Nelson Mandela. He begins by describing the suffering of human beings. After acknowledging the shortcomings of bearing witness through words, Heaney concludes on a bright note of hope:

*Call miracle self-healing:  
The utter, self-revealing  
Double-take of feeling.*

*If there's fire on the mountain  
Or lightning and storm  
And a god speaks from the sky  
That means someone is hearing  
The outcry and the birth-cry  
Of new life at its term.*

In Salt Lake City, *Utah Humanities* sponsors a free, accredited, college-level humanities course for those “of modest means who dare to dream.” Offered at three partner colleges, the [Venture Course](#) teaches philosophy, art history, literature, and American history. Students also learn how to apply critical writing and thinking. [Course organizers](#) discovered that studying the humanities gave people the confidence to improve their lives, contribute to society, appreciate the value of education, and expand their goals. Course co-founder [Jean Cheney](#) explains the importance of teaching humanities:

*“I see the humanities having a resurgence as more and more of us, in all walks of life, recognize that critical thinking, the ability to read and communicate well, and a deep understanding of our nation’s values, history and government are essential if our democracy is to survive. The humanities are not ‘nice to haves’ and peripheral to a sound education or a well-lived life. They are its heart.”*

## Calculating the Value of Human Life

Most private and government health insurers use a formula to estimate the value of one human life, [roughly \\$50,000 per year](#). Insurers use this value to decide whether a medical procedure should be covered, i.e., is the cost of the procedure worth the

cost of saving a person's life. Independent research indicates that annual figures of [\\$129,000](#) and [\\$183,000-\\$264,000](#) are more accurate.

## Questions to Critical & Creative Thinking

- What do you think about these figures? Do you think they accurately reflect the value of human life? Why or why not?
- Can you devise additional criteria for assessing the material value (currency) of human life?
- Can you think of non-material (intangible) factors that should be considered when assessing the value of human life?

The humanities examine the value of human life from perspectives not centered around dollars and cents. As you might expect, different cultures have very different ways to assess a person's value. Many religions have specific guidelines about the value of human life, such as the [Ten Commandments](#) of Christianity or the doctrines of [ahimsa](#) (non-injury) and [samsara](#) (cycle of life) in Hinduism and Buddhism. Assessing the value of human life can be controversial and challenging. For example, consider the ongoing debates over abortion rights, capital punishment, and assisted suicide. There is also the question of whether the quality of a person's life is more important than prolonging it.

These challenges are reflected across history. Time and again, people reveal confusingly inconsistent attitudes about the value of human life. There are instances when they do everything possible, [including sacrificing themselves](#), to preserve other people's lives. Other times, such as in genocide, people rationalize why they maliciously devalue, injure, and murder others. When the bystander effect takes hold, people become indifferent to the endangerment of another person.



*Some people refuse to wear face masks even though they save lives.*

*Credit: [AI3xanderD](#). Pixabay. Free for commercial use. No attribution required.*

*<https://pixabay.com/photos/corona-virus-pandemic-covid-19-5002332/>.*

How we view ourselves and the world impacts our decisions about who has a right to life and who does not. The debate in the United States over wearing a face mask during the COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent example of how our decision-making is influenced by personal biases. On July 14, 2020, the [Centers for Disease Control](#) confirmed “that cloth face coverings help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus to others.”

In June 2020, [The New York Times](#) reported that among Americans, a person’s gender, political affiliation, and education level are better predictors of whether someone dons a face mask. A Marketwatch article points to the [group unity theory](#) of why people refuse to wear face masks. “Those who choose not to wear masks may feel a sense of solidarity, like they’re taking a stand against authority.”

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- When you learn of a catastrophe happening in your home country, do you try to find out what city? Do you contact your relatives?
- Would you be as interested in the news if you learned it had happened 800 miles (1,288 km) away from your hometown?
- Are you opposed to wearing a face mask? Why or why not?
- Do you feel face mask policies infringe on your personal liberty?

## All Men Are Created Equal\*?

*\*From the United States [Declaration of Independence](#) (July 4, 1776).*

The United States and the UN agree that human rights are universal and egalitarian, centered around the assumption that all human lives have equal value. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines [egalitarianism](#) as:

*“1) a belief in human equality, especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs.”*

*“2) a social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people.”*

It is important to remember that egalitarianism is a modern concept. Historically, people much more commonly believed it was natural for some humans to be superior to others, which also meant enjoying privileges, esteem, and wealth. These roles were not always fixed, but inherent in them was the belief that *the superior person had more rights* than the inferior one. And

this idea of unequal rights informs the definition and practice of social justice.

The Chinese philosopher Confucius proposed that the [hierarchy of Heaven→Man](#) served as the universal model for all human relationships, such as ruler→subject, father→son, or teacher→student. He asserted that by aligning ourselves with the natural order of the universe, we are assured of social harmony, moral governance, and economic stability. The superior man is assumed to be a virtuous one, with a moral obligation to treat his inferiors justly. This assumption meant that quite often, justice was whatever authority figures deemed correct.

Greek philosophers also proposed that some lives have more value than others. [Aristotle](#) held the idea that some people were natural slaves; some were natural masters. He also believed women to be naturally inferior to men. [Plato](#), likewise, endorsed the idea that men are naturally superior to women, and some men are superior to everyone. He argued that [justice](#) is self-interest enforced by superior strength (might makes right).

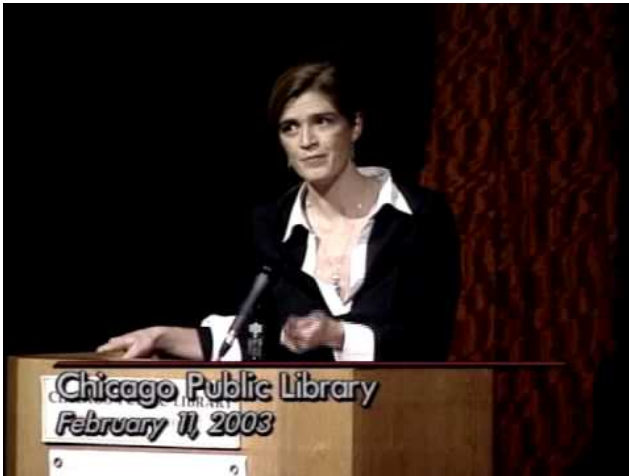
## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

It could be said that the argument for some humans being superior to others comes from people seeking to bolster their position of power in society, religion, or government.

- Do you agree with this argument? Can you describe an example when the superiority argument was not attached to self-serving motives?
- How do you think the perception of a person's value might influence the bystander effect? I.e., do you think people are more likely to help someone who looks important or wealthy? (After answering this question, watch a [video](#) on the bystander effect.)

- Has anything you read changed your mind about the value of human life? Is your definition conditional, based on individual circumstances?

