

# Bryant University

HONORS THESIS



## How Understanding History Through Historical Fiction Affects Gender Relations

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**ABSTRACT**

This project will demonstrate how an understanding of history through historical fiction affects gender relations. It looks at not only the studied value of historical teaching but also the history itself. The history of women, particularly women of color and other marginalized groups, is often neglected in the Public Education system globally. In higher-level education, educational gaps are not always addressed. Understanding what led to the core values popularly held in society today can simultaneously allow us to reevaluate them. Placing a high value on the modesty and sexual inexperience of women are two examples I will address. This thesis examines three major periods in US history where women were negatively affected by the standards and beliefs of the times. It shows what women have historically done to cause a shift in these mindsets. Gaining this understanding offers insight for women in modern-day society to continue to improve gender relations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Understanding the history of society's core beliefs is essential to deconstructing them. In the United States, the study of history has varied depending on geographical location. In a study concerning the evolution of public education in the United States, it is shown to be more decentralized than in many other countries. The United States Constitution does not specifically address educational governance, which gives individual states the greatest control over education, leaving the federal government with limited control (CEP, 2020, p.6). Public schools, due to this decentralization, reflect the values of a specific geographical location. For this reason, achieving any one goal within the public education system can be difficult. The foundation of the public education system was to “prepare people for jobs and citizenship, unif[y] a diverse population, and promot[e] equity(CEP, 2020)” which is made difficult by modern conflicting values.

In a study completed by Christopher Berd, it is stated that “Teaching methods and curricular choices have long been identified by many scholars as barriers to the study of history (Collingwood, 1946).” This is due to many factors, two of which are the emphasis on memorization and the absence of understanding further values of history. The results of a 2019 study conducted by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation concluded that only 27% of people under the age of forty-five were able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of history. These results showed a pattern of lack of knowledge regarding their constitutional rights, with “25 percent [not knowing] that freedom of speech was guaranteed under the First Amendment(WWF, 2019)”

Women’s history contains many disparities. Women who are considered notable by historians are highlighted for different achievements that were viewed as significant at the time. This could be for positive or negative achievement, as women who were considered “deviant” were occasionally included in historical texts. While it is not unheard of for a woman to lead a life documented by historians, most women were largely left out of the recoded history. This is often the case for the lives of the average woman, especially those whose stories were not intertwined with those of historically notable men. For example, in the time of the Courtesan,

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women who practiced this work were noted, but were not documented in much detail. This is also the case for “respectable women” and women in poverty (Lerner, 1975).

The trend of ignoring the majority of women at different periods led to there being very little research into the “ways in which women were aided and affected by the work of these “great women,”(1975)”. There are exceptions to this rule, where some significant female contributions to history have had their impacts on young women recorded. Veronica Franco, who lived in Venice, Italy in the Medieval period is an example of this. She was noted by historians to “challenge patriarchal notions, religious assumptions, and advocate women as perfectly capable as separate, independent beings from men (Cohenour, 2004)”. Her life was highly documented, making it easier to form an accurate picture of her effects on society at the time.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a great amount of literature related to my topic available on the internet as well as in physical form in local libraries. However, this literature documents mostly the history itself and does not focus on the realities of learning history and its effect on women specifically. The nature of this thesis allows for flexibility in what date of publication can be used for research. This is because historical data has been published at all different times throughout history. Many of these older resources remain relevant today. However, resources on the effects of historical education on women require more recent publications, which are few and far between.

Regarding the three specified periods of focus, there are a great number of well-sourced articles regarding each of them. These are most consistent when addressing the Medieval time in Venice as well as the time of Magdalene's homes in Ireland. The sources containing information about ancient Greece occasionally come to conflicting conclusions. This is largely due to the overlap between history and mythology. For example, most historical literature regarding a plague in Greece, or general discourse was dedicated to having “Angered the gods”.

**Joel M. Hoffman, "Was There Really a Virgin Birth in the Bible?", n.p. [cited 22 May**

**2022].Online:[https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/people/related-articles/was-there-really-a- virgin-birth-in-the-bible](https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/people/related-articles/was-there-really-a-virgin-birth-in-the-bible)**

The above article is a good source for many questions concerning the Bible as it contains a lot of research regarding the translation from Greek to English. This is incredibly relevant to my topic of choice. The limits of this source are that while each contributor is a known scholar, it would be useful to cross-examine the statements made as each article has only one contributor. Another benefit to this source is that each page answers a concise question, and lists the qualifications of the author for the given article.

**Anisia Iacob “The Life of Roman Women during the Roman Empire”. The Collector. 18**

**August 2021. <https://www.thecollector.com/roman-women-in-roman-empire/>**

The article listed above is a great source of information about life for women during the Roman Empire. This is an in-depth source that describes not only daily life but also the political and legal capabilities of women at the time. The source shows art pieces from that time which are largely sourced from accredited museums. Even education, divorce, and beauty standards are addressed in detail, which is very important when writing realistically.

**“The Ancient Greek World”. Penn Museum. 2002.**

**[https://www.penn.museum/sites/greek\\_](https://www.penn.museum/sites/greek_world/women.html)**

**[world/women.html](https://www.penn.museum/sites/greek_world/women.html)**

This is another good source of information for the historical aspect of my research. The research is sourced from both the Penn Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Research team. The source contains dozens of pages describing everything from politics to the daily lives of women to extra topics like the war heroes of the time. The writing is formal and concise, although each page is short, which limits the amount of information that can be found from this source about each topic.

