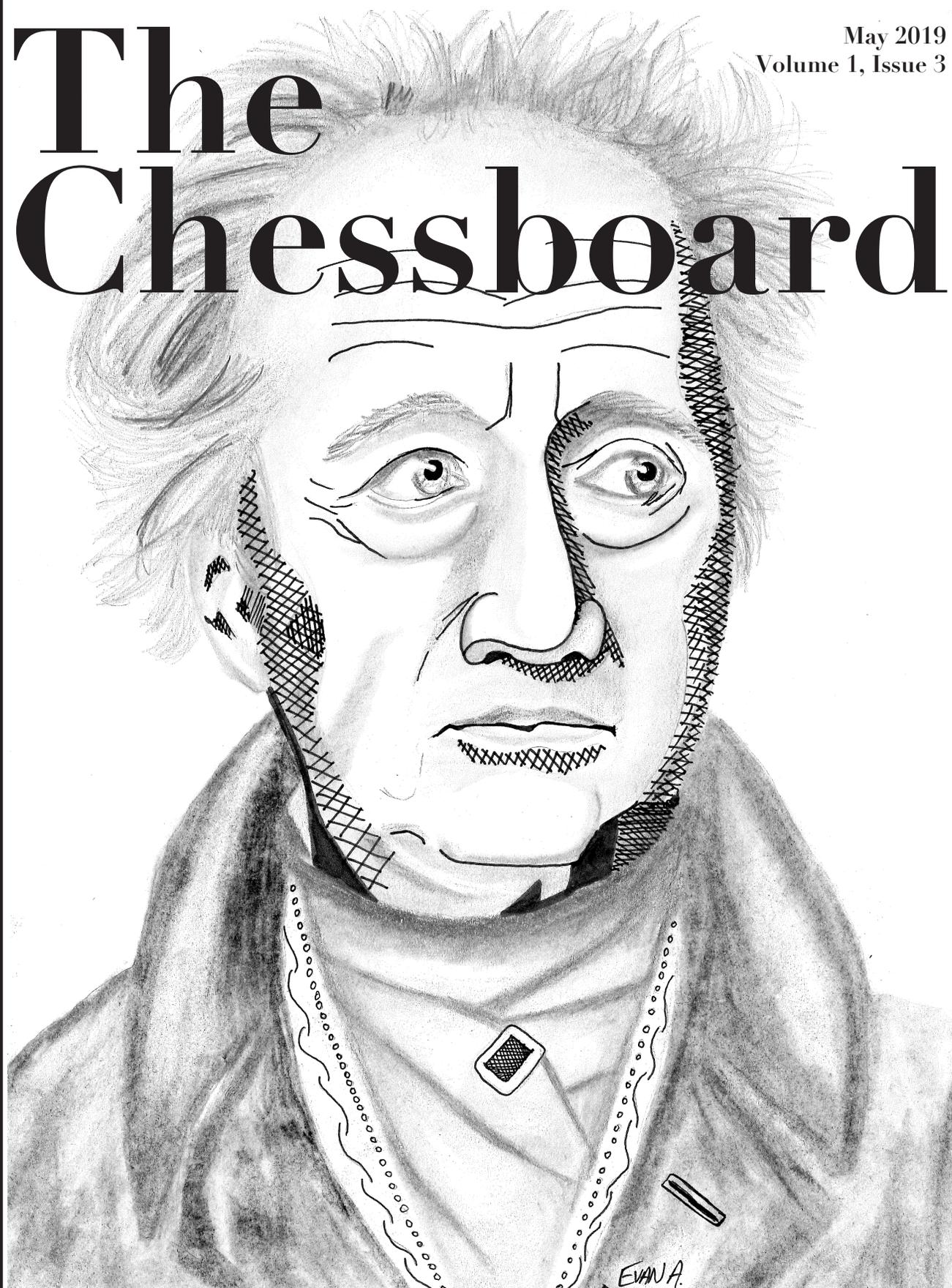


May 2019
Volume 1, Issue 3

The Chessboard



“Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward. They may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.”
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Editors' Corner

Mission Statement

The Chessboard is a student-run publication that seeks to stoke campus-wide discussions about a host of social, cultural, and political issues. This goal is best embodied in the quote from German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that has inspired our name: "Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward; they may be beaten, but they may start a winning game." We ask students to use this publication to move their unique ideas forward so they may be contemplated, discussed, and challenged in daily conversations. This "winning game" of considering ideas is a pillar of the liberal arts and critical thinking, and it is a value that we at The Chessboard hope to further at Luther College.

Editors' Note

As our Mission Statement notes, our goal is to allow students to voice their opinions through The Chessboard so that they may be discussed and challenged. This means that The Chessboard contains a wide variety of opinions that are informed by a wide variety of perspectives. Therefore, the views expressed by Chess Piece authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the Center for Ethics and Public Engagement.

Call for Contributors and Responses

The Chessboard is always looking for new writers and new artists. If you are interested in writing a Chess Piece or drawing a sketch, please contact us at: **chessboard@luther.edu**. We also welcome written responses to previous Chess Pieces or pieces written in this issue. Feel free to e-mail us if this interests you.