## The Continuum of intervention



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/humanexperience/?p=219>

Credit: Samantha Power. "[A Problem from Hell: Samantha Power Talks about Genocide](https://youtu.be/nzxyF1bDWGU/)." *Facing History and Ourselves*. YouTube. Fair Use of worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to access content. <https://youtu.be/nzxyF1bDWGU/>.

Samantha Power, former war correspondent and United States ambassador to the UN, reminds us that intervention is not just military action. She emphasizes that responses to

human rights abuses can and should be incremental. Initial actions should be non-violent measures such as diplomatic measures and economic sanctions. “Sending in the Marines” is the last resort.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- How might the suggestions offered in the video been applied to the Holocaust or Rwandan genocide?
- Do you think one of these non-military responses would have made a difference?

## The Responsibility to Protect

In 1919, German scholar Max Weber delivered a speech called “Politics as a Vocation.” In it, he claimed that politics is a balancing act between [two sets of moral values](#): the ethic of conviction/attitude (*gesinnungsethik*) and the ethic of responsibility (*verantwortungsethik*). The ethic of conviction (the mental attitude, not the court ruling) compels us to act because it is the [moral thing to do](#). The ethic of responsibility compels us to act because it will result in [positive or desirable consequences](#). In other words, do we attempt to stop human suffering because our sense of morality compels us or because we are legally required to comply?

In 2005, the UN adopted an international standard for protecting human rights named [The Responsibility to Protect \(R2P\)](#). The standard establishes a global responsibility to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. R2P consists of three pillars of responsibility:

*“Pillar One: Every state has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from four mass atrocity crimes:*



*genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.”*

*“Pillar Two: The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that responsibility.”*

*“Pillar Three: If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter.”*

Pillars one and two express the ethic of conviction. Nations are morally obligated to protect their people from mass atrocities, as well as reach out to other nations during their times of crisis. Pillar three expresses the ethic of responsibility, declaring that there must be consequences for nations that fail to protect their people from mass atrocities.

## Questions for Critical & Creative Thinking

- R2P was created partially in response to the Rwandan genocide. Looking at the continuum of intervention and the three pillars, how might the Rwandan government have prevented the start of or reduced the impact of genocide?
- How well did other nations follow the three pillars in their responses to the Rwanda genocide?

## Human Rights in the Age of Globalization

The term [globalization](#) was first used in 1930 to describe an all-encompassing view of education rather than an exchange

of ideas across national or physical boundaries. Later, usages of the term in economics more closely resembled the modern meaning. In 1968 globalization was defined as a network of interdependent political organizations around the world. Since then, the concept of globalization has widened to include the exchange and integration of products, culture, ideas, institutions, technology, services, people, and even plants and animals.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is an example of how modern globalization, in this case, air travel and crowded urban environments, effectively shrinks the distance between countries. The first cases were observed in China on December 31, 2019. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced the disease had become a [pandemic](#). By comparison, in 1918, influenza first detected in the United States took [six months](#) to reach pandemic status. Contributing to the worldwide spread of the disease was WWI, which sent thousands of American troops abroad, crowded together for weeks on military transport ships.

Especially in our present-day age of digital and wireless communication, globalization has removed many traditional barriers between countries and cultures. With this increased awareness of our global society, of course, comes a heightened responsibility to address its most severe problems, such as overpopulation, climate change, food shortages, natural disasters, and pandemics.



*Modern technology enables people to build a global society.*

*Credit: [geralty](#). Pixabay. Free for commercial use. No attribution required.*

*<https://pixabay.com/photos/handshake-hands-laptop-monitor-3382503/>*

Globalization has built a worldwide interdependence that benefits us in many ways, even contributing to peace and stability through the continuous, live monitoring of world events. International peacekeeping agencies, such as the UN, now have the technology to extend their efforts into most remote corners of the world. Globalization in the humanities means people around the world can create an interconnected community without borders. They can share experiences with people they might otherwise never realized existed. They can organize and collaborate to address our most pressing issues.

# Spirituality & Well-being



*Credit: [JillWellington](#). Pixabay. Free for commercial use. No attribution required.*

## 5 Happiness & Spirituality

This chapter will help you to evaluate what you know about major religious and philosophical ideologies . and to examine the extent of your knowledge about monotheistic and polytheistic faiths. This chapter will also outline the development and origins of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism as well as provide information relating to the basic tenants of each faith. It will also discuss secular and philosophical approaches to happiness and well being.

## 5.1 Learning Objectives

In this chapter we will be working through some of the skills you will need to master in order to succeed in this course. This chapter will prepare you to:

- Be able to explain what monotheism and polytheism means
- Identify the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism
- Discuss the concept of self within eastern ideologies
- Give examples of the similarities and differences between each of the faith traditions explored

One of the central features of human beings is the desire to live our lives in a way that will allow us to find happiness, joy, and peace during our existence.

In this chapter, we will traverse the themes of spirituality, happiness, and well-being through exploring monotheistic and polytheistic faiths and the basic tenets of the world's major eastern and western religions. We will look at humans' relationship to God within the social structures of religion and approaches to spirituality.

In the context of the humanities, we will explore various forms of spirituality, philosophies, and well-being practices from around the world and how these practices seek to assist humans in living meaningful lives and finding a sense of overall wellness. And we will look at various perceptions of well-being through media, art, and literature and how artistic expression is a means of expressing spirituality, happiness, and joy.

## 5.2 In Pursuit of Happiness

The pursuit of happiness is a concept enshrined in our cultural ideology in the United States, and is clearly identified in the Declaration of Independence. Is it then the pursuit of happiness rather than the attainment of such that brings us the greatest joy? Is it possible to ever reach a perpetual state of happiness, or is life simply punctuated by both happy and difficult times?

In a quote commonly attributed to John Lennon, he describes the pursuit of happiness: “When I was five-years-old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down ‘happy’. They told me I didn’t understand the assignment, and I told them they didn’t understand life.”

### 5.2.1 Nature or Nurture?

Is happiness something we have to be conscious about working for, or does it just sneak up on us when we least expect it? How much control do we have over our happiness? The good news is that researchers have found quite a bit of information. In *Ten Steps to Happiness*, by Islamic Scholar Ustadha Bint Ahmad, she explores the work of a renowned global equity strategist and behavioral psychologist, James Montier, who concluded in his research, *The Psychology of Happiness*, that psychologists have found that happiness is comprised of three components:

1. About 50 percent of individual happiness comes from a genetic set point. That is, we’re each predisposed to a certain level of happiness. Some of us are just naturally

more inclined to be cheery than others.

