**Case 1: Today’s Hot Topic: The Paris Agreement**

Our world as a whole has suffered from carbon emissions, and climate change is rapidly rising. A group of countries across the world created a plan, The Paris Agreement, that could potentially lower these carbon emissions to help climate change. The United States, which is one of the leading producers of carbon emissions, signed this agreement when it was first released. The following year, newly-elected President Trump released a statement saying that the United States would cease all participation with the Paris Agreement.

The Paris agreement, in short, sets out a global plan to stem climate change and lower earth's temperature.  It also aims to strengthen countries' ability to deal with the impacts of climate change and support them in their efforts. Though the main purpose of this organization is to prevent climate change, the UNFCCC says  that "The Paris Agreement is a landmark in the multilateral climate change process because, for the first time, a binding agreement brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects." When signed, governments agree that the increase in global average temperature will be well below 2 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels, a need for global emissions to peak as soon as possible, and to aim to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees celsius which would reduce the effects of climate change. Rising carbon levels heighten the effects of global warming. If nothing is done to stop these rising emissions, global warming will cause many global issues including more frequent and severe weather, higher death rates, and higher wildlife extinction rates.

Currently 197 countries are participating in this agreement, but concerns have been raised that the agreement  “disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production." The Paris Agreement creates a structure where different sets of rules apply to each country. According to the National Economic Research Associates, if the US fulfilled the needs of their specific plan, it would cost the American economy $3 trillion and 6.5 million industrial sector jobs by 2040.  Furthermore, once signed, the transition away from fossil fuels will raise the costs of energy and many other goods. Domestic policies would be enforced like the Clean Power Plan, which would make coal, oil, and natural gas significantly more expensive. This policy change would make Americans pay increased energy prices throughout the economy. Not only would utility and gas pump prices go up, but everyday essentials of all kinds could rise as well. Poorer Americans would be hurt disproportionately by these measures.  The Paris Climate Accord would thus have a devastating effect on many individuals and small businesses. As stated previously, the Agreement’s goal is to keep warming below 2 degrees celsius and to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial global average temperatures. Some are skeptical however, claiming that if all nations follow the current policies, the world would be lucky to stay below 3 degrees celsius of warming. This gap between the Agreement and reality shows how the Paris Agreement might adversely affect millions of people for questionable benefit.

**Study Questions:**

1. Should the USA re-sign the Paris agreement?
2. Should a country put it’s own needs ahead of the world's health?
3. Should the president be able to make decisions about their country, if the decision will affect the world and not just their country?
4. Do countries have an obligation to protect the world’s health?
5. Should countries all be treated equally, or should there be different rules for different countries?
6. The USA is considered to be one of the most innovative countries. Should they spend a large sum of money on a plan that hopes to slow climate change down, or should they use their money to create a better plan?
7. Should we prioritize present citizens or future citizens?

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**Case 2: Write Your Own History**

“History isn’t what happened, history is just what historians tell us” - Julian Barnes. History is something taught to all students in school. It is a big part of our lives as it has shaped the world we see today. Most people believe that history is a “collection of facts about the past.” However, according to most historians, history consists of making arguments about what happened in the past based on what people recorded. Consequently, historians disagree about what the facts are as well as how to interpret them (“Writing History”). The problem presented in history is that events are more likely to be told by the “winners'' of that situation, so the way it is told becomes biased. As a result, some people find that their history is either not told or misinterpreted. For example, many people believed that Christopher Columbus discovered America. Today, scholars make it clear that he did not discover America, but in fact, he opened the way for European exploration and colonization of the Americas. Columbus’s voyages are rooted in facts; however, what those voyages mean in history can be interpreted differently.

At this moment in time, people are starting to speak out against how history has been told. We see groups trying to change the narrative. For instance, The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine, that aims to change the perspective from which we see American history. “The project—a historical analysis of how slavery shaped American political, social, and economic institutions—has spawned a podcast, a high-school curriculum, and… [a] book” (Serwer). The 1619 project argues that U.S. history is often taught and understood through the eyes of white male figures, so the project places “the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative” (Silverstein).