Chess Pieces

| | |
|--|----|
| Perception Versus Reality Anna Dewitt | 2 |
| Those Democratic Blues Alex Aakre | 4 |
| A Case for Masochism Ananda Easley | 6 |
| Dual Perspectives Becca Buse | 8 |
| One for the Angels Kari Jacobson | 10 |
| An Equitable Community Ashalul Aden | 12 |

Editors

Karl Badger '19
Editor-in-Chief
Kelao Charmaine Neumbo '22
Managing Editor

Artists

Alex Aakre '19
Evan Anderson '21
Tomas Dandas '20
Alijah Goetting '19

Writers

Alex Aakre '19
Ashalul Aden '20
Becca Buse '19
Anna Dewitt '19
Ananda Easley '19
Kari Jacobson '21

Cover Art

Evan Anderson '21

Perception Versus Reality

The Portayal of Immigration and Refugees in the Media, Politics, and Everyday Life

Anna Dewitt (2019)

Art by Evan Anderson (2021)

In the last several years, American media has been full of stories, statistics, and claims about immigrants and refugees. The reports range from information sliding across television news tickers reporting on events like the caravan from Honduras, to vague references about Syrian refugees made by politicians on social media platforms. Constant exposure to media stories about foreigners coming to the United States (legally or otherwise) creates the perception that our country is facing one of the highest immigration and refugee resettlement rates in history and in the world. What we hear in the news and from politicians occasionally implies that so-called “Western” countries are the only ones taking in the flood of immigrants and refugees. While the sheer amount of news and political discourse on the topic support these perceptions, reality may be a little more nuanced.

During fall semester this year, I took an International Relations course where we discussed immigration, refugees, and asylum seekers. As most people are, I was familiar with common reasons why people leave their native countries: conflict, persecution, and for access to better opportunities. I also knew about the migration crisis in Europe and debates about US immigration policy from the news and other Luther classes. Despite my knowledge base, something I never considered was the actual number of immigrants and refugees entering the United States each year. I assumed that it was a relatively high number because of what I had read in the news and seen on T.V., but I could not have given a good estimate. Similarly, even though I had heard comments along the lines of “taking more than our fair share of refugees,” I probably would not have been able to accurately estimate where the U.S. or

other countries were ranked in terms of the numbers of migrants and refugees they accept. While I pride myself on being critical of the information I consume, I have recently realized that I was ignorant about the accuracy of the claims about immigrants and refugees that we are exposed to in the media and online. Unfortunately, I don’t think that my ignorance is unique among Americans.

Before talking about the numbers, it’s important to differentiate between immigrants and refugees. Using legal definitions, Amnesty International (AI) defines a refugee as “a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there.”¹ Refugees also are not protected by their own governments and have a right to international protection.² An immigrant, on the other hand, has no universally recognized definition. However Amnesty International, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), as well as others would define immigrants or migrants as “people staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum-seekers or refugees.”³ While there are different connotations for “migrant” and “immigrant” in some contexts, we will be using the definition provided by AI and IRC.

So, now that we’ve defined our terms, what is the reality for the United States? The first perception, that the U.S. has the largest immigrant population in the world, is correct. In 2017, the United Nations reported that the U.S. is home to 49.8 million immigrants in total.⁴ Compared to the country with the next largest number of immigrants, Saudi Arabia with 12.2 million immigrants, the U.S. undoubtedly hosts a significant share of the world’s immigrant population. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the number of immigrants in the U.S. has increased by 15.3% since

¹“Key Facts about Refugees and Asylum Seekers’ Rights,” *Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Migrants*, Amnesty International, 16 April, 2017, www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/.

² *Ibid.*

³ “Key Facts,” and “Migrants, Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Immigrants: What’s the Difference?” *International Rescue Committee*, International Rescue Committee, 11 Dec. 2018, www.rescue.org/article/migrants-asylum-seekers-refugees-and-immigrants-whats-difference.

⁴ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “International Migration Report 2017: Highlights,” United Nations, 15 April, 2017. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf

2010.⁵ Based on these statistics, the perceptions portrayed in the media appear to be true.

We have the largest immigrant population in the world, but is this the biggest influx of immigrants the United States has ever seen? Although the U.S. currently has the largest total number of immigrants in its history, recent data from the MPI indicates that this is not the largest increase in immigration America has ever seen. Rather, the largest annual increase in the foreign-born population was three percent in 2013-2014.⁶ Another way to look at it is by the share of the total U.S. population. Immigrants currently make up about 13.7 percent of America's population, while the highest recorded number was 14.8 percent in 1890.⁷ It's clear that the answer to this question really depends on how you look at it. The largest annual increase of immigrants coming to the U.S. was within the past ten years, but current immigrants don't make up the biggest portion of the population in our history.

Statistics on refugees paint a very different picture. In the United Nations' most recent report, the U.S. is not even listed as a top recipient of refugees. Instead, Turkey (2.9 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Lebanon (1.0 million), Iran (979,400), Uganda (940,800), and Ethiopia (791,600) are listed as the countries with the most total refugees.⁸ At 287,129 refugees, the U.S. hosts a significantly lower number of refugees than several European countries as well, including Germany and France.⁹ Finally, the 2017 refugee resettlement rate in the U.S. was at an all-time low, at 33,000.¹⁰ Clearly, refugee statistics show that the U.S. is not accepting record-breaking numbers of people, nor is it taking in the largest number of refugees in the world.