2. About 10 percent of our happiness is due to our circumstances: demographic factors, age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic factors. It also includes personal history and life status.
3. The remaining 40 percent of an individual's happiness is derived from intentional activity, from discrete actions or practices that we choose to do.<sup>1</sup>

This is good news in that the things commonly attributed to happiness such as money, possessions and life status only contribute to 10 percent of our overall well being. The better news is that we have full control over 40 percent of our happiness and well being in relation to what we choose as intentional activities in our life.

Aristotle also said, "Happiness depends upon ourselves." In her novel, *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert echoed those sentiments when she wrote, "Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it." Helen Keller agreed as well when she stated, "Happiness does not come from without, it comes from within." How do we go about cultivating it from within?

Abraham Lincoln famously said, "Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be." Is happiness and wellness a state of mind? If so, how does that account for mental illnesses like depression and anxiety? Is there a limit to how happy a person can be? Can we be truly happy all the time? Do we have to know sadness to truly experience joy? The

author C.S. Lewis said, “The pain I feel now is the happiness I had before. That’s the deal.”

## 5.2.2 Happiness and Mental Health

In recent years the term subjective well being (SWB), has become the seminal phrase used in serious research when exploring the concept of how to measure and articulate a person’s happiness. What does subjective well being mean? Does it only measure happiness? What is the difference between subjective well being and happiness? Is there a difference between joy and happiness?

What does it mean to be happy? Is it a mental state of well being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy? For decades, psychologists have studied sadness and depression, but it wasn’t until the 1990s that they started to study happiness or positive psychology. Can science explain happiness? Can happiness be measured? What is happiness anyway?

The good news is that psychological research is beginning to show that experiencing and accepting such emotions are vital to our mental health. Attempting to suppress thoughts can backfire and even diminish our sense of contentment. “Acknowledging the complexity of life may be an especially fruitful path to psychological well being,” says psychologist Jonathan M. Adler of the Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering.<sup>1</sup>

Negative emotions also most likely aid in our survival. Bad feelings can be vital clues that a health issue, relationship, or other important matter needs attention, Adler points out.<sup>2</sup>

Trying to suppress negative emotions has also been found to be unproductive. Sitting with uncomfortable, negative feelings and facing them head on instead of trying to avoid them or escape them and getting to know them is a key practice of



Buddhism. In *When Things Fall Apart: Heartfelt Advice for Hard Times*, Pema Chödrön, the first female American Buddhist monk references Buddha while framing our concept of suffering. She states “The first noble truth of the Buddha is that when we feel suffering, it doesn’t mean that something is wrong. What a relief. Finally somebody told the truth. Suffering is part of life, and we don’t have to feel it’s happening because we personally made the wrong move. In reality, however, when we feel suffering, we think that something is wrong. As long as we’re addicted to hope, we feel that we can tone our experience down or liven it up or change it somehow, and we continue to suffer a lot.” The only way to overcome this avoidance of negative emotions is to consciously sit with the pain. Chödrön emphasizes the importance of this practice when she states, “Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing. We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don’t really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It’s just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.” The inevitability of suffering expressed here and the acceptance here is the key to happiness. It must be emphasized that this is seen as a practice in the sense that you can not automatically learn to sit with negative feelings, that such an approach takes time and practice. Chödrön explains, “So even if the hot loneliness is there, and for 1.6 seconds, we sit with that restlessness; when yesterday, we couldn’t sit for even one, that’s the journey of the warrior”.

Consider why in western culture we have a tendency to dismiss negative thinking as unproductive.

Aristotle said, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” The famous French writer, mathematician, inventor, physicist, and theologian (talk about a polymath!), Blaise Pascal concurred

with Aristotle when he said, “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.” Actress and humanitarian, Audrey Hepburn said, “The most important thing is to enjoy your life—to be happy. It’s all that matters.”

If our well-being and happiness is so crucial to our existence, how do we go about finding it and living it? Does it come through fame, friends, wealth, popularity, kindness, community?

### 5.2.3 Measuring Happiness

In recent years, the term subjective well-being or SWB has become the seminal phrase used in serious research when exploring the concept of how to measure and articulate a person’s happiness. What does subjective well-being mean? Does it only measure happiness? What is the difference between subjective well-being and happiness? Is there a difference between joy and happiness?

The United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network conducts studies that measure happiness. Their results are published annually in the *World Happiness Report*. Their researchers question citizens from countries across the globe to gauge their perceived happiness levels. The report attempts to show that peoples’ quality of happiness can be assessed by a series of subjective well-being measures. One might expect results showing that developed countries have a higher level of happiness or wellness than their third or even fourth world counterparts. However, there is no definitive correlation that exists between the two. Indeed, the *World Happiness Report* “urges readers to treat the evidence as suggestive rather than conclusive.” So, what are the measures for happiness? Does materialism make us happy? Certainly, to some extent having our most basic needs met is key to finding

happiness. However, how much is enough? Does happiness and wellness include the ability to acknowledge and grapple with other emotions including sadness, disappointment, and fear? What have philosophers said about this topic? The Stoics would say you only need your basic needs met. In his book, *Democracy in America*, French historian and political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville included a chapter on Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restive in the Midst of Their Well-Being. He observed the “strange melancholy” often haunting the inhabitants of democracies in the midst of abundance. Henry David Thoreau made his own critique on his fellow Americans and felt that people had let their priorities get skewed and that we need to simplify our lives.

## 5.2.4 The Nature of Self: Personal Fulfillment versus Social Responsibility

Does serving others influence our level of happiness? Mark Twain has said, “The best way to cheer yourself is to try to cheer someone else up.” Mother Teresa added to these sentiments when she said, “Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.” Why do people tend to be happier when they focus more on the well-being and happiness of others? Do we have to be happy ourselves before we can help others be happy? Anne Frank in *The Diary of a Young Girl* said, “Whoever is happy will make others happy.” The Dalai Lama also expressed similar sentiments when he said, “Only the development of compassion and understanding for others can bring us the tranquility and happiness we all seek.”

Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, are predicated on a very different understanding of the Self than

we have in the West. As you begin to explore this theme, please take a moment to think about the following questions:

What is the “self” or the “I”? Of what does it consist? Where does it exist? Is it permanent or something temporary? When you die, what do you think happens to it?

Most of you are pretty sure that your “self” has an existence right here, right now, and that “self” will continue to exist after your body dies. Why do you believe this? On what basis? Your body and mind constantly change, so where is the permanent “self”?

You'll see, as you proceed, that the answers to these questions, as given by Hindus and Buddhists, are very different from your own. Yet, they form the very basis of the questions being asked by these two religions. For these religions, change is all there is. Thus, there is no permanent “self” that remains who-we-are-now through all time.

You need to begin to understand the way these religions look at what's real, by which they mean what's permanent, in a world of constant change. Where does that permanence reside if all we see with our senses are things that change? How does one experience what is permanent or real or true if our bodies and minds participate in this world of change? Plato and other western philosophers asked some of these same questions but often arrived at different answers.