On the other hand, others disagree with this and believe that this interpretation of U.S. history misconstrued the facts. A letter written by a Princeton historian, Sean Wilentz, and signed by four other leading scholars, criticized the 1619 Project. Wilentz shares some background behind his letter by writing, “Our letter applauded the project’s stated aim to raise public awareness and understanding of slavery’s central importance in our history… the letter intended to help ensure that its efforts did not come at the expense of basic accuracy. Offering practical support to that end, it pointed out specific statements that, if allowed to stand, would misinform the public and give ammunition to those who might be opposed to the mission of grappling with the legacy of slavery. The letter requested that the *Times* print corrections of the errors that … appeared” (Wilentz).

The letter refers to “matters of verifiable fact” that “cannot be described as interpretation or ‘framing’” and says the project reflected “a displacement of historical understanding by ideology.” For instance, the project’s lead essay, written by Nikole Hannah-Jones, argues that “one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery.” Wilentz states that this claim is built on false assertions. He writes, “ But apart from the activity of the pioneering abolitionist Granville Sharp, Britain was hardly conflicted at all in 1776 over its involvement in the slave system. Sharp played a key role in securing the 1772 *Somerset v. Stewart* ruling, which declared that chattel slavery was not recognized in English common law. That ruling did little, however, to reverse Britain’s devotion to human bondage… Nor did it generate a movement inside Britain in opposition to either slavery or the slave trade…What Hannah-Jones described as a perceptible British threat to American slavery in 1776 in fact did not exist” (Wilentz). Given the reputation of the historians involved, the letter is a challenge to the credibility of the 1619 Project. This raises some ethical questions.

**Study Questions:**

1. Should there be a set way on how historians interpret history?
2. Is it better to have many interpretations of historic facts or just one?
3. How should historians decide whether or not a historical event is correctly being interpreted? If it is being misinterpreted, how should historians go about it?
4. What is the importance of correctly interpreting historical facts?
5. When, if ever, should ideology play a role in reporting historical information? Should history just revolve around the facts?
6. How should historians make sure that everyone is represented in history?

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**Case 3: This Isn’t a Redemption Story, Although it Could Be**

The Yeager’s were a very complicated family with four kids who were now all around their early thirties. Noah was the most mild mannered out of the bunch, and lived by a noble code of ethics that he used to dictate his decisions. Victoria was very perceptive and intelligent, and was trying to establish herself as a published author. Eli was a star athlete, who had gone on to play D1 soccer at university. Atlas, however, was the odd one of the bunch. He was quite eccentric and rambunctious, with a temporary stay at a home for the troubled youth when he was young, constantly starting trouble and having outbursts. He has been promising his siblings that he will do better, yet since they have entered adulthood he has been arrested on accounts of breaking and entering and driving under the influence. Since the age of twenty one, he has been in and out of rehab as a “recovering” alcoholic. None of his other felonies compare to his most recent stunt, first degree robbery with a knife, which earned him six years in prison.

In an attempt to save their brother once more, Atlas’ siblings decide that they would all take a camping trip to unplug and cleanse their brother of his sins. The Yeager’s would camp all of the time with their parents when they were little, so even Eli, who could very easily be considered a stoic, was excited by the nostalgia. All the siblings met at the campsite after not having seen each other for months. The happy reunion was cut short when Victoria saw Atlas trying to hide a bottle of booze in his bag. After a short scuffle, his brothers had managed to empty all three bottles hidden in his bag, and after setting up their tents, they went to the river for white water rafting.