**Bay NS, Bay BH. Greek anatomist herophilus: the father of anatomy. Anat Cell Biol. 2010 Dec;43(4):280-3. doi: 10.5115/acb.2010.43.4.280. Epub 2010 Dec 31.**

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Herophilus was the teacher of Agnodice but was more famous for his advancements in medicine. Although he was praised commonly for having discovered ovaries, he was also accused of conducting vivisections on living human beings. Herophilus was also the first person to conduct an autopsy, which contradicted beliefs at the time and created a controversy surrounding him. This is also how he discovered the nervous system as well as the digestive system. However, this kind of autopsy was thought to be a “violent impulse” at the time as the soul was believed to be trapped in the body after death.

**Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's tortoise: the veiled woman of ancient Greece*. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2003.**

There's no one clear answer to why women in the ancient world wore veils when outside of their homes and specifically outside of their women's rooms. It's popularly believed that women wore veils to preserve their modesty and avoid sexualization by hiding their features. While this is true, there are also other recorded reasons for veiling. For example, Helen of Troy in the Iliad veiled to hide her tears. This leads researchers to believe there were many suspected uses for veiling.

**“School-related gender-based violence: A global review of current issues and approaches in policy, programming and implementation responses to School Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV).” UNESCO. 2014.**

The literature on gender-based violence relating to education is limited. This UNESCO study is one of the most in depth studies made relating these two subjects. It addresses the importance of the quality of the learning environments and the effects it has. It also studies the root causes of violence. It draws from several studies done on related topics.

**Berg, Christopher. “Why study history? An examination of undergraduate students’ notions and perceptions about history”. Walden University. August 2019.**

This is an examination which compares the perceptions of history that undergraduate students hold. It addresses the decline of interest in learning history. The study also goes into the skills that learning history can build. The question “why study history” is answered in great detail.

**Cohenour, Gretchen. B.A. “VERONICA FRANCO AND FIRST WAVE FEMINISM: REACHING FROM THE PAST, BUILDING TOWARDS THE FUTURE”. May, 2004.**

This is an English Thesis which addresses the first wave feminism that Veronica Franco promoted. This source goes into detail about Veronica Franco’s life, including quotes and information from “The Honest Courtesan”. This relates to modern feminist ideas and compares the two. This is a great resource for information about Veronica Franco’s life as well as what her life led to for women.

**Rosenthal, Margaret. “The Honest Courtesan”. University of Chicago Press. Published July 2012.**

This book is the most in depth study in print about Veronica Franco. It goes through her entire life in detail, listing many of her poems and achievements. There are many quotes from her trial which cannot be easily found through other sources. The author effectively and concisely shows the beliefs that Veronica Franco held.

**Ault, B. 2005. “Housing the Poor and Homeless in Ancient Greece” in *Ancient Greek Houses and Households*, edited by L. C. Nevett and B. A. Ault, 140 -59. Philadelphia: Penn Press.**

This is an interesting look into the difference in housing between the poor in Ancient Greece and the rich. However, the differentiation between these groups was very different at the time. People who were considered poor were simply people who needed to work, and therefore couldn’t be involved in politics. However, people who would be considered poor under our modern-day definition lived in small shacks very close together and often had to work long and grueling hours. These people did not own slaves and their housing was made of cheap materials in constant need of repair.

**“Law and Courts in Ancient Athens: A Brief Overview”. The Kosmos Society. Harvard.edu. 20 September 2018.**

This Harvard Education study of Ancient Greek Law and Courts is a wealth of knowledge about the differences in charges and prosecution depending on the crime committed. There



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were not only differences in jury sizes depending on the magnitude of the crime, but the jury was also always made up of elders and usually people who could no longer work for some reason. All of these were male citizens, meaning they were born in Athens. Homicide courts were especially different from the modern day as they were always made up of the same fifty-one elderly who would serve on the jury until death.

**Sherman, Haley. Bryant University. Personal Interview. 9/21/2022.**

This interview was regarding the process and responsibilities of the Women's Center specifically at Bryant University. The Women's Center provides a range of educational and social programs. Kelly Boutin (the Director of the Hochberg Women's Center & Pride Center), Meghan Kenneally (Pride Center & Advocacy Services Coordinator), Haley Sherman (Coordinator of the Hochberg Women's Center), and Amy Webster (Health Promotion Coordinator) serve as Victim Advocates who work to support and assist victims of sexual misconduct as anonymous resources. Victim Advocates are not confidential resources, but anonymous – meaning they must report statistical data, such as the date and location of the incident, but names will not be included without the consent of the victim. Victim Advocates are not clinically trained psychologists or counselors but can help connect victims to counseling services if they are seeking a confidential disclosure. Advocates may also help connect students to other resources such as Health Services practitioners, campus Chaplains, Title IX Coordinators, the Department of Public Safety, Day One, and Smithfield Police.

Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits sex discrimination in K-12 schools and higher education institutions that receive federal funding. At Bryant, Title IX is a non-confidential resource used when a victim of sex discrimination, or Complainant, wishes for the institution to apply sanctions to the perpetrator, or Respondent, through a formal investigation process. If a victim does not want to undergo a Formal Complaint process, but still reports to Title IX, then they do not have to undergo the process and are offered supportive measures. Any individual who reports an incident to Title IX is offered supportive measures, which include but are not limited to academic support (e.g. rescheduling assignments, projects, and exams; arranging incompletes, leave of absences, or withdrawals; transferring to different courses), safety (e.g. Campus safety escort; Bryant No Contact Orders

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(mutual agreement); advocate accompaniment to Smithfield Police Department to file a police report; advocate accompaniment to Rhode Island District Court for No Contact Order or Restraining Order), housing and work (e.g. Change in campus housing; assistance in finding alternative housing; change of work schedule; assistance in finding alternative employment), and medical support referrals (e.g. Bryant Counseling Services; Bryant Health Services; Transportation to Rhode Island Women & Infants Hospital (SANE Hospital); Recommend other accessible off-campus resources). Bryant No Contact orders are confined to the Bryant Campus and are mutual agreements between all parties involved.

A Formal Student Complaint that undergoes the formal Title IX process may result in sanctions such as a warning, probation, residence hall suspension or eviction, suspension, expulsion, revocation of admission or degree, withholding of a degree, and more than one of the Code's sanctions may be imposed for any single violation. At the end of the process, any party can ask for an appeal to the case. If an incident occurs but does not meet the Title IX standard, then it may be processed through Community Standards as the Sexual Misconduct Policy allows.

**Stephen Bannon. Personal Interview. Bryant University. 12 October 2022.**

In my interview with Stephen Bannon, I asked him a series of questions regarding the process of reporting sexual assaults on the Bryant University Campus. In August 2020, the process of reporting changed under the Trump Administration. Reporting both First and Second-degree sexual assaults to DPS now must be referred to Title Nine. This can include stalking, domestic violence, rape, and dating violence. DPS under these regulations no longer makes a direct report of sexual assaults or investigates until a formal complaint is filed and signed. In that case, only the three certified title nine investigators can do so. At Bryant, these investigations for the most part happen internally. DPS does use the reports from the Women's Center to create a yearly Safety and Clery report.

Before August 2020, if a complainant reported a sexual assault, DPS would offer and suggest advocacy options, but they could also ask how the complainant would like to proceed. The student could decide if they wanted to go forward with a student conduct complaint and would be taken from there. The student could say they don't want the police involved and

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would like to only have an internal investigation. DPS is restricted by the new guidelines in what they can do for complainants. Stephen Bannon stated that “[DPS has] become less involved since august of 2020” about sexual assault proceedings on campus. Today, if somebody is named as a suspect, they must be notified of who made the allegation and therefore have significantly more time between being notified and being interviewed than in the past.

Despite these new regulations, no contact orders can be issued automatically, and if either party violates that they can be brought up on charges. Bryant University hasn't had a single title nine hearing since the changes established in August of 2020, despite receiving 12 reports of first-degree sexual assault in 2021. Bannon also states, “there are respondents out there who have never been held accountable for it” referring to the assaults committed. On average, Bryant University has an average of four to six sexual assaults reported per year, making the 12 reports in 2021 significantly higher than average.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I use several types of research to complete this thesis. The first is an in-depth study of many scholarly articles from each period I am studying. I also looked at several published thesis papers regarding the topics including “Life in Greece for women” and “Legality of Prostitution in 13 century Venice”. This thesis also contains references from novels written about these times and one personal interview. I will write detailed notes from these articles and organize them by period. The writing piece of my project will be completed after the research has been completed. I will also note which research should be included where in a plot outline of the novel. This will ensure I keep all of the important plot points in the story as I write.

This will not involve much statistical research but will instead contain more of a research-based outline only. This may not only include research papers and articles but also documentaries about these periods. This is a more creatively focused project and will therefore be mostly centered around very thorough research about the subject, followed by research into effective writing styles for the historical genre I will be writing within.

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Examples of these sources include some of the sources listed above in the Literature Review section. They will need to be checked for accuracy and relevancy to my topic as they are used.

## **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

To get a more well-rounded view of what led to the societal standards at the time, it's important to understand the religious and political factors at play. As of 2020, 31.11% of the world adheres to Christianity. The populations of 158 countries are predominantly Christian, meaning their ideology is likely influenced by Christianity. For this reason, I chose to focus on the bible over any other religious text. Studying the history of what ideology stems from this text allows people today to gain an understanding of why their core values exist. It also introduces the question if they are relevant today. This begins with the understanding of the Bible as it existed during the Greek and Medieval periods, and today. The Dichotomy of the Two Mary's-commonly referred to in psychology as the "Whore Madonna Complex"-is the idea that women are either categorized as "good" and pure, or "bad" and promiscuous (Bareket, 2018).

The two Mary's referenced in this Dichotomy are the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. Both women at the core of this dichotomy have been grossly misunderstood by society. Mary Magdalene is thought even in the present day to have been the prostitute or sinner who received forgiveness from Jesus. Through research into this subject, it was found that Mary Magdalene was confused with the story of an unnamed sinner who washed Jesus' feet. It was only in 591 that Pope Gregory announced that Mary and this unnamed person were the same, which led to the popularization of that belief in Western Catholic society (Beavis, 2013).