## 5.2.5 Is Happiness Contagious?

Denmark has been consistently ranked as the happiest country on earth. What are some of the identifiable characteristics of this country that could possibly contribute to this sense of happiness and well-being? Like most European and Scandinavian countries, Denmark has free health care and free college. It also has state mandated lengthy maternity and paternity leave. It also has the highest rate of co-housing

anywhere in the world. Co-housing is an intentional community of individual homes that center around a communal space where residents often eat together or come together for activities. This is arguably a significant factor in overall happiness when we consider the research of psychologist Howard Cutler, who while researching happiness with the 14th Dalai Lama found that social isolation was one of the most significant factors in reducing happiness and a sense of well-being. They also found that social media and increasingly long work hours have contributed to this sense of social isolation. Co-housing creates, as do other institutions such as religious communities, a sense of social support, which could be one of the reasons religious people are consistently found to be happier than those who not profess a faith. Watch the short video below that discusses the merits of co-housing. Also, listen to the podcast that explores the epidemic of increasing social isolation. Consider what you think about co housing communities. Would you enjoy living in a built-in social structure? As humans, we tend to naturally shy away from or be apologetic for experiencing negative emotions. Negative emotions have many possible causes. They could be reactionary in terms of responding to a negative comment, situation, or temporary setback. They may be indicative of a broader mental health challenge. Regardless of the source, all humans will experience negative emotions at some point in their life.

What impact does a sense of community have on one's level of well-being? Do we need others to be happy? In Epicurus's *A Guide to Happiness* he wrote, "Of all the means to ensure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends."

In this age of virtual reality and almost universal access to technology do we still need human interaction? Does knowing your neighbors really make a difference?

There is much to consider when looking at the topic of well-

being. The questions presented in this introduction are just a handful of those we will discuss as we take a deeper dive into a variety of perspectives about what it means to have a strong sense of well-being.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- What is the nature of the god in these religions?
- What is the relationship of the god(s) to humans?
- What are the texts upon which belief is based?
- What are the major ideas outlined in the texts?
- How does each religion impact the social structures of its believers?
- How would people behave as a result of following this religion?
- Are men and woman or different ethnicities or different classes treated the same or differently? What is the result of this?
- Who is in charge in this religion? How does that impact the decisions made in this religion and the structure of it?

## 5.3 Finding Happiness through Spirituality

For many this sense of happiness and well-being is found through spirituality and rituals associated with spirituality—for others, this is attained through practices that focus on one's well-being. So why has spirituality been a mainstay for so many in their search for happiness? How do different religions help people find peace and joy in life? The Dalai Lama said, "The purpose of our lives is to be happy." What do different religious practices say about the cultures from which they emerged?

Do Hindus and Buddhists find happiness differently than Jews, Muslims, and Christians? If you don't belong to a religion, can you still be spiritual? Why does ritual play such an important part in religion and in spirituality?

We will explore two categories of spiritual pathways: faith-based or religious beliefs and logic-based or philosophical beliefs. Faith-based beliefs rely on the transmission of holy or sacred information from a divine source. Logic-based beliefs rely on discussing evidence that supports (or refutes) an idea or concept.

In this short book, of course, we only touch the surface of a handful of spiritual belief systems, many of which have very long histories and an incredible wealth of traditions. As you learn about these faiths, some of which you may be familiar with, some not, consider the similarities and differences that exist between them. Be open to learning something new about each of the faiths you encounter.

## 5.4 Religious Ideologies

### 5.4.1 Monotheism

Monotheism comes from the fusion of two Greek words, *mono-* meaning single and *-theism* meaning god. A monotheistic religion believes there is one God, from whom we receive divine teachings. Judaism and Christianity, and Islam are major religions based on monotheism. Other monotheistic traditions include Babism, Bahá'ism, Cao Dai (Caodaiism), Cheondoism (Cheondogyo), Deism, Eckankar, Rastafari, Ravidassia, Seicho no Ie, Shaivism, Shaktism, Sikhism, Tenrikyo (Tenriism), Vaishnavism, and Zoroastrianism.

## 5.4.2 Polytheism

The Greek word *poly-* means many. Hence, polytheism is the belief in multiple gods or deities. Some polytheistic religions you may recognize are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Hare Krishna. Most [Native American](#) and indigenous Polynesian (see links) cultures are polytheistic. The [ancient Egyptians](#) and indigenous [Japanese](#) worshipped their monarchs as one of a pantheon of gods.

- <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/polynesian-religions-mythic-themes>
- <http://www.ulukau.org/elib/cgi-bin/library?e=d-0beckwit1-000Sec-11haw-50-20-frameset-book-1-010escapewin&a=d&d=D0&toc=0>

## 5.4.3 Judaism

Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions and was founded over 3,500 years ago in the Middle East. Judaism is founded on the belief in one all-powerful, all-knowing God.

Some basic facts about Judaism:

- [Judaism](#) is a complex belief system that includes theology, law, and cultural practices.
- The [Torah](#), a collection of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, document God's teachings.
- [Synagogues](#) are places where worship services and other functions are conducted.
- [Rabbis](#) are spiritual leaders who teach and interpret the scriptures, counsel members, and assist in ceremonies.
- Men may wear a brimless cap, called a [yarmulke or](#)



[kappel](#), to keep their heads covered in the presence of God.

- [Kosher dietary laws](#) are special requirements for what foods can be eaten, on what occasions, and how they are prepared and served.

Early Judaism began as the belief that God shared a unique relationship with certain people, a covenant, whose purpose was to promote universal peace and benefit humankind. As Judaism evolved, it was influenced by the religions of the near east; particularly Canaanite culture. (source: [BBC: Judaism](#))

Central to the idea of Judaism is a belief in a hierarchy of holiness that permeates all areas of life. For example, Earth is considered holy because God created it. Israel is the holiest land on Earth, Jerusalem is the holiest spot in Israel. This hierarchy organizes all aspects of Jewish life, such as temple architecture, social class, food, rituals, and holidays.

Yom Kippur is considered the holiest day of the year, the day of atonement. In biblical times, the high priest would enter the innermost sanctuary of the temple and pronounce the holy name of god and ask for a blessing on the people of Israel. Now Jews fast and pray and seek to right their wrongs in a spirit of repentance.

Hanukkah, Chanukkah, or the festival of lights, is a minor holiday in the Judaic calendar. It commemorates the rededication of the Jerusalem temple. The seven-branched [menorah](#) represents the miracle of a small amount of consecrated oil, enough to burn for one day, lasting for eight. This holiday is popularly celebrated in the United States because it falls near Christmas.

