

Erika DiPasquale  
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### The Function of Racism in the Wizarding World

Racism is prominent in nearly every society, even fictional ones like the wizarding world in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. The racist ideology consists of one ethnic group considering themselves superior to other races. Regardless that the racial segregation of the twentieth century is no longer prominent, discrimination against individuals for the color of their skin is still apparent in today's day and age. Rowling's treatment of race in the *Harry Potter* series sparked concern among academics. Because pure-blood supremacy, slavery, and a species-based hierarchy exists in the wizarding world, did Rowling intend to promote or fight racism? According to Elaine Ostry and Susan McWilliams, the series "enacts a great 'race war'" in order "to broaden children's perspectives on social justice" and provide a "model for good citizenship" (Ostry 89, 96, McWilliams 150). Thus, readers learn about the complex forms that racism takes while realizing its negative impact on society. In order to teach readers that racism is not justifiable, Rowling emphasizes how detrimental the prejudice against creatures and muggle-borns is to society; furthermore, she exaggerates how unappealing racism is by portraying racists as evil and those who fight against racism as heroes.

While racism in the real world refers to one's skin color, racism in the wizarding world does not. Although Dean Thomas is "a black boy," Angelina Johnson is a "black girl," Parvati Patil is likely Indian, and Cho Chang is likely Asian, they are all Gryffindors and are not discriminated against for their skin color (*Sorter's Stone* 122, *Order of the Phoenix* 224). According to Lyubansky, "the racial identifiers seem to exist only as a vehicle for Rowling to show how [geographical] race has no real meaning in her magical universe" (234). Mrs. Finnigan's explanation for her "shamrock-covered tent" at the Quidditch World Cup illustrates

the wizarding world's indifference towards skin color: "why shouldn't we show our colors?" (*Goblet of Fire* 82). Because one can express his or her ethnicity without concern in the wizarding world, the geographical location where a wizard is born is irrelevant in determining his or her social class; however, how magical one's genealogy is *does* fuel the racist sentiments in the wizarding world. Consequently, George Weasley's and Angelina Johnson's relationship—a white boy and a black girl—is not controversial, while James Potter's marriage to muggle-born Lily is met with insults to their family (*Goblet of Fire* 394, *Order of the Pheonix* 784). Lily's parents being non-magical humans, or muggles, is an issue for the wizarding society, but Angelina's skin color is not. The insignificance of geographical race in relationships demonstrates the absolute tolerance that the wizarding world has for one's skin color, especially when in contrast with the importance of blood-purity in relationships. In order to extend this tolerance to include all species and blood-lines, Rowling portrays racism as unjustifiable throughout the series.

Although skin color is insignificant in the wizarding world, society limits one's opportunities depending on one's species, which prevents society from reaching its potential. Werewolves and giants "suffer from the stereotypes placed on them," according to Ostry (95). Remus Lupin—a werewolf—is "the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher"; however, he resigns from Hogwarts out of fear that the parents of Hogwarts students "will not want a werewolf teaching their children" regardless that "Wolfsbane potion" makes him harmless (*Prisoner of Askaban* 423-424). Lupin's resignation is a disservice to the wizarding society because Hogwarts students will not be as prepared against the Dark Arts without such a great teacher. Since the general mistrust of werewolves hurts society more than it protects it in this case, there is no justification for the discrimination against werewolves.

Society's prejudice against giants has the same injurious effect on the wizarding world. When the *Daily Prophet* publicizes that Hagrid is a half-giant, he receives letters calling him "a monster," motivating him to resign as gamekeeper and the Care of Magical Creatures professor. (*Goblet of Fire* 454). Luckily, Dumbledore does not allow him to resign. Those that discriminate against Hagrid ignore that he is also half-wizard from his father's pure-blood family, revealing how ridiculous the racist ideology is. Hagrid displays a "very kind nature" through his consistent desire to care for and protect innocent creatures such as a baby dragon and a hippogriff (*Goblet of Fire* 179). These actions are not consistent with the prejudiced belief that all giants are "vicious" and "like killing" (*Goblet of Fire* 430); however, this prejudiced stereotype nearly barred Hagrid from continuing to serve society well as Hogwart's gamekeeper. Even more so, the popular "hate" of giants causes the Minister of Magic, Fudge, to refuse "to extend [giants] the hand of friendship," which would prevent their population from rejoining Voldemort's side in the second war (*Goblet of Fire* 708). The vicious stereotype that giants suffer blind the wizarding community from their potential to help them defeat Voldemort, whom they fear much more than giants. Fudge and the general public choose to succumb to their own prejudice beliefs rather than gain an advantage over Voldemort. Therefore, Rowling clearly portrays racism as a fatal flaw of society rather than a reasonable ideology.