The data relating to the United States' immigration and refugee policies shown here are not comprehensive, but they highlight nuances not explicitly acknowledged in most American media and political discourse. Whether on T.V., on a podium at a rally, or in casual conversation, things we've heard about hot topics are simply thrown around without much thought. In discussions about U.S. immigration, the terms "refugees" and "immigrants" are too often lumped into the same category without explanation, leading to misleading information about each group. Aside from resulting in the spread of ignorance and misinformation, it's easy to see how these types of misunderstandings can translate into misinformed voting choices or falling prey to anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric. In a heated political climate, it is important that journalists, politicians, and above all, individuals are aware of the false perceptions created by word choice and the lack of reliable statistical evidence. Maybe being better-informed is one step toward creating less bias, fewer misunderstandings, and better policies that reflect reality.

⁵ "Top 25 Destinations of International Migrants," *Migrationpolicy.org*, Migration Policy Institute, 21 Mar. 2019, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants.
⁶ Zong, Jie, et al., "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," *Migrationpolicy.org*, Migration Policy Institute, 15 Apr. 2019, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Now.
⁷ *Ibid.*
⁸ "Refugees," *United Nations*, United Nations, 10 April, 2017, www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/refugees/.
⁹ *Ibid.*
¹⁰ Phillip Connor, and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "US Resettled Fewer Refugees than Rest of World in 2017 for First Time," *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 5 July 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/05/for-the-first-time-u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-than-the-rest-of-the-world/.

Those Democratic Blues

Alex Aakre (2019)

Art by Alex Aakre (2019)

I was shooting pool in The Helm Bar when a friend of mine looked at me and said, “You know, the Democratic Party is a lot like a jean jacket... it used to be for the working man but now it’s just bougie.” The prophet known as “Cheddar” had spoken. As he went back to the game, I could not help but think that Cheddar was right. Both of our parents belonged to unions: mine a teachers’ union and his a steelworkers’ union. We grew up hearing the old yarn that the Democratic Party was the party of the working man and the Republican Party was that of those dastardly businessmen who aimed to take advantage of us. But is that true anymore? Is the Party what we once thought it was?

Rural America is turning red. Its blue-collar workers are leaving the party of their parents and grandparents because it no longer resonates with them. In many cases, the Party is more of headache than anything else. Cheddar and I grew up in the La Crosse, Wisconsin area, which had been considered a “Blue Stronghold” for years. But in the 2016 election, it was the most evenly-split congressional district in the country. It showed that times were changing, and that we may not be a Blue Stronghold forever. This local shift comes down to the brand of liberalism that the national party has been promoting: social instead of just fiscal.

Although both of those terms are attached to the word “liberal,” social liberalism and fiscal liberalism do not necessarily go hand in hand. You can be a proud union member and support an inheritance tax, but have cultural or religious objections to any number of the social issues that the Democratic Party has advocated. Just as you can be a Republican who weeps at the notion of a nickel more in taxation but sees access to a safe abortion as a constitutional right. As different as they may be, the parties — especially the Democratic Party — have conflated social and economic politics.

The mindset is: if someone is liberal, then they must be liberal on all fronts. Just look at the pushback Party leadership gave to Indiana Senator Joe Donnelly on any number of his conservative social stances.¹ Donnelly understood that liberalism is a not an all-encompassing term, especially in rural regions of the country where conservative social outlooks are more common. It is a lesson that Donnelly has learned well in Indiana — a state that has repeatedly elected Mike Pence to office — but one that the national party has routinely overlooked. This is a mistake that will cause shifts in party allegiances, as it did in Indiana where Donnelly lost reelection last November.



Growing up, Cheddar and I assumed that all Democrats were like us: blue-collar types who had bad experiences with bankers or felt underpaid every time we cashed a paycheck. We owned guns, hunted, and regularly attended church — as did the Republicans in our town. The only difference between us and them was our economic outlook. Our congressman reflects this: he is the proud son of a union worker, has a conservative Christian background, and an A-rating from the NRA. Without the union connection and matching economic outlook, those details could have easily described a Republican. Coming to college shattered our world view. We discovered that the La Crosse area was a microcosm, one that has not yet fully abandoned a 1950s mindset — a time when the word “union” was synonymous with the Democratic Party and people had a fairly traditional social outlook on the world. College showed us that our “Democratic” views were quite conservative in comparison to our classmates, who grew up with a far different understanding of both the Party and liberalism.

On its quest for social liberalism, the Party just assumed blue collar workers — many of whom are social conservatives — would always remain loyal. Why would they not? Most people can look past social

¹ Burgess Everett and James Arkin, “Red-state Democrats refuse to come out against Kavanaugh,” *Politico*, September 25, 2018.

stances that they disagree with as long as the Party is helping them fiscally. The problem came when the party started to forsake unions — the hallmark of their economic outlook. Many Democrats still like to use the term “union” during campaigns, but when given the chance they do very little to validate those statements of support. Just look at the lackluster support the

But the fleeing workers often take labor values with them; the now very red Arkansas and Missouri voted to raise the minimum wage in November referendums. Likewise, Utah, Nebraska and Idaho voted to expand Medicaid.⁴ These are ideas that are in line with the spirit of FDR but done under a Republican banner. A shift has occurred.