## 5.4.4 Christianity

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with approximately

2.4 billion worldwide followers worldwide and approximately 33,000 denominations. Christianity is a monotheistic, Abrahamic tradition that follows the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Bible. Listed below are some interesting facts about Christianity as found on

Some basic facts about Christianity (source, [BBC: Christianity](#)):

- The holy teachings are written down in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments.
- The [Ten Commandments](#), a set of instructions sent to Moses from God, declared appropriate rules for worship and human behavior.
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent to Earth to save humanity from their various sins. In this role, Jesus Christ is the Messiah as promised in the Old Testament.
- Worship places include churches and cathedrals.
- Spiritual leaders have various titles, depending on the denomination. A few common titles include priests, ministers, monks, and nuns.
- In addition to marking the date of Jesus Christ's birth, Christmas is a social and commercial holiday in Western culture.
- Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian calendar, representing his death by Crucifixion and three days later, the miracle of his Resurrection.

Christianity, arguably the most influential religion in western civilization, sprouted from Judaism. Jesus Christ was a Jewish reformer whose ministry taught followers to love God and each other. Paul the Apostle is important for his role in telling followers they did not need to follow Jewish law. For the first three centuries, Jerusalem, Christianity was a small movement centered in Syria, Egypt and Rome.

Christianity can be divided into three main branches, Roman

Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, within which there are numerous smaller divisions. 1517 is an important date marking the Protestant Reformation, when German theologian [Martin Luther](#) broke from the Catholic Church. The [Eastern Orthodox Church](#) has historical links to the Roman Empire and Constantinople. The [Schism of 1054](#) is regarded as when Eastern Orthodoxy began to split away from the western-led Roman Catholic Church.

Fundamental to the Christian belief is the restoration of communion with God through the alienation of sin. People are said to be born into [Original Sin](#), inherited from the sin of Adam disobeying God in the Garden of Eden. Believing in Jesus's power to transform enables people to overcome their burden of sin. Associated with this dynamic between sin and virtue, are heaven and hell. Heaven is God's domain and the reward for moral behavior. Hell is the kingdom of the Devil or Lucifer and the punishment meted out for immoral behavior.

#### *5.4.4.1     SIDEBAR: What does Jesus look like?*

There are many artistic representations of Jesus Christ. They have their origins from the time of Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604), and were valued both as lessons for the illiterate and as aids to enhance worship. Jesus is frequently represented as a European white man which does not align with his place of birth. What are the possible reasons for this? Is it because Christ is the literal son of God? Or does it reflect the lack of knowledge about other cultures in early Christian Art? If so, why does this image persist? Individuals have also claimed to find the image of Christ in a variety of objects such as on the base of a frying pan, a Walmart receipt, in a bag of Cheetos renaming the discovery 'Cheesus', on a sidewalk and also a piece of toast to name a few. Are these claims manifestations tricks of the mind or are they heavenly manifestations or 'a sign'?

as some would claim? Does their legitimacy matter if the end result is to strengthen someone's faith?

## 5.4.5 Islam

[Islam](#) is a monotheistic, Abrahamic religion. The core belief is that followers should surrender to the will of Allah, the creator of all things. There are approximately 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, with the highest density living in Indonesia.

Some basic facts about Islam (source, [BBC](#): Islam):

- Allah's messenger was the prophet [Muhammad](#) (or Mohammed), born in Mecca in 570 A.D. He promoted social bonding and the idea of a religious community.
- The holy scriptures, called Qur'an, are regarded as the written word of God.
- A [mosque](#) is a place for prayer, and may be located inside a building or outside on an open plot of land.
- Mecca, birthplace of Muhammad, is the holiest city in Islam.
- [Imam](#), which means leader or model in Arabic, is a spiritual and community leader.
- Important dates on the [Islamic calendar](#) include Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, and Eid al-Fitr, which celebrates the end of Ramadan.
- The [Five Pillars of Islam](#) are duties performed by faithful Muslims: declaration of faith, daily prayers, payment of charity tax, fasting during Ramadan, and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).
- The Muslim diet forbids consumption of alcohol and pork. Chicken and beef may be eaten providing they are [halal](#), slaughtered following Islamic ritual.

Sharia, or Islamic Law, is governed by [three sources](#): Qur'an, Sunna, and Hadith. Sunnah is a collection of guidelines on traditional social and religious practices. Hadith is a record of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims believe Allah makes his message known by words through prophets, who are holy men assigned to spread the teachings. 25 prophets are named in the Qur'an, with the most important ones being Muhammad, Adam, Jonah, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Muhammed, Allah's last prophet, was an orphan and shepherd who had a revelation at the age of 40. From that point, Allah revealed the teachings of the Qur'an to Muhammed, until the prophet passed away 23 years later.

Mecca is the focal point for five-times-daily prayer ritual, during which worshipper prostrate or bow facing in the direction of the holy city. The *hajj* is a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the birthplace of Prophet Muhammed. [Malcom X](#) has been interviewed about his *hajj* experience. Professional boxer Muhammed Ali (formerly Cassius Clay) embarked on his *hajj* in 1972.

Many Muslim women wear the *hijab*, which is a head covering intended as a sign of respect that elevates and protects their beauty. Tradition dictates it is worn in public except in the company of immediate male relatives, women, children.

## 5.4.6 Hinduism

Hinduism is one of those difficult to pigeonhole religions. Some regard it as a polytheistic faith, having thousands of gods and goddesses. Others argue that these are just different avatars of one supreme being, usually identified with Vishnu. Hinduism has the third largest religion in the world, with approximately

950 million adherents. It is the predominant belief system of India and Nepal.

Some basic facts about Hinduism (source, [\(BBC: Hinduism\)](#)):

- The [three principal deities](#) are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Together they form an eternal cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction, respectively.
- Human existence is described as a continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth called *samsara*.
- This reincarnation cycle is governed by [karma](#), a universal law that equates all actions with an immediate or future consequences.
- Humans can shape their karma, creating good consequences, by taking actions in this lifetime that allow them to escape the cycle of rebirth. This escape is called *moksha*.
- Also related to the power of virtuous behavior is [dharma](#), which means universal law or duty. Dharma has the power to affect everything in the universe—plants, animals, people, weather phenomena, inanimate objects, etc.
- Hinduism may be one of the oldest living religions in the world, with elements traceable back thousands of years.
- Hinduism is believed to have originated near the River Indus in modern day Pakistan.
- The main texts, called *Veda*, are written in Sanskrit and consist of verses recited during Hindu rituals.
- The [cow](#) is a sacred animal, associated with the gods Shiva, Indra, and Krishna.
- Hindus believe in *ahimsa* (noninjury), the sanctity of life, and many adhere to vegetarian diets.