While werewolves and giants undergo discrimination, the wizarding world subjects house-elves to slavery. No creature other than the house-elf suffers this treatment; therefore, Rowling communicates that "the house-elves are enslaved in a world that makes judgments on the basis of race" (Carey). Most wizards try to justify house-elf enslavement by claiming that "the elves are happy" and that one would be "makin' 'em unhappy ter take away their work" (*Goblet of Fire* 125, 265). Although these ignorant claims are consistent with Winky's

depression upon being freed, Dobby is ecstatic to be a paid elf at Hogwarts (*Goblet of Fire* 379). Ostry considers Winky's and the average house-elves' desire to remain enslaved as "false consciousness": when one is psychologically made to believe what his or her purpose is by a greater power (96). In this case, the greater power is the wizard community that imposes the purpose of blindly obeying one's master onto the elf population. This "false consciousness" prevents the elves from gaining rights because society permeated the idea that they're not supposed to be free into their culture. Rowling emphasizes that "the house-elves' preference for enslavement is a product of oppression rather than an exercise of free will" by juxtaposing Dobby's love for freedom with Winky's shame (Lyubansky 245). Without Dobby's unique mindset, the argument that house-elves like enslavement may appear true. So, Rowling exaggerates the lack of explanation for enslaving house-elves via Dobby's liberated attitude in order to prove that a society is disgraceful to limit one's opportunity based on one's race.

As stereotypes subjugate certain species in the wizarding world, parentage oppresses the human population. Racist wizards, such as the Malfoys, call muggle-born wizards "Mudbloods" (*Chamber of Secrets* 115). Because "one of the worst insults leveled against African Americans is 'mud people,'" Rowling parallels the prejudice that muggle-born wizards face to the discrimination that Black people experience in the real world (Ostry 92). Doing so projects the awful connotation that Black racism has in this century onto the discrimination against muggle-born wizards in the wizarding world. Furthermore, Slytherin's desire to bar muggle-born wizards from education is similar to white-supremacists' efforts to prevent the integration of the public school system in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. If Slytherin and the other racists had their way, Hermione—a muggle-born witch—would not be able to attend Hogwarts despite achieving "the best marks of [her class]" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 307). Rowling hyperbolizes Hermione's intelligence

in an effort to emphasize the insignificance that one's parentage actually has in one's achievements. Hermione's strengths in conjunction with the similarities between white-supremacy and pure-blood supremacy convey the irrationality of racism in both the wizarding and real worlds.

Rowling further denounces the discrimination that muggle-born wizards suffer by criticizing pure-blood supremacy. A wizard born to parents of completely magical ancestries is a pure-blood. The idea of pure-blood supremacy traces back to Slytherin, one of the founders of Hogwarts, who desired to admit only pure-blood wizards into the school (*Chamber of Secrets* 150). Rowling projects a repugnant connotation on pure-blood supremacy by using lackluster adjectives to describe the "sculpture of a witch and wizard sitting on...mounds of carved...muggles" that the Minister of Magic Pius Thicknesse put in the Ministry's Atrium. This hierarchal image based on race is "darker," "frightening," and "vast," indicating that its "Magic is Might" message is just as unappealing as the statue itself (*Deathly Hallows* 242). In order to further reject the notion of pure-blood supremacy, Rowling highlights the unattractive traits of the story's three most prominent pure-bloods. Ron Weasley is an average boy and Draco Malfoy is a "*bad Dark [wizard]*" while Neville Longbottom "can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up" (*Goblet of Fire* 381, *Chamber of Secrets* 112). By exaggerating the undesirable characteristics of these characters, Rowling demonstrates that a pure-blood does not necessarily possess any advantages over wizards of other ancestries. As a result, Slytherin and the other racist wizards cannot justify their prejudices against muggle-born and half-blood wizards.

By portraying Voldemort as a racist antagonist as well, Rowling heightens the irrationality surrounding racism. Voldemort hates muggles not only because the "blood of Salazar Slytherin" runs through his veins, but also because his muggle father both plagued

Slytherin's pure-blood lineage and "abandoned [him] even before [he] was born" (*Chamber of Secrets* 314). In addition, he was "raised by Muggles" at an orphanage after his witch mother died (*Chamber of Secrets* 317). His unhappy experiences with muggles in conjunction with his Slytherin-pedigree motivate his efforts to fulfill Slytherin's intentions of a pure-blood society. Since race is the driving force behind Voldemort's quest for absolute power, racism in the wizarding world adopts an evil connotation.

Rowling exaggerates the villainous nature of racism by characterizing Voldemort analogously to Hitler. Hitler was not Aryan and Voldemort is not a pure-blood wizard; however, Hitler waged a genocide against non-Aryan people and Voldemort declared that all non-pure-blood wizards are his "enemies" (*Chamber of Secrets* 138). Both villains "possess[ed] a vision of racial purity" despite their mixed ancestries (Ostry 89). By accentuating these similarities between Voldemort and Hitler, Rowling projects Hitler's heinous reputation onto Voldemort and his racist sentiments. Furthermore, Hitler's belief that Aryan people are superior does not justify the number of innocent people that he killed. Because Voldemort's "race war" parallels Hitler's, Voldemort can't justify his murders with the claim that muggles and half-bloods are inferior either (Ostry 89). Consequently, the series clearly articulates how vile racism is.