“On its quest for social liberalism, the Party just assumed blue collar workers ... would always remain loyal. Why would they not? Most people can look past social stances that they disagree with as long as the Party is helping them fiscally. The problem came when the party started to forsake unions.”

Democrats gave the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have made it easier for workers to form unions and increased penalties for employers who violate labor laws. This act would have signaled support for the working class. It failed in two consecutive Democrat-controlled congresses; not even Obama strained himself to see it passed.² We can also see Democrats failing to implement pro-union policies where they have direct control. Despite paying lip service to unions, only a handful of Democrats had unionized campaign workers during the 2018 midterms, out of the hundreds of campaigns that were run.³

As the Democrats have shifted away from labor, the Republican Party has actually begun addressing the economic concerns of blue-collar workers. They’ve promised to bring back jobs and build new industries. Even if their implementation is a little “business-friendly,” the gesture has an effect. If anything, Democrats have been proud to block the development of some projects, such as mines in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. Ecological effects aside, people do have to put food on their table, and they tend to avoid the party that is stopping them from doing so. Instead, social issues have become the focus of the Party, ranging from transgender issues to abortion access. These items may not be your main priority if you work 12-hour shifts in a factory or milk cows every morning. For people living paycheck to paycheck, economic policy will always take priority over social issues. However, if the Party’s focus is not economics, if it is instead on an ever-changing list of social issues, then they’re going to start to lose people.

The ways in which many social issues are advocated do not help the situation: aggressive protests, call-out culture, and social media declarations. Opponents of the Democratic Party love to frame these tactics in a negative light and have done an effective job in doing so. The left has become synonymous with the word “snowflake” and images of Berkley, a school that is perpetually on fire. These are extreme stereotypes, but social liberals have not done a great job of disproving them — often taking pride in them. These connotations tend to make social conservatives weary of the Democratic Party. Most people do not want to “join the resistance” — this isn’t Star Wars — they just want to carve out a fair living without much fuss.

I even wonder whether party platforms are the most effective way to promote social change. When a party adopts a particular social stance, they ask their membership to conform to that ideal and force their opposition to oppose it, leading to gridlock. If the Democratic Party loosened their focus on abortion rights, for instance, they could allow more pro-choice Republicans to come to the fore — no longer fearing party condemnation. Social ideals could be more free-flowing and the only rigid political division would be economics. This is the way it once was — a time when a farmer or laborer could safely vote Democrat, knowing that the party stood for them. It was this way when our parents and grandparents voted, and I am hoping it can be this way again.

² “Employee Free Choice Act (Card Check),” *Society for Human Resource Management*. [https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/public-policy/hr-public-policy-issues/pages/employeeefreechoiceact\(cardcheck\).aspx](https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/public-policy/hr-public-policy-issues/pages/employeeefreechoiceact(cardcheck).aspx)

³ Alex Seitz-Wald, “Democrats love unions. Just not for their own campaign workers.”, *NBC News*, April 15, 2018.

⁴ Kirk Johnson, “Voters Weigh In on Key Issues Through More Than 150 Ballot Initiatives,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2018.

A Case for Masochism

Ananda Easley (2019)

Art by Tomas Dandas (2020)

Disclaimer: I am NOT saying that we should be purposefully finding ways to suffer. I am NOT saying that we should harm ourselves. This piece is not directed at those who have experienced major trauma (Although, I do believe they could still gain insights). This is a message for those who have lived relatively pain-free lives and, as a result, now suffer from apathy, anxiety, and a sense of meaninglessness.

It's the 1950's. Rural North Carolina. A thin, dark-haired woman, her shoulder-length hair curled and lips painted dark red, looks at the camera and laughs. Her new husband, well-built and angular, takes her picture. Little did the woman know that in the years to follow, she would help her husband build their house board by board, give birth to a strong-willed baby girl, and watch her second child come home with nicotine poisoning from the tobacco leaves he picked every day. She would helplessly watch her husband surrender to leukemia and proceed to live for 30 years on her own, until she also succumbed to cancer and dementia. She would stubbornly cling to her ways, despite living with pain both forced upon her and of her own making. Why? I hope to explore the answer. From my grandmother's story, we can learn what it means to willingly live through pain, how to appreciate its lessons, and how to create a healthy form of masochism to avoid worse pain in the long run.

However, just as pain can pinpoint an issue, it can also be harnessed in healthy doses to protect in the future. Just as exposure to a cultured virus (aka a vaccine) boosts your immune system, small doses of pain can prevent catastrophic damage in the long run. I would argue that the subconscious desire to avoid pain is contributing to millions of unhappy, unhealthy Americans. While my grandmother was not the perfect picture of health, her generation experienced much lower rates of various mental illness and chronic diet and exercise-related physical conditions.¹

The issue is that our modern technologies allow us to bypass painful, but valuable opportunities for growth. For example, we have no need to hunt for our food... we only need to open the nearest fridge. We don't even need to entertain ourselves using creative and energy-consuming activities, games, or hobbies, for that matter. (Ask your grandparents what they did for fun. I dare you.)

“The issue is that our modern technologies allow us to bypass painful, but valuable opportunities for growth.”