In the case of Mary the mother of Jesus, the popular belief of her having a virgin birth has also been disputed. In the Old Testament, the language used was Hebrew, which used the word "Almah" to describe Mary. This word has two meanings, the first being "virgin" and the second meaning "young woman". In the Jewish faith, there was no value placed on the savior's mother being a virgin. There was very little importance placed on Mary at all as Judaism rejects Christ as savior entirely. In the Catholic faith, this was not the case, and the translation was made in favor of the religious and political beliefs of the time (Wiseman,

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2002). The conclusion that can be made from this historical insight is that the realities of these two women are very different than what was believed. The reality is that neither of these women exists on the opposite ends of a virtuous scale and have instead been misinterpreted by popular belief. It remains that these ideas have had exponential effects on the lives of women for centuries. The polarized representation of women being either “pure” or “impure” can be traced back to ancient Greece (Bereket, 2018).

In Ancient Greece, women led very different lives than men. Although Ancient Greek was a democracy, this only applied to citizens, which were only men, born in the city in which they lived, and who were of a certain age. Although details about women during this period can be limited, there are certain ideologies regarding women that were recorded. Ancient Greece was patriarchy, and women lived mostly confined to their homes. The laws that protected citizens could only protect women through their male relatives and husbands (Anisia, 2021).

Poor and wealthy women during the Greek Empire led extremely different lives. Although both groups lived inside the home during childhood, women in poverty would work in adulthood according to need, while wealthy women would continue inside the house. Education was limited to household skills as well as properly raising children. As late as 62 BCE during the Roman Empire under Emperor Augustus, women who were not married by the age of twenty faced legal penalties as well as marginalization. Although the rise of the Roman empire led to more freedom for women, there were limits to this freedom. Any education a woman received was intended to make her more “entertaining” to her husband, and the overly educated woman was thought to be dangerous as intelligence was believed to be linked to promiscuity. Divorce was allowed under any condition and was not uncommon. This was one action women were allowed to take; however, it was most common for the man to retain custody of any children created during the marriage, making divorce an unsuitable option for a majority of women (Anisia, 2021).

The Christian Bible has impacted societies around the world for centuries and is arguably the most influential book in history (Smith, 1956). The first edition of the bible created by a printing press was distributed in the fifteenth century. However, the Bible was in circulation for

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hundreds of years before this and was previously being copied by hand. The process of copying one bible could take years, and often led to errors and incorrect translations.

Considering the bible, which is thought by people practicing the Christian faith to be the word of one God, it's important to recognize the existence of translational differences as well as added and removed verses. Over time, depending on different political motives and social differences, words were translated from Greek and Hebrew to change their meaning. Whether this is by intentional mistranslation or ignorance is unknown in many cases.

In the year 1611, the King James Bible was created. Six committees were employed to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew, and the New Testament from Latin. These translations were made with the idea of supporting the "ecclesiology of the Church of England" and not finding the original meaning of the texts (Holzwarth, 2018). That is, they were translated to support the theology of the church of England at this time. This version of the bible was widely criticized by scholars such as Hugh Broughton and Thomas Hobbs. One instance of this change is from Psalm 16:22 where the line "...like lions my hands and feet" is changed to "They pierced my hands and my feet" following Christian beliefs more closely. The King also banned the printing of all other versions of the bible, whether they were English copies, Hebrew, or Latin, and stopped for a time to increase the popularity of the version created under him. This version of the bible is still used in some fundamentalist and new Christian religious groups.

During the Middle Ages, the circulating version of the bible was the Latin Vulgate. This was written by St. Jerome who translated the bible from Greek into Latin to make it easily read by the common person. The alternate purpose of this translation was to make an authoritative version of the bible, leading to more changes, which would come to affect Italy during the medieval period. This version left less up to interpretation and encouraged people to respect and obey. St. Jerome's opinions on women have been observed from not only his Vulgate but from saved letters and pamphlets. Two examples of this are shown in the justification letters of his bible translations. In the first, the original Hebrew translation is "Behold, she is with child", while St Jerome expresses his disgust felt for pregnant women, and their "tumor uteri". In the story of Potiphar's wife in Genesis where another man's wife asks Joseph to "lie with her", the line of response is "and he refused." However, St Jerome's translation stresses the immorality

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of her actions. These differences show a bias that would come to affect the treatment of women and their roles concerning men. This was especially true in Catholic societies such as Italy (Barr, 2009).

**GENDER RELATIONS AND HISTORICAL EDUCATION**

Today, decisions regarding gender-based laws are left to the discretion of the leading political party at the time. This is reflected in many policies, with one example from May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, where the Trump administration limited the legal definition of sexual harassment to “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive”. This is a stark contrast to the statement made by Obama in 2016, where he stated, “We are the first administration to make it clear that sexual assault is not just a crime, it can be a violation of a woman's civil rights”. A change considered the most historically notable in recent times is the overturning of Roe V Wade. This 1973 ruling legalized abortion nationally as the supreme court found it to be an unconstitutional restriction of liberty. In 2022, this ruling was overturned after a supreme court decision that a ban on abortion did not violate constitutional rights.

Comprehensive education on history is the foundation for improving gender relations. A quote by HG Wells claims that “human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe”. This quote is expanded upon by Amartya Sen, who is known as “the Father of the concept of Human Development” (Karam, 2015). Around the world, there is gender inequality which is directly affected by education and literacy. As we continue to neglect historical education, we put humanity at greater risk of repeating the tragedies of history.

Amartya Sen places a great focus on the repercussions of illiteracy in women around the world on society. In a 2015 UNICEF report, it's stated that “Gaps in schooling can...directly lead to insecurity by distancing the deprived from the ways and means of fighting against that deprivation.” There are many instances where legal rights to property or protection go unpracticed. This is due to illiteracy and resulting ignorance of the suffering party, as well as the educational advantage of the offending party.