Hinduism categorizes people into [castes](#), groups of people with specific roles and social status within the community. These are hereditary and rigidly hierarchal assignments, with rules dictating what religious duties they perform, who they can

marry, what education they receive, what profession they can pursue, where they may live, etc. The highest-ranking class is [Brahman](#). The other three Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. Outside the four castes, are members designated as impure (also known as [untouchables](#)), who may include people who handle animal products such as leather and hides, or impure products such as human waste.

Hindus celebrate many [holy days](#), but Diwali, the festival of lights, is the best known. Diwali is distinctive for its celebration across all castes. Gods associated with this festival include Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and the victory of Krishan (Vishnu) over the hell demon Narakasura. Another important festival called Holi, celebrates the god of love, Kama, and is celebrated during the spring equinox.

## 5.4.7 Buddhism

Buddhism is another difficult-to-categorize religion. Buddhism's founder was a spiritual leader and teacher but not a divine god. Some scholars classify Buddhism as [polytheistic](#) because it recognizes many gods. Others classify it as nontheistic because it lacks a supreme, all-knowing being. There are approximately 300 million Buddhists worldwide, divided among a variety of lineages. Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism are probably the most recognized in the United States.

Some basic facts about Buddhism (source, [BBC:Buddhism](#), Encyclopedia Britannica):

- Buddhism does not feature a relationship between God and humanity, but like Hinduism, focuses on actions and consequences that affect the reincarnation cycle.
- The core teachings are contained in the [Four Noble Truths](#) to achieving enlightenment.

- Sutras contain sacred written texts interpreting the meaning of the truths and path to enlightenment. Some noteworthy sutras include the [Lotus Sutra](#) , [Heart Sutra](#), [Diamond Sutra](#), Garland Sutra, Perfection of Wisdom, Path to Purification, Lankavatara Sutra, Pali Canon (Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, Abhidharma Pitaka).
- The [goal of enlightenment](#) is to eliminate suffering (*dukkha*), escape (*moksha*) from the reincarnation cycle (*samsara*), and enter paradise (nirvana).
- Suffering is caused by forming attachments to emotions and thoughts, good or bad.
- Evil is a form of suffering and evildoers are judged after death and sent to purgatory or hell as punishment.
- [Theravada](#) is a main branch of Buddhism and predominantly practice in Southeast Asia.
- [Mahayana](#), another major branch, became the dominant practice in Central and East Asia. It is the foundational source of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.
- [Vajrayana](#) is an esoteric branch and the source of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and [parts of Japan](#).
- Buddhist places of worship are called temples, although prayer practices occur in many other settings such as in the home or outside. [Small temples](#) may be installed inside homes.
- Many, but not all, [Buddhists are vegetarians](#), in harmony with the practice to avoid harming living things.
- Spiritual leaders are usually referred to as monks, priests, nuns, and abbots.

There are many connections between Hinduism and Buddhism. Both have a belief in dharma, divine duty or law and that existence is characterized by impermanence, suffering, and uncertainty. They both recognize how the karmic consequences of behavior shape the reincarnation cycle. And



both teach that suffering, which includes the reincarnation cycle of birth-death-rebirth, can be overcome through appropriate thought and behavior. Unlike Hinduism, there are no caste restrictions in Buddhism.

Buddhism is estimated to be 2,500 years old and [developed in northeastern India](#) around the 6th-4th century B.C. Buddhism was developed by its founder [Buddha Gautama](#) (personal name Siddhartha) during his spiritual quest for enlightenment. Siddhartha was born into a Hindu family of the [Kshatriya warrior](#) class. Buddha discerned the [Four Noble Truths](#) to achieving enlightenment after years of meditation under a Bodhi Tree (tree of awakening).

Buddha taught that understanding and practicing the [Four Noble Truths](#) would lead to enlightenment and freedom from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. Paradise (nirvana) is the divine reward for beings who achieve enlightenment. Evildoers are sent to Hell. Enlightened beings may voluntarily choose to remain on Earth, to assist others in achieving enlightenment. A famous parable called the [10 Ox-Herding Pictures](#) illustrates the journey from suffering to enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths are summarized as follows (source, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Four-Noble-Truths>, <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/shaka.shtml#guideSHAKA>) :

1. Suffering is the characteristic of all living beings
2. Craving or attachment is cause of suffering
3. Eliminate the cause of suffering to achieve enlightenment
4. Pursue the eightfold path to eliminate the cause of suffering

## 5.5 Philosophical Ideologies

In this section, you will consider philosophical approaches to wellbeing, including Atheism. You will also consider the approaches of Epicurus in relation to philosophical concepts of what it means to live a good life. You will look at the range of human emotions including happiness, sadness, negativity, vulnerability, and shame. How do these emotions relate to our sense of well being? Should we seek only to feel positive emotions? Are negative feelings a core component to our sense of well being? Are they a necessary yardstick to measure joy?

Philosophical concepts will dictate that happiness and well being is the goal of human existence or an aspect of chance.

### 5.5.1 Humanism

Humanism emphasizes a belief in the human experience and rational thinking as the determinant of our knowledge and the development and implementation of our morals. **It is a** system of education and mode of inquiry that originated in northern Italy during the 13th and 14th centuries and later spread through continental Europe and England. Humanism has its emphasis in the human realm as opposed to the metaphysical.

Some basic facts about Humanism (source, [BBC Humanism](#))

- There are no supernatural beings.
- The material universe is the only thing that exists.
- Science provides the only reliable source of knowledge about this universe.

- We only live this life – there is no after-life, and no such thing as reincarnation.
- Human beings can live ethical and fulfilling lives without religious beliefs.
- Human beings derive their moral code from the lessons of history, personal experience, and thought.

Humanism is a rational philosophy that is informed by science, inspired by artifacts of human experience and is directed by compassion for self and others. Humanism affirms the dignity of each human being. It also affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives

## 5.5.2 Existentialism

Existentialism is the belief that emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will. Existential belief holds that a person creates their own set of morals in response to their own situation and should not be influenced by any external or metaphysical beings in relation to such.

Some well known Existentialists are Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus who both lived in Paris during the 1940s. [Sartre believed](#) that essence precedes existence, that is we have to create our own lives, selves and values. He holds that we are born without a destiny, and what we create is up to us.

Some basic facts about Existentialism: (Source: [Philosophy Basics](#))

- Existentialism is a movement in philosophy and literature that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice
- Existential thought began in the mid-to-late 19th Century,

but reached its peak in mid-20th Century France

- Existentialism believes that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence
- Existential thought believes there is no God or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter this nothingness (and hence to find meaning in life) is by embracing existence
- Existentialism believes that individuals are entirely free and must take personal responsibility for themselves

### 5.5.3 Stoicism

Stoicism emphasizes virtue, while Aristotle argued that happiness was the only valuable trait that existed in isolation. He also emphasized the importance of virtue and that happiness without virtue is simply contentment. Plato places an emphasis on morality in the pursuit of happiness. He also sees a connection with fulfilling our social obligations in the pursuit of happiness. Epicurus emphasizes the indulgence of pleasure and avoidance of pain as a means to happiness. This may seem obvious, but it is important to note he is not advocating a hedonistic approach to life; he warns against over indulgence as this ultimately leads to pain. Think of it in terms of Epicurus advocating for more of a La Caille versus Chuckarama approach to life; that is, life should not be measured in quantity, but in quality. He also emphasizes the absence of fear. Epicurus maintained that God exists, but rather than man being created in God's image, men liked to create God in their image, meaning that humans often characterize God as being in alignment with their own ideas and even political affiliations.