First and foremost, pain is a useful tool. It is a signal that something is wrong and needs to be fixed. On the most basic level, physical pain demands immediate attention. It overrides almost every other sensation. For example, when you have a cramp, a cut, or some sort of injury, it can be almost impossible to tune it out and focus on other tasks. How many people do you see continuing to walk casually on a broken leg? None. Similarly, how many people function well in states of extreme anxiety? Not many. Pain is an indication that something needs to change.

We can watch Netflix for hours without moving an inch. So, we come to a strange dilemma. Do we create pain for ourselves in order to be healthy, or do we continue to avoid it for the sake of comfort?

The body is “anti-fragile,” as coined by Jonathan Haidt.² It needs to experience some strain in order to grow. Weight lifting, running, biking, and exercise generally hurts. But those micro muscle tears are what allow the fibers to stretch, grow, and rebuild. For some people, the endorphin rush and feeling of accomplishment is worth the pain. But for others, the discomfort is all they can

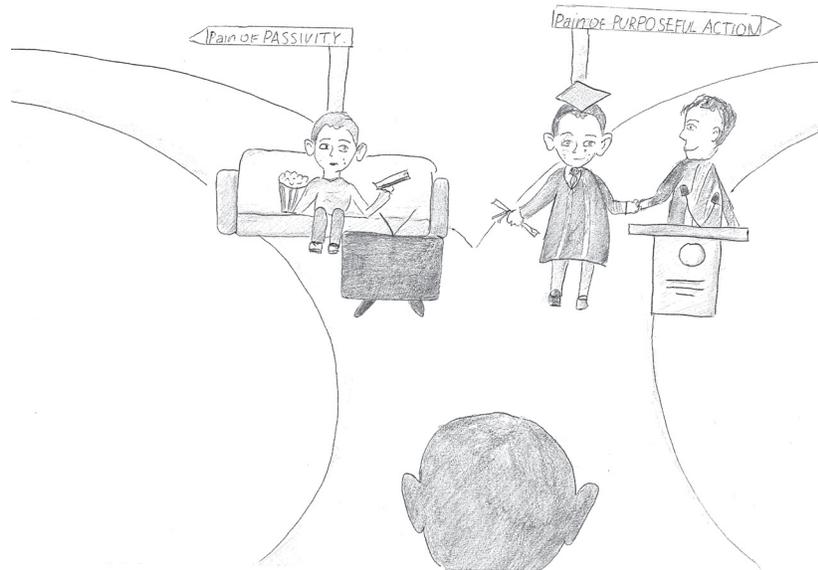
¹ John Ratey, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*; (NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

² Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, *Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2019).

focus on. So why make ourselves uncomfortable? Because we are able to comprehend the long-term benefits of our actions. We can see how the short-term pain of exercise will help us stay healthy and fit years into the future. No other species, as far as we are aware, has this ability.

We can pose a similar argument about our minds. We must stretch them, or even tear them a little—breaking our mindsets in order for new growth to occur. In psychology, the Yerkes-Dodson law refers to

expected to cause emotional distress. It can be assumed that my grandfather's death was incredibly painful for my grandmother and in no way desirable to experience. Sometimes you will encounter pain that doesn't seem to have a purpose. However, finding meaning can lessen the pain. As a result of her widowhood, my grandmother invested more heavily in her community and home projects. If framed correctly, that breakup, failed test, or missed opportunity can become a catalyst for growth and motivation. It can be viewed as a learning experience,



the relationship between stress and performance on a task.³ Tasks can include a race, a test, or a job interview. A moderate amount of stress can make for the optimal performance. Too much, you break. Too little, you fall asleep.

Pushing yourself to read a book, consciously focus on that lecture, or exercise self-control (in whatever way you think you need to) can be incredibly beneficial. It's an investment. For example, more conversations than I can count have been sparked by books I've read or obscure facts I've written down in a lecture. Some of these conversations have led to important opportunities, like jobs. You learn; you grow; you build resources for use in the future. That's the whole concept of education—mental strain and growth.

Lastly, after having addressed our bodies and minds, I would like to tackle our emotions. The ability to overcome and use emotional pain makes us more resilient. Emotional pain is incredibly relative to each individual mindset and situation, but some ordeals are typically

an opportunity to try something new, or a chance to do something differently. By changing our perceptions, we can change our emotional experiences.

Lastly, you need to make sure that you have willingly chosen the type of pain you are currently experiencing. Be aware that your brain may trick you into thinking the pain of *doing something* (like actively changing your behavior) will be worse than the pain of your current state. People hate change. I am convinced my grandmother continued to remain faithful, hardworking, and generous throughout her life for two reasons: One, because she was driven to uphold her values and fight for what she believed was right. And two, because she felt that the pain of failure would be worse than the pain of hard work. Failure to raise her children or provide for her husband would have come with social repercussions and a complete loss of identity. She would rather put up with the discomfort of chores and tough love. So, which pain will you choose? The immediate, self-initiated pain of purposeful action, or the slow-onset pain of passivity and apathy?

³ Kendra Cherry, "The Yerkes - Dodson Law and Performance," <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-yerkes-dodson-law-2796027>, (November 16, 2018).

Dual Perspectives

Abortion in the U.S. and How it's Much More than a Life Debate

Becca Buse (2019)

Art by Alijah Goetting (2019)

TRIGGER WARNING: This article contains information about sexual assault and abortion which may trigger survivors.