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Gender Socialization is the process of internalizing gender roles and norms. This process influences gender relations by determining the influences that surround children which begin from birth. Another contributing factor to this is formal education, which can allow children to learn outside of the influences in their direct family. Education about history can have an enormous influence on children who are experiencing this socialization while their opinions and sense of self are still forming. The question then becomes how the effects of historical education on gender relations can be measured. First, it's important to evaluate the effectiveness of education. This can be done through the qualitative and quantitative methodology.

There are several measures to evaluate gender relations, one of the more extreme being gender-based violence. A quantitative study from 2014 with contributions by UNESCO observed the effects of education on gender-based violence. The study showed that "the number of years a person spends in school has been shown to have a positive correlation with a decrease in both future victimization and perpetration of physical and sexual violence." This is a promising result for not only women but men as well. Although women and girls are the most common target for Gender-Based Violence, boys and men are also affected. The resulting decrease in both perpetration and victimization is a promising statistic for educational effectiveness (Unesco, 2014).

History specifically is a subject that presents a unique skill set. History doesn't only assist in building empathy for individuals but also to gain an understanding of the actions of entire societies. It can allow a society currently at peace to evaluate past wars and keep history from repeating itself. History also helps us to understand change. If there has been a drastic increase in sexual violence or literacy, "we need to look further back to identify the causes of change." History can even expose how certain societal elements remain unchanged in a largely changed world (Stearn, 2020).

Alternatively, the question has risen if showing recorded historical violence depicted graphically has a positive or negative impact on people. In a 2017 study, the Israeli Palestinian conflict was used to study the impact of increasing the graphic detail when describing a violent event. This showed a negative shift in overall mood as graphic detail was added, and while it strengthened many existing opinions on the conflict, new opinions or ideas did not rise. This



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teaching method was therefore not found to be particularly effective. There are, however, many more effective methods that history can be taught to foster modern-day application.

To encourage the empathy that comes alongside historical teaching, it's important to teach the question of morality, and not simply assign moral justification to the winning side or a convenient scapegoat. Although this is inarguably a simpler approach to teaching history "no lessons at all are learned from history when students are not made to care (Reardon, 2008)." Teaching morality and the complexities of history are more challenging but encourage critical thinking and mindset growth. That is, promoting empathy as an accompaniment to learning.

Provoking empathy in people being educated about historical tragedies cannot be done solely by exposure to extreme imagery. Exposing students to violent imagery doesn't unilaterally build empathy. For this reason, "many find that it isn't until discussing the intricate contexts of violent images in a classroom setting that most students begin to fully appreciate their historical and educational value (Fitchett et al., 2015)".

There is no question that violent history must be taught, but the method that proves most effective is largely debated. In the same study, it is found that "violent images only served to strengthen preexisting attitudes and not foster new ones (Fitchett et al., 2015)". In a 2011 study by Druckman, he uses emphasis framing to provoke new thought surrounding an issue. Emphasis framing occurs when the teacher places emphasis on relevant ideas to consider. This encourages the learner to focus more closely on the given idea. Prompting and encouraging interaction in the classroom can be difficult but can lead to more change than passively learning from lectures.

In the words of a Michigan teacher Carol Sliwka, there is a way of "Connecting to history through historical fiction". This does not propose that historical fiction should serve as the basis of historical learning. Like any fiction, it should be handled with skepticism. However, it is an asset to building initial interest in the subject of history. It is where historical fiction meets classroom education that it can be incredibly beneficial. Where textbook learning can feel unrelatable and difficult to grasp, "Fiction brings historical figures to life and allows students to make important conceptual connections (Sliwka, 2008)". Historical fiction has been coupled with history curriculum for years, across many districts. "Between Shades of Gray" by Ruta

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Sepetys is commonly used to further understanding of the Holocaust. “Kindred” by Octavia Butler is used to show the horrors of slavery while throwing readers into a first-person perspective. Especially when addressing often male focused history, historical fiction can build interest and empathy while showing alternative perspectives.

**AGNODICE, VERONICA FRANCO, AND CHRISTINA MULCAHY**

When discussing the history of Ancient Greece, it’s important to understand the presence of what is now considered mythology in historical records. The issue of mythology is that the record of popularized stories varies by location. The existence of Gods and Goddesses in Ancient Greek society was thought of as a fact as opposed to a belief system. Mythology was closely interwoven in day-to-day life which is why many historical accounts during this period contributed colossal events such as the plague to the distress of the Gods.

There are religious foundations to the popular belief systems in Ancient Greece, many of which also include mythology. A journal article written by Olaya Guerrero discusses the original marriage in Greece which is the marriage between Zeus and Hera. This is thought to be the picture of a perfect marriage and people living in ancient Greece would pray to them before their own marriages. This is especially interesting as the story of the love between these Gods is a story of sexual assault. Zeus asked Hera to marry him, which she rejected. Later, to convince her otherwise, he turned into a bird and created a storm. He was said to have flown out into the storm in front of Hera, where she took pity on him and took him in her arms. He took advantage of this and transformed back into a man, sexually assaulting her. When he asked her to be his wife again, she was so ashamed that she agreed. This is an important reflection of the role of women and their treatment at this time.