Some basic facts about Stoicism: (Source [Britannica](#))

- **Stoicism**, a school of thought that flourished in Greek and

Roman antiquity

- Stoics have always believed that the goal of all inquiry is to provide a mode of conduct characterized by tranquility of mind and certainty of moral worth
- Stoicism takes its name from the place where its founder, Zeno of Citium(Cyprus), customarily lectured—the Stoa Poikile(Painted Colonnade).

## 5.5.4 Agnosticism

An Agnostic holds that it is impossible to prove or disprove the existence of a deity or theism. The terms “agnostic” and “agnosticism” were famously coined in the late nineteenth century by the [English biologist, T.H. Huxley](#). He said that he originally

invented the word “Agnostic” to denote people who, like [himself], confess themselves to be hopelessly ignorant concerning a variety of matters, about which meta-physicians and theologians, both orthodox and heterodox, dogmatize with the utmost confidence. (1884)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/atheism-agnosticism/#DefiAgno>

Huxley argues that in the absence to prove or disprove the existence of god, we would be better to suspend judgement on the matter.

Some basic facts about Agnosticism: (Source [Learn Religions](#) & [Britannica](#) Cline, Austin. “Agnosticism for Beginners – Basic Facts About Agnosticism and Agnostics.” Learn Religions, Feb. 11, 2020, [learnreligions.com/basic-facts-about-agnosticism-and-agnostics-248036/](https://learnreligions.com/basic-facts-about-agnosticism-and-agnostics-248036/).)

- Agnosticism is the absence of Knowledge of gods
- Being an agnostic doesn't necessarily mean that a person can't be religious

- [Agnosticism is the Absence of Knowledge of Gods](#)
- [Agnostic ideas can be traced back to the earliest Greek philosophers](#)
- The word agnosticism was first publicly coined in 1869 at a meeting of the [Metaphysical Society](#) in London by [T.H. Huxley](#), a British biologist and champion of the Darwinian theory of evolution

### 5.5.5 Atheism

Atheism demonstrates another approach to life that refutes the existence of deity. It is often associated with Agnosticism, which is the position that we cannot know one way or the other that God exists. Atheists and Agnostics make up about 4 percent of the population on the United States, approximately 1.2 million people. Perhaps because of the widespread belief that you cannot be moral without a belief in God, 49 percent of Americans say they would not vote for an atheist to be president. Why do you think this might be? Is there a connection between morality and religion? Can one exist without the other?

Some basic facts about atheism: (Source [Britannica](#))

- **Atheism**, in general, the critique and denial of metaphysical beliefs in God or spiritual beings
- Atheism is also distinguished from agnosticism, which leaves open the question whether there is a god or not
- Atheism is not only a rejection of the central concepts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; it is a rejection of the belief of all spiritual beings

## 5.5.6 Confucianism

**Confucianism** is the way of life propagated by Confucius in the 6th–5th century BCE and has been followed by the Chinese people for more than two millennia. Although Confucianism has changed over time, transformed over time, it is still the substance of learning, the source of values, and the social code of Chinese culture.

Confucius was a Chinese philosopher and political theorist. His life was quite unremarkable which underscores that his emphasis is on self-cultivation rather than revealed truth.

Some basic facts about Confucianism: (Source: [Britannica](#))

- Confucianism, a Western term that has no counterpart in Chinese, is a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life
- Sometimes viewed as a philosophy and sometimes as a religion
- Confucianism may be understood as an all-encompassing way of thinking and living that entails ancestor reverence and a profound human-centered religiousness
- Although often grouped with the major historical religions, Confucianism differs from them by not being an organized religion
- Although it is an exaggeration to characterize traditional Chinese life and culture as Confucian, Confucian ethical values have for well over 2,000 years served as the source of inspiration as well as the court of appeal for human interaction between individuals, communities

At the core of Confucianism is a belief in tradition. Confucius did not necessarily “discover” Confucianism, but rather he was motivated by his strong desire to understand why certain life forms and institutions, such as reverence for ancestors, human-

centered religious practices, and mourning ceremonies, had survived for centuries.

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- In China particularly, [Confucius is elevated to deity status](#). People build [Confucian Temples](#) to house his ancestral spirit and [perform rituals dedicated to him](#). Does this make Confucianism a religion?
- Do you need religion to be moral?
- Where do agnostics and atheists get their moral ideas and values from?

### 5.5.7 Daoism

**Daoism**, (also spelled **Taoism**), is a religious philosophical tradition that was developed over 2000 years ago in China. It is based on the writings of Lao-tzu who lived in the 6th century BC. Daoism emphasizes simplicity and rejects social constructs and organized societies. The term *dao* or *tao* predates the rise of Daoism and is used in all schools of Chinese philosophy, including Confucianism. Its literal meanings include “way,” “path,” “road,” “course,” “speech,” and “method,” among others

Some basic facts about Daoism: (Source: [Britannica](#))

Daoism has generally been more popular and spontaneous than the official (Confucian) state cult and less diffuse and shapeless than folk religion

Daoist philosophy and religion have found their way into all Asian cultures influenced by China, especially those of Vietnam, Japan, and Korea

Daoism & Confucianism share many of the same ideas about



man, society, the ruler, heaven, and the universe—ideas that were not created by either school but that stem from a tradition prior to either Confucius or Lao tzu

*There are 3 main ideas in Daoism, they are:*

The most important of these concepts are (1) the continuity between nature and human beings, or the interaction between the world and human society; (2) the rhythm of constant flux and transformation in the universe and the return or reversion of all things to the Dao from which they emerged; and (3) the worship of ancestors, the cult of heaven, and the divine nature of the sovereign. (Source: [Britannica](#))

## Questions for Creative & Critical Thinking

- *Daoism includes a lot of metaphysical principles about the origin of everything. Should it be regarded as a religion?*
- *The traditional practice of ancestor worship is tightly integrated into Confucian and Daoist practices. How might it influence whether we classify Confucianism and Daoism as philosophies or religions?*

# Conclusion



Credit: [Karan Chopra](#). Flickr. CC0 1.0 Public Domain.