This semester, I have been leading a book club through the CEPE (Center for Ethics and Public Engagement) on Jodi Picoult's most recent novel, *A Spark of Light*. Picoult's fictional novel describes a day in Mississippi's only abortion clinic where a shooting occurs (Mississippi truly has only one clinic).¹ She tells the story backwards, starting in the evening and working back to the morning. As readers, we slowly discover more about the people at the clinic and why they are there. One woman, Janine, is an anti-abortion activist who goes to the clinic to spy on the practice. Later in the novel, we discover

After reading Picoult's novel, I was unable to forget the dual perspectives that Picoult brings to the abortion debate in America. For many, abortion is about a black or white decision. Life or death. But Picoult paints the spectrum of abortion beautifully in her novel. She shares stories of over a dozen characters who all have their own reasons for needing and wanting an abortion. A person could be pro-choice, but not want an abortion herself. Or maybe the person is pro-life, but is among the few that gets pregnant while using birth control pills, and cannot afford a child. The reasons for having an abortion are unique to each woman. Therefore, we shouldn't

“Many people in America justify their view on abortion without stopping to look at another perspective. This is occurring alongside increasingly restrictive abortion policies across the country. What would happen if the contradictions were put on hold and we instead listened to a different point of view?”

that Janine had an abortion after being gang raped by a group of young boys. She is able to justify her own abortion, but turns a blind eye to all the other reasons women would want to have an abortion. Janine's contradictory view on abortion is exactly what I'd like to focus on. Many people in America justify their view on abortion without stopping to look at another perspective. This is occurring alongside increasingly restrictive abortion policies across the country. What would happen if the contradictions were put on hold and we instead listened to a different point of view?

judge a person by the choices they make in their life. What we can do is make sure that each woman has the option to make her own informed decisions.

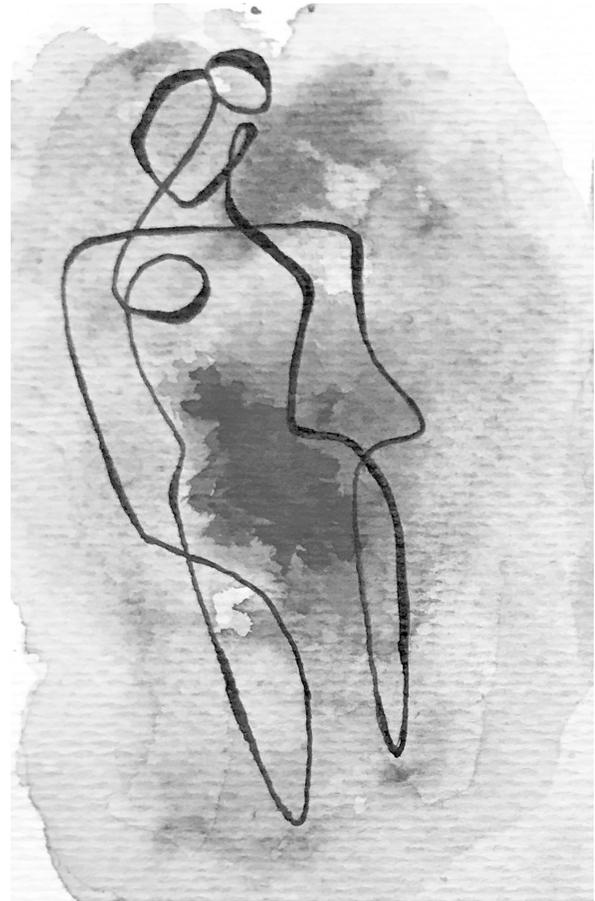
To find out more context on abortion history in America, I had a conversation about the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* with Lynne, a woman from my book club. While I thought the history of abortion in America began there, she corrected me and reminded me that abortions can be traced beyond *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Before 1973, while Lynne was working in Chicago, she knew multiple women who had ways of having an abortion, despite

¹ Jenny Jarvie, "In a State with Only One Clinic, Mississippi Approves the Most Restrictive Abortion Ban in the U.S.," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 08, 2018.

it being illegal. In this example, she emphasized an important misconception about abortion: if it is illegal, it cannot be done. In contrast, Lynne believes that people will always find a way to have an abortion, regardless of the law and their economic status.

Lynne also shared with me two women's stories: one who decided to have an abortion after an amniocentesis test came back positive (her child would have a disability), and another woman who *didn't* have an abortion after a positive test. Lynne shared these two stories with me to emphasize the importance of each woman and the extremely difficult choice each had to make. As Lynne reflected, she told me, "It is a terribly hard decision that hasn't gotten easier." I was surprised to hear that she thought that deciding to have an abortion hasn't gotten any easier, but after my own reflection I could agree with her statement. The abortion debate in America has turned into a battleground between two opposing sides, which has taken the focus away from women.