The first woman of focus in this thesis is Agnodice, a Greek woman who is considered to be the first-ever midwife. Although she is mentioned in the text, the problem of separating fact from fiction in Greek history stands. Women are largely left out from this time by historians, and the only record of her are based around her teacher, Herophilus of Chalcedon, and art. However, there are supporting factors to her existence. The verification of her teacher,

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Herophilus, has been made. He practiced medicine and discovered the ovary in the late third or early fourth century BC.

In a published article by John Pearce about Medical Doctors such as Hippocrates. Before his influences, it was believed that “Greeks believed that evil spirits or angry gods caused diseases and that the gods such as Asclepius, son of Apollo, could heal and cure diseases.” This made it difficult for illnesses to be treated as the answer to more ailments was prayer. For women, this was even more difficult, with most illnesses being attributed to the “wandering womb”. That terminology refers to the idea that the womb had to be weighed down or it would float freely through the body causing destruction. This was thought to be cured by sex and pregnancy alone.

While Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were philosophers, their ideas heavily contributed to medical beliefs at the time. The religious beliefs at the time banned the dissection of bodies, which made it difficult to learn much about the physical ailments. Philosophical ideas about illness were thought by Plato to be more important than the physical realities of the disease. In the Hellenistic era, the physical body began to be investigated, which was the beginning of modern medicine and discovery in Greece. This was originated by Herophilus, who against popular ideology, conducted both vivisections and autopsies. As Herophilus was one of the few doctors willing to practice on women at the time, it can be deduced that this doctor would be one of the most likely to be chosen by Agnodice to mentor her (King, 1986).

In a journal published by the Cambridge University Press by Helen King, it is stated that Agnodice’s story has been used “within the history of medicine and, from the seventeenth century to the present day, when midwives have defended themselves against a male-dominated medical profession seeking to medicalized childbirth, Agnodike has been invoked as fact, and hence as a valuable past precedent.” This suggests Agnodice’s story has been considered fact for hundreds of years. When considering the subject of gender relations and learning women’s history, the story of Agnodice is essential.

In “Hyginus, Fabula 274.10-13: The Story of Agnodice”, the detailed story of Agnodice is recorded in detail. At the time in Greek history, women were forbidden from practicing medicine, and the beliefs surrounding modesty prohibited most doctors from being present during childbirth. Infant and maternal mortality were very common. Agnodice studied under

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Herophilus, and cut her hair to appear more masculine to practice medicine. When attempting to assist a pregnant woman give birth for the first time, Agnodice was believed to be a man. For this reason, the woman in labor refused her services. Agnodice then exposed herself as a woman and was able to assist her during labor. Other physicians at the time continued to be denied involvement in birth, and “in their jealousy (p. 54)” accused Agnodice of seducing patients. In denying these charges, Agnodice exposed herself during the trial, simultaneously admitting to breaking the law and practicing medicine as a woman. The wives she had treated then entered the trial and stated that “you men are not spouses(coneugis), but enemies considering you are condemning who discovered(inuenit) health for us (p. 54)”. Agnodice was not convicted, and Athenians changed the law to allow free born women to practice medicine.

In a Harvard Education study of Ancient Greek Law and Courts, the practice of law in Ancient Greece was thoroughly studied. Although it was a Democratic society that practiced trials, it’s very different from what would be seen in a court today. There were juries made up of from fifty to five hundred people depending on the crime. The crime committed also affected the charges and prosecution. For example, if a man were to take something from another man, sometimes upon accepting guilt, they would not have a trial and would instead pay a fee to compensate the accuser. There were not only differences in jury sizes depending on the magnitude of the crime, but the jury was also always made up of elders and usually people who could no longer work for some reason. All of these were male citizens, meaning they were born in Athens. Homicide courts were also different from the modern day as they were always made up of the same fifty-one elderly who would serve on the jury until death (Harvard University, 2018). Complaints could not be brought by women, and complaints concerning women were evaluated through the lens of what the crime cost the male relatives of said woman. For this reason, Agnodice’s story is unique in that she was tried as a man by a group of only men.

Within this text as well as the text describing her mentor, Herophilus, there are some inconsistencies with what is known about Greece at this time. However, this is dedicated to having been translated from Greek into Latin. For example, the proper Greek name would be “Hagnodike” meaning “chaste before justice”, making the name “Agnodice” itself a Latin adaptation. Another considered inconsistency is the reference to Agnodice as the first Midwife,

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which is unlikely due to the nature of the role, and the knowledge that the presence of other women at Greek births was common (King, 1986). While this is true, it's believed the reference is to Agnodice being the first recognized midwife with medical education like that of a male physician at the time.

After the religious influences of the life of Ancient Greeks came a similar modest Christian morality of the thirteenth century in Venice, Italy. In focusing on the life of the well-known Courtesan Veronica Franco, it's also important to learn about the religious and political factors that were at play at the time. Religion and Government were closely interwoven, and the opinions of the Pope largely dictated the direction the laws would go. The relationships between the law and the profession of prostitution at the time were more complex than what is seen in the modern day. Prostitution was illegal in Venice like most other countries but was legalized in 1358.

Some restrictions were applied to maintain a separation between prostitutes and the public. Historians argue this was not enforced, and prostitutes held normal social lives within society. As the knowledge that sex workers had significantly better income than most other types of work they were allowed to practice at the time, it was considered a valid economic choice. This was especially true for those from lower income families where a political marriage wasn't attainable and families did not have a dowry for their children (Clarke 2021).