Hopefully, having explored our four themes and questioned your usual thinking, you are more aware of the global challenges we humans face. In examining the various artifacts, you realize they arose from our natural craving to make sense of what it means to be human.

Some of these artifacts and discussions may have resonated with you, even validated your thoughts and feelings. Others may have sent you to entirely new worlds. It can be daunting, discouraging, to study human trafficking, gender inequity, genocide, political corruption, and the largest refugee crisis in human history.

On the other hand, we hope to have shown that the humanities provide a means for engaging in positive, empowering, enlightening, and hopeful reflections about what it means to be human. You have a grounding in philosophy, history, literature, religion, art, anthropology, politics, and psychology. And now, you understand how these disciplines

reveal the moral, spiritual, and intellectual paths of people making their way through the world.

In his poem "[A Brief for the Defense](#)," American poet Jack Gilbert challenges us to acknowledge human sorrows and suffering but also "have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world." He describes women laughing in the face of sickness and suffering in the "terrible streets of Calcutta." He concludes the poem with his appreciation for the life he has:

*Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies  
are not starving someplace, they are starving  
somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils.  
But we enjoy our lives because that's what God  
wants.*

*Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would  
not*

*be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not  
be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women  
at the fountain are laughing together between  
the suffering they have known and the awfulness  
in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody  
in the village is very sick. There is laughter  
every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta,  
and the women laugh in the cages of Bombay.  
If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction,  
we lessen the importance of their deprivation.  
We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,  
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have  
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the  
ruthless*

*furnace of this world. To make injustice the only  
measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.  
If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down,  
we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.*

*We must admit there will be music despite everything.*

*We stand at the prow again of a small ship  
anchored late at night in the tiny port  
looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront  
is three shuttered cafés and one naked light burning.  
To hear the faint sound of oars in the silence as a  
rowboat  
comes slowly out and then goes back is truly worth  
all the years of sorrow that are to come.*

## The Big Questions

What is the purpose of life? Awakening at 3:37 a.m. pondering why we exist is perhaps a universal experience. Why do people suffer? How do we find joy? Is there life after death? The study of humanities is uniquely designed to address these confounding questions having no black-and-white answers. The humanities provide an assurance that we can embrace the process of searching, even if the conclusions are ever-changing.

***“And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”***

***—[Rainer Maria Rilke](#)***

Some human experiences are universal—falling in love, finding success, enduring loss, withstanding pain. Nevertheless, an individual’s response to love, success, loss, and pain is unique because every person has a different interpretation of what these experiences mean. The comforting caress of the sun on someone’s cheek might be a source of irritation to another person. One person may shriek with joy over a winter of deep,

heavy snowfalls. Someone else despairs during a long winter of gloom and depression.

We feel differently. We look different. We are different. At the same time, we automatically file away people by race, culture, religion, gender. We assess people's worth according to how closely they resemble us. We treat people who are similar to us better than people who are different. This bias towards favoring people and values we agree with dictates social structures and relationship power-dynamics.

Digging under the surface of these habits can make us uncomfortable. We may choose to ignore unflattering aspects of our belief system. Flee from discomforting facts that challenge our world view. Disconnect from the world with the excuse that we are not sure we can help with this. Or, we may decide to invest in changing how we think.

***"You may choose to look the other way but you  
can never say again that you did not know."***

***—[William Wilberforce](#)***

Another big question. Since we are not all the same, can we claim a shared human experience? Perhaps the more important question to ask is how individuals can join together to battle the darker manifestations of humanity, such as greed, manipulation, violence, injustice, and intolerance?

## **On Being Human**

It can be hard to be human. To wake up every day and brush your teeth and do the things you said you would do to find the work you enjoy and people you like; to deal with pandemics and earthquakes and disappointments; to cope with paper cuts and breakups and lost keys.

The insufferable waiting for social reform to manifest can be

hard on humans. Emancipated slaves won the right to vote in America in 1870. One hundred thirty-eight years later, the United States elected President Barack Obama, its first Black president. Women won the right to vote in America in 1920. In 2019, American women made up 51% of the population but only 24% of the federal legislature. One hundred years after winning the battle for suffrage, a woman has yet to be elected president of the United States.

Maya Angelou's poem "[Still I Rise](#)" reverberates with a message about how change gets started. In the last two stanzas, Angelou repeats the phrase, "I rise," to underline her defiant resilience in the face of racism:

*Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.*

## Now What Do We Do?

*"Speaking is the first political act. It is the first  
act of liberty,*

*and it always implicitly involves another. In speaking, one recognizes, 'I am and I am not alone.'"*

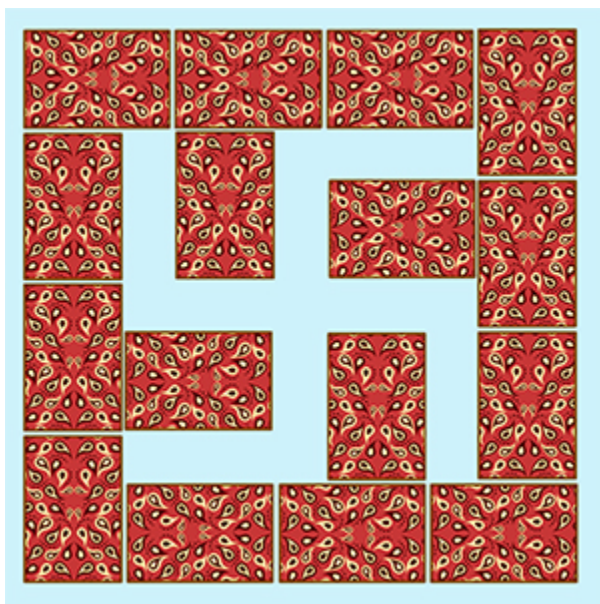
—[James Orbinski](#)

The next big question, but certainly not the last, how do we move forward from being a human to acting on our humanity? Throughout the four themes, we have explored artifacts from the far and near past. In deciding what to do in the future, perhaps the answer lies in examining our present. Use the experiences of the artists, poets, activists, revolutionaries, and scholars to reflect on how you fit into this thing called the human experience. Compare pressing global issues to current events happening in your community. Measure yourself in relation to the experiences, good and bad, of people who are different.

As Orbinski notes, speaking leads to sharing, and sharing leads to action. Perhaps the next time you listen to music, read the news, or see a homeless person, your newfound awareness will compel you to speak or act or even just think a little differently. I hope that you do.







Credit: [sabakuINK](https://sabakuink.net/). CC BY-SA 4.0.<https://sabakuink.net/>.

## ANSWER

Among several possibilities, only one is a woman. The surgeon is the boy's adoptive father, stepfather, biological father, second father, transgender father, or mother. According to [a study](#) conducted by Boston University, only 15% of test subjects associated "surgeon" with the most likely possibility "mother."