Rowling contrasts the evil of racism with how heroic the characters that fight against prejudice are. Because "each 'good' character, without exception, not only explicitly denounces prejudice...but behaves accordingly," according to Lyubansky, Rowling promotes the theme that no good comes from racism (238). Dumbledore hires Lupin, Hagrid, Dobby, and Winky despite knowing that each is of an unpopular species. By providing characters of all species the opportunity to channel their talents into their work at Hogwarts, Dumbledore proves that one's species—or race—does not affect one's ability. McWilliams notes that Dumbledore didn't *free*

all the house-elves at Hogwarts because “he would be freeing them into a world where, because of legal and social prejudices, they have no chance of procuring gainful employment” (154); hence, Dumbledore’s seemingly ambivalent attitude toward house-elves does not classify him as a racist, but rather as a benevolent hero. Because Dumbledore encourages inclusion at Hogwarts and in the wizarding world, he is not only a hero, but also a communicator of the message that racism is unreasonable.

In addition to Dumbledore’s inclusion policy, Rowling uses Hermione’s abolitionist efforts to express the fatal role that racism has in society. Hermione founds the “Society For the Promotion of Elfish Welfare,” “S.P.E.W.” for short, in an effort to ultimately abolish elf enslavement (*Goblet of Fire* 224). By “translat[ing] abolitionist sentiment into the magical world” through S.P.E.W., Rowling parallels house-elf enslavement to the unjust African Slave System of the Eighteenth century (Carey). Both house-elf and African enslavement depends on racism. One race of people decides that they are superior to another race, which they consider justification for enslaving the supposedly *lesser* race. Eighteenth century abolitionists argued that people of all races were equal and had equal rights while Hermione argues that house-elves have “just as much right as wizards to be unhappy...[and] the right to wages, and holidays, and proper clothes” (*Goblet of Fire* 538). The similarities between Hermione’s and the abolitionists’ manifestos function to reveal that house-elf enslavement in the wizarding world is as unjust as African enslavement in the real world. Without this parallel, the racist system of house-elf enslavement would not appear wrongful enough to communicate Rowling’s message that racism is unjustifiable.

In order to magnify how deplorable racism is, Rowling highlights how open-minded Harry Potter—the protagonist and series’ hero—is throughout the series in regards to creatures’

and humans' race. Harry judges creatures and wizards by their character rather than their race and treats them accordingly. After he learns that Lupin is a werewolf and Hagrid is half-giant, Harry asks Lupin not to resign and exclaims that he doesn't "care that [Hagrid is] half-giant" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 424, *Goblet of Fire* 450). He values these mentors for the good things they had done for Harry and for Hogwarts instead of considering them to be the stereotypes that society labels them with. This open-minded attitude is apparent in the friends that Harry chooses. Harry's best friends are a muggle-born and a poor pure-blood despite Malfoy advising him not "to go making friends with the wrong sort" (*Chamber of Secrets* 108). Because he doesn't value how magical his friends' lineages are, Rowling stresses Harry's nondiscriminatory inclination. Such non-racist behavior contains a favorable connotation because the hero of the story admires one's character as opposed to one's race.

Rowling heightens Harry's race-impartial mindset through his interactions with Dobby, the house-elf. When Harry meets Dobby, he instinctively treats him like "*an equal*," which prompts Dobby's admiration for Harry's "goodness" and "greatness" (*Chamber of Secrets* 13). Harry continues to respect Dobby as a benevolent character throughout the series by tricking Dobby's master into freeing him and ultimately burying the elf in a proper grave (*Chamber of Secrets* 338, *Deathly Hallows* 478). The fact that Dobby is a house-elf does not impede Harry's treatment of the character. Instead, Harry values Dobby's willingness to sacrifice himself for Harry's and society's benefit. Rowling emphasizes the idea that discriminating against house-elves is immoral through Harry's statement that Dobby "can't have met many decent wizards" if one hadn't asked him to sit down prior to meeting Harry (*Chamber of Secrets* 14). This implies that no racist wizard is righteous. Even Harry's decision not to free Kreacher, the house-elf that he inherits, out of fear that he "would become his adversary," remains consistent with his value



of “good service” over race (McWilliams 144-145). He didn’t keep Kreacher enslaved due to him being a house-elf; alternatively, he kept Kreacher enslaved because he believed the elf would help Voldemort and, thereby, harm society. By presenting the series’ hero as an open-minded, unprejudiced character, Rowling highlights how terrible racism is.

If all of Rowling’s efforts to illustrate how unjustified racism is does not convince the reader, Dumbledore’s declaration that “it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be” will (*Goblet of Fire* 708). Judging an individual based on one’s species or ancestry—“what someone is born”—does not accurately gauge one’s character—“what they grow to be.” Therefore, all the discrimination in the wizarding world, whether in regards to one’s species or one’s ancestry, ultimately hurts the society in some way. Only the story’s heroes counteract such issues through their actions and attitudes, teaching the reader that fighting racism is the right thing to do. Rowling’s use of these techniques fulfills her intentions to illustrate the unjustifiable nature of racism.

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