During the thirteenth century, Saints had a large influence on politics. "Saint Augustine condemned prostitution as sinful" but also believed it was necessary to prevent worse sins. While Augustine was made a saint after death, during life he was Bishop in life. The worse sins he referenced included "sodomy, adultery, rape, and incest (Clarke, 2021)". Life at this time lacked many options for women. In fact, rape was an alternative to courtship since marrying the victim would absolve them of any penalties. It was considered a lesser sin for men to solicit services from prostitutes instead of sexually assaulting women considered "respectable". Practicing prostitution was thought to be a means of expanding options for women and freed them from the threat of forced marriage and political marriage. Although prostitutes had freedoms from forced marriage, there were many drawbacks to practicing prostitution, including increased risk of facing sexual assault and limited legal rights.

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Veronica Franco specifically aligned herself with public officials and those involved with politics to strategically raise her position in society. This is not theorized but known as she wrote and published about this strategy in her poetry (Rosenthal, 1992). Franco did not just support feminism, but in her writings, rejected “Any class or social hierarchy that limits an individual's freedom (Rosenthal, 1992)”. She believed that there was a distinction between those who prostituted themselves in exchange for money and those who prostituted themselves as a strategic means of advancement to the point of being equal to the male. She believed the second category to be superior to the first. Franco’s education matched that of most male members of society, and advanced past that of the average man or woman.

The freedoms of courtesans made it difficult to distinguish them from the sexually active woman who did not make money from her sexual experiences. This was due to the courtesans' wealth, which allowed them to buy themselves expensive clothing and jewels. Laws attempting to separate them more clearly from “respectable women” made it illegal for the courtesan to wear silk or gold, silver, and even fake jewelry. These laws went unfollowed, and courtesans remained fashion pinnacles of their time. It was around the time of the greatest plague outbreak in Italy that more officers were appointed to specifically regulate courtesans' interaction with the public. One of these officers was Maffio Venier, whom Franco had three years earlier criticized for his opinions of women in many of her published poems.

Female poets and writers faced a lot of barriers as they attempted to penetrate the published literature market at the time. This was first because the original thoughts and ideas of women understood by the general populace were written and published by men. This was in the form of poetry and literature. The thoughts that were genuinely written by women greatly conflicted with these preconceived notions, making women unpopular to publish. The women who did manage to surpass the barrier to publication were usually from higher-income families where their fathers believed in the education of women. Franco was an unusual exception to this rule (Coheneur, 2004).

Veronica Franco was one of the most significant instances of women at this time who operated within the systems created for them to eventually venture beyond them. To do this, they had to have the confidence and aspirations to go beyond what the patriarchal culture allowed

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(Coheneur, 2004). As women were often pigeonholed in society, any attempt to create change was halted. Franco avoided this by becoming a Courtesan and making connections with strong political figures, a practice which was accepted. By the time she began to publish poems, make a name for herself as a poetess, and introduce feminist ideas, she was already in a stable position where she had enough connections to make her difficult to stop. She employed modern day feminism in her writing, defined as the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.

In a published thesis from 2004, Coheneur stated that "It is Franco's insight into the power conflicts between men and women--and her awareness of the threat she posed to her male contemporaries--that makes her literary works and her dealings with Venetian intellectuals so pertinent today." The understanding of how a woman could have broken through the proverbial "glass ceiling" in the thirteen hundreds is crucial to the women of today understanding how they can do this themselves. This is not to say women in the modern day should become courtesans, but instead introduces what has been effective in any given situation to push past certain limitations. The poetry Franco chose to publish and how she decided to interact with male poets at the time was strategically planned. She used this interaction to expose literary and social inequality between the sexes.

In Jones' "The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe," Franco's poetry is studied further. Jones explains that Franco uses the ways that masculine ideals contradict each other to defend her profession as well as her sex. Franco states that women's bodies should not be subjugated by men while practicing the profession of a courtesan. She used her position in society to show that women needed to be educated to have a civilized society, and to attempt to show the patriarchal society she was born into that educating women could benefit men as well.

The Roman Catholic Church has been primary in Italy for the last fifteen hundred years, yet the interpretation of the religion has experienced drastic changes over this time. The plague of the 1300s and the uprising of a strict religious order that accompanied it did not detract from Franco's ideas but delayed the progress she could make in society. This shift was led by beliefs that the plague was a punishment caused by sin, which was blamed on marginalized groups and professions such as courtesans. At this point, certain Christian ideals surged again in Venice,

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which would come to affect women's treatment in society today. One concept was that every man who slept with a woman had sexual rights physically inside of her. Prostitutes would therefore have the sexual rights of every man who ejaculated in her, which was believed to bond communities more closely together. However, the idea of a prostitute's body being unclean came when a prostitute slept with a man of another perceived race where there was a desired separation. This was one of the sins that were thought to be committed by prostitutes which resulted in their persecution (Nirenberg, 2015).