The current politics surrounding abortion in America is hard to avoid; almost daily, there are headlines about states tightening abortion laws. These restrictive policies ignore the needs of many women and have dangerous effects. If *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, it would not stop women from having abortions, it would only increase the chances of a woman harming herself to remove a pregnancy that she does not want. Many countries in which abortion is illegal have extremely high maternal mortality rates as a result. This is especially true in Latin America, where there are 23,000 maternal deaths per year, and many of these have a direct correlation to lack of access to abortion.² In current American politics, it is common to hear people throw around the idea of overturning *Roe v. Wade* to solve the abortion issue. Ironically, this idea would not have the results that *Roe* opponents would want, since many Americans would still have access to abortions even if *Roe* was overturned. Nevertheless, in a growing number of states, anti-abortionists are attempting to restrict abortion law in hopes of challenging *Roe v. Wade*. Just last month, Ohio changed its law to ban abortion after a fetal heartbeat (which is 6 weeks).³ Anti-abortion activists, like those in Ohio, hope that such



laws will cause a case to rise to the Supreme Court. If their attempts work, the long-debated topic will once again be heard by the Supreme Court, but this time with intensified public opinion.

It remains puzzling to me that abortion continues to be a highly-debated subject in politics almost fifty years after legalization. Democrats and Republicans are expected to be either pro-choice or pro-life to be elected. It also frustrates me that abortion ideology continues to be a deciding factor when a president chooses a justice on the Supreme Court. Currently, the Supreme Court only has three female justices out of nine, which means that men continue to make decisions for American women on a daily basis. It seems contradictory that men are creating regulations on what a woman can do with her body. Why is the woman's perspective lost from this debate? Maybe now is just the time to start listening to women, to let them tell their own stories and make their own decisions.

2 A. Acosta, E. Cabezas, and J. Chaparro, "Present and Future of Maternal Mortality in Latin America," *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 70 (2000): 125-131. doi:[10.1016/S0020-7292\(00\)00235-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292(00)00235-6)

3 NPR, "A Bill Banning Most Abortions Becomes Law In Ohio." <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/11/712455980/a-bill-banning-most-abortions-becomes-law-in-ohio> (Accessed April, 18, 2019)

One for the Angels

Kari Jacobson (2021)

Last October, I attended a Reformation symposium lecture about the revision of Luther College's mission statement. This statement played a major role in my decision to come to Luther; I was energized by the hope and action suggested by the "liberating power of faith and learning." The initial paragraph of the statement reads: "As people of all backgrounds, we embrace diversity and challenge one another to learn in community, to discern our callings, and to serve with distinction for the common good." We state that the "liberating power of faith and learning" enables us to enact our mission. Do we, as a college, foster learning *and* faith?

A speaker on campus this year remarked that the *telos*, the ultimate object or aim, of a college or university is often reflected in their motto. Yale's *telos* is *lux et veritas* (light and truth);

"To welcome and encourage religious diversity and dialogue, a college needs to provide resources for students to develop holy envy, or an admiration for aspects of religions other than one's own. But one can only develop holy envy if they are knowledgeable about the principles of each religion."

Harvard's, *veritas* (truth); and Luther's, *Soli Deo Gloria* and *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum* (To God alone be the glory and the Word of God remains forever). According to our motto and mission statement, we are a college of the church. As people of faith, we still bring glory to God through our learning.

One way in which Luther intertwines faith and learning is through the core requirements of Introduction to Biblical Studies and a second religion elective. On the first day of Introduction to Biblical Studies, I learned that we would be analyzing the Bible as literature from an intersectional lens to remedy the past injuries for

which the Bible has been used as justification. In English courses it is common to both read a text in context and apply a modern lens—Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, queer, psychoanalytical, etc.—to a text. Some historians would argue that this practice of applying modern standards to a past age is anachronistic. I personally appreciate studying literature with both modern lenses and historical context. There is a difference, however, between reading the Bible as literature and as a Christian.

Throughout my life, I learned that being a Christian and an intellectual were not mutually exclusive identities. One should be able to study the Bible as literature, a historical document, and a holy text. It is important for people of faith to identify and reconcile the tension between these three readings of the Bible.

Within the study of religion in academia and in Luther Biblical Studies courses, it is a trend to read short stories and articles that address various facets of human identity, such as gender, race, and class. Biblical scholars and students then analyze how the prejudices of various biblical sources and authors are imbedded into the Bible itself. According to this interpretation, the Bible is a collection of many well-crafted stories featuring people who teach the fallible character of Jesus a lesson. In the academic study of the Bible at Luther, the traditional Christian perspective is often instantly labeled as harmful and silenced, rather than dissected and debated, in relation to aspects of identity. 📖 10

When a professor presents a single interpretation of a passage as correct, without addressing any alternative interpretations, the power of faith and learning is no longer liberating.

Many Luther students leave their first religion course filled with so many doubts and contradictions that they give up on religion entirely, instead of being able to struggle with their questions in a supportive and intellectually diverse environment. One classmate said, “I don’t see how you can take biblical studies and not come out an atheist.” Luther has failed in its mission to “affirm the liberating power of faith and learning,” unless the implicit mission is to liberate students from their faiths.

“We as students should question the Bible, work through our doubts, and consult other texts; yet, we need support from the professors who introduce us to contradictions.”

To welcome and encourage religious diversity and dialogue, a college needs to provide resources for students to develop *holy envy*, or an admiration for aspects of religions other than one’s own.¹ But one can only develop *holy envy* if they are knowledgeable about the principles of each religion. The best way to learn the principles of different religions is to take courses on theology — the study of the nature of God and religious belief. Despite the many theology courses that Luther offers, Biblical Studies is a prerequisite to these theology courses, instead of the other way around. This means that students lack a solid foundation in theology when they take Biblical Studies. It means that many students do not understand the intended purpose and ideology of the Bible as a sacred Christian text before interpreting it with a modern lens.