Another reason prostitutes were considered to be unclean during this time is because of the spread of syphilis. Originally, syphilis appeared in Europe after the French invasion in 1495 beginning with the invasion of Naples. For this reason, it was first considered the "French Disease". Although the French maintained a level of blame during this time for the disease, minority groups were also blamed. Mainly prostitutes, as the nature and physical appearance of the disease perpetuated the idea that their physical bodies were dirty. As is seen today, blame did not fall on those who solicited their services, although without their patronage this spread would not have been possible. Courtesans would traditionally begin to practice at ages as young as ten where they were not by today's standards able to consent. This was to support their families or avoid poverty, and still the moral responsibility was placed on them. This and leprosy were thought to be "The most feared diseases...Leprosy and syphilis were the first illnesses to be consistently described as repulsive....of a disease that was not only repulsive and retributive but collectively invasive. (Sontag 45-46)." Even dying from syphilis was thought to be shameful.

In the modern lens, diseases have followed the trend of being used to persecute minority groups. Reflections of this mindset exist with the treatment of homosexual men during the AIDS crisis, and more recently in the spread of Monkey Pox. There are many proposed reasons why minority groups are blamed for epidemics, but in a study by Craig Chamberlain, one is highlighted. Targeting certain groups that fail to assimilate or who suffer from underlying political tensions occurs because they are seen as threats. Positioning minorities as threats has been done by convincing the public they are a danger to public health, traditional values, or even economic threats. The idea of this leads to the politicization of disease, which is by no means limited to the modern day.



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In the early 1900's when the Irish were migrating to the United States due to extreme economic conditions, they were promised religious freedom. When they arrived, they received discrimination, poor living and working conditions, and often poverty. The well-known "Typhoid Mary" was an Irish immigrant who was asymptotically spreading typhoid for six years. Instead of being educated on the spread of germs, she was detained for two years on an island. The handling of her case was "as much about gender and class prejudices as it was about typhoid (Keane, 2014)". In Italy during the 1500s, the religious group penetrating society was the Jesuit Order, which specialized in the persecution of minorities under the guise of witchcraft. Because they were considered to be immoral, the accusation of witchcraft simply made them easier to prosecute.

Although this specific religious order didn't persist in Italian society, the Roman Catholic Church has remained the primary religion in Italy to this day. Halfway across the continent, nearly five hundred years later in the mid-1700s, Ireland was also a dominantly Catholic Society. At this time, the first Magdalene Laundry was opened. These were institutions run entirely by the Catholic church that would hold girls who didn't conform to Catholic Societal standards at the time. The idea was that as the biblical Mary Magdalene had gained forgiveness through prayer and worship, so could these girls and women. This included unwed mothers, people accused of committing premarital sexual activities, and even those deemed too beautiful to be allowed around the general populace. There was no set end to these women's stays, and they were often told they would live in these places for the duration of their lives. For girls who were brought to the laundries from young childhood to their teens, this was a sentence lasting almost their entire lives.

Born in 1918, Christina Muhcaly was sent to a Magdalene laundry at fifteen for becoming pregnant. With no sexual education, she did not understand that sex could lead to pregnancy. Originally sent to a "Mothers home", ten months after giving birth to her son, she was sent back home without her child. The children born in these homes were adopted or sent to other homes, and the mothers were not given alternative choices.

After returning home, she was not allowed through the front gates by her father, who instructed the nuns to take her back. According to Christina, the only words from her father were "You're

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not coming into this house, you've disgraced us. You're not right in the head. You can't be right in the head to bring a child into this world. And you deserve punishment." Sent to another Magdelene Laundry, she was there for three years before escaping. This story is not an uncommon one, and the last Laundry did not close until 1996.

## **CONCLUSION**

Education on the history of societies core beliefs contributes positively to gender relations. Today, achieving a single goal in the United States public educational system is made difficult by the differences between states. Although history is taught in some form in public schools across America, the focus is determined by the political influences of a certain geographical region. Today, only 27% of people under forty-five have been educated to the point of having basic knowledge of history.

There are endless contributors to the state of gender relations. Ensuring people are informed of their rights is a proven positive contribution to improving them. In learning about history, the basic rights given in the constitution to all Americans are not only taught but studied. Gaining an understanding of what social and political climates led to the creation of certain rights allows for a deeper understanding.

Although women make up fifty percent of world history, they are featured much less by historians than men. This makes it much more difficult for women to learn their own history. Although there are studies on the lives of average people at different time periods, they often don't study in detail the roles of the average woman. This has led to gaps in our understanding of women's roles in many periods. It's impossible to know how many stories have gone unrecognized or completely unrecorded. An example of this are the black women who were mathematicians at NASA in the 1960s. Despite being crucial to solving many complex mathematical problems related to space travel, they were not even allowed to use the bathrooms in the building within which they worked. Although they were able to tell their own stories, they were largely left out of published works by their male counterparts. It wasn't until the popularization of the book "Hidden Figures" in 2016 that their stories became known to the public.

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The way that history is taught is a critical component of how it is received. The standard memorization of many public schools does not encourage empathy or understanding and is limiting. The popularization of history through historical fiction can be incredibly effective in generating both vital components of learning.

A book focusing on three significant women whose stories are not widely known, and tying them together to give one message, can be an efficient and effective way to improve gender relations. Some of our core societal beliefs come from the religious or political ideology that is no longer popularly believed. Others are based on information that was once considered fact and has since been disproven. The ability to make informed decisions about one's core beliefs can help in shifting them. The harmful ideology surrounding violence against women has so stubbornly clung to our belief systems that many no longer understand where it came from. The tools that we need to drastically improve gender relations are already available to us in history. It's when we begin to share information in a way that people are interested in learning that we can finally use them.

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