Interpretations of the Bible make little sense without understanding theology, even when read as literature. Without God’s divinity and

Christ’s sacrifice for humanity, the complements to any plot, characterization and motivation, are missing. The omniscient God would not have sent his son Jesus to suffer the abuses of humanity if he did not value them as individuals in his greater plan for their salvation. This core Christian principle is not discussed in Biblical Studies courses. This grave omission is like withholding a piece of a puzzle; the picture is incomplete.

While students can be more intentional about bringing their religious questions to class, rather than accepting professor’s opinions on their *in loco parentis*² authority, academic disagreement is a lofty dream in Biblical Studies courses.

Students fear disapproval from their peers and professors and eliminate the cognitive dissonance by surrendering their beliefs or reiterating their professor’s opinion for assessments.

But even if they refuse to give up their faith, it’s an undue burden on students to struggle alone with the contradictions between faith and learning. Faculty and staff at Luther are responsible for providing students with opportunities for the discussion and debate on which Luther, as a liberal arts college of the church, prides itself. Yes, we as students should question the Bible, work through our doubts, and consult other texts; yet, we need support from the professors who introduce us to contradictions.

Maybe this “pitch for the angels” is too much to ask for. Maybe students can no longer discover their vocations by finding the intersection of faith and learning at Luther. But this intersection is why I am here today and is what I hope a Luther education continues to value for future students.

1 Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2019).

2 In the place of a parent

An Equitable Community

Ashalul Aden (2020)

To me, “community” means a large group of people who are there for us when times are tough; it means people who are there for us when we need encouragement, love, and support. I am happy and proud to say that I have found that community at Luther. I truly feel the love and support from many of my friends, staff, and faculty members. However, this school year has tested the feeling of community for me.

I am a Black, Muslim, Woman. I have three distinct identities that are constantly under attack. For my own well-being, for my own *sanity*, it helps to know that I have a community behind me that supports me and people who look like me. Unfortunately, this is not the case for all students. Luther College has a retention issue when it comes to students

many events on campus this year. We had our reception in Norby, we hosted Ibram Kendi, a world-renowned speaker and historian, as our distinguished lecturer this semester, and many other events. When I extended invitations for students to attend these events, there was a common response amongst a specific group of people. I had people tell me, “These events are for students of color, because they are the ones who are working to make the school more inclusive.” Let me write that again for you! “These events are for students of color, because they are the ones who are working to make the school more inclusive.” I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard that statement this school year. Any time I hear such a comment, my heart breaks a little. It is not the job of black and brown people to make the world a better place for themselves. It is not the job of black and brown people here at Luther to make

“Oppressed and marginalized members of the community cannot bear the burden of the work. If we truly want to be a part of a beloved community, we need to work together as a community to strive for equity and equality.”

of color. There are many reasons why this is the case. However, the most common reason I hear—other than the fact that they deal with too much racism here—is that Luther College was not able to provide the community they needed to thrive. They often found themselves alone. They did not have the community they needed. At Luther College.

This year, I have had the great opportunity to serve as the President of the Black Student Union. It is our 50th anniversary! In celebration of that milestone, we have held

Luther a more inclusive environment. It is the job of Every. Single. One. Of. Us. Regardless of our gender identity, race, sexual orientation, or able-ness! We should all work together to make Luther College a place for all people. Fighting for social justice is something that we (human beings) all have to work on. Oppressed and marginalized members of the community cannot bear the burden of the work. If we truly want to be a part of a beloved community, we need to work together as a community to strive for equity and equality.

I see more black and brown faces at “inclusive” events because this is their livelihood. At these events, black and brown people can see who their allies are. They can see people they can relate to, and allies they can rely on. I go to these events because I know people who care for me and my well-being will be there. I go to these events because they show me who are the truly strong, active members of

seminary’s belief in a Biblical justification of slavery. Instead, these members decided to form their own college—Luther.¹ Luther’s founders chose a path of courage and solidarity, even though this involved great risks. Starting a college in 1861, when the nation was at war, was a great risk, but here we are. We are here today because people decided to truly care for their neighbor and wanted to build a community for all people. I love being at Luther College. I

“Every student here deserves to feel welcomed and to feel that there are people here who truly care for their well-being. Let us commit to being to be the best version of ourselves so we can help build this amazing community at Luther.”

my community here at Luther College. There is a power of presence that comes from attending events at Luther College that expand our minds on the topic of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and able-ness. Unfortunately, at these events, I often see the same faces.

Luther College was founded because of pressing questions of racial justice in 1861. Luther College began after lay members of the Norwegian Lutheran Synod objected to sending students to Concordia Seminary because of the

love all the friends, staff, and faculty members that have been with me on my journey here. I love that they are a part of my community and that I am a part of theirs. I want every person that comes to Luther to feel that community the minute they step on campus. Every student here deserves to feel welcomed and to feel that there are people here who truly care for their well-being. Let us commit to being to be the best version of ourselves so we can help build this amazing community at Luther.

¹ Richard Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 221.