The Yeagers were moving down the current of the river at a fast pace, enjoying one another’s company. They kept the conversation light, asking about Noah’s fiance, Victoria’s upcoming book,  and Eli’s new head coaching position for college soccer, except when the conversation shifted to Atlas; “ What will it take you to finally turn your life around?”asked Eli. “Well,” “Atlas paused, “I” - before suddenly falling out of the boat after it collided with a large rock. As his siblings panicked, Noah noticed a child who could not have been more than twelve years of age flailing five feet behind Atlas. With a closer glance, Victoria noticed that the boy looked familiar… then it clicked. “ Oh no! That’s Micheal,” she thought to herself. “ He was a regular at the soup kitchen I have been volunteering at for the past few years. We have grown really close. His mother recently passed away, and I was pondering on adopting him because he has no one left to take care of him,” she told her brothers who seemed fixated on helping Atlas. Neither Atlas or his siblings nor the child could swim, and there was a spot for only one more person on the boat. Atlas was an alcoholic, a convicted felon, a trouble maker, but at the end of the day, he was their brother. With a tear in her eye, Victoria says ,“ Micheal has had it so tough growing up. He could grow up to be the next president of the United States, or the scientist who develops a cure for cancer but, I guess we will never know.” And with those words, the siblings paddle to save their brother as if their life depended on it.

**Study Questions:**

1. When is tribalism justified? When is it not?
2. Were the Yeager’s right to steer towards Atlas instead of the drowning boy? Should they give their brother another chance knowing that by living he not only is a danger to other’s lives but his own as well?
3. Is it ethical to assume that the boy could have grown into just as much of an antagonist as Atlas?
4. Should the level of a relationship you have with a person determine how kind you are to them?
5. Should family be prioritized over everyone else?
6. What effect does Victoria pondering the adoption have on the dilemma?

**Case 4: The Concussion**

**Background:**

Concussions can sometimes be one of the worst injuries because they are hard to identify sometimes which can result in them being untreated and leave permanent damage. Some symptoms of severe concussions include a headache that gets worse and does not go away, slurred speech, weakness, numbness, decreased coordination, repeated vomiting or nausea, or loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). A concussion left untreated can lead to many long-term complications. A few potential complications of a concussion include chronic headaches, memory problems, vertigo, and post-concussion syndrome, which is headaches, dizziness, mood swings, and brain fog that can continue for months or years after a concussion. They can also severely affect your physical abilities and mental health.

When an injury happens on the ice in hockey unless the player is laying on the ice and cannot get up the play keeps going while the injured player skates to the bench and there they are accessed by a trainer.

**Case:**

Kennedy is a 17 year old girl who plays travel ice hockey. Her father played highly competitive hockey his whole life and went on to play in the AHL. He is very passionate about the sport and was taught to never let anything to prevent him from playing, including an injury.

Kennedy was competing in a tournament against several powerhouse Canadian teams. During one of the games she was skating with the puck and was body checked into the boards where she hit her head and lost consciousness for a few seconds. She then got up and was hit again by a defensemen in front of the net trying to protect her goalie. She slowly and painfully skated back to the bench with a severe headache. Then she began to vomit and the trainer was brought over to access her. He began to run the basic evaluation tests and determined that she had a concussion that had the potential to be serious. 

The trainer brought her back to the locker room where he told her to go to the ER and get it professionally checked out. He left her to get undressed and then after a few minutes she was back sitting on the bench fully dressed in her equipment. The coach was confused to see her back and he asked her what she was doing. Kennedy and her dad talked in the locker room and because of their strong passions for the sport they decided she needed to toughen up and play through it. Kennedy really wanted to continue to play but it was very obvious that she was in a lot of pain despite her attempts to cover it up. 

The coach and the trainer tried to explain to her dad the potential severity of her injury and the potential negative complications if an injury like hers is left untreated. However, the dad insisted on making her play through it because it was what he was taught. After a back and forth discussion between the 3 gentlemen the coach agreed to play her. He played her for a few short shifts in the remainder of the game.

After the game, the dad did take her to the doctor and she was diagnosed with a moderate concussion and was advised to take 2-3 weeks off of hockey. By taking those weeks off she would miss a tournament, states, and the start of playoffs. Neither her nor her dad wanted her to miss that because by the time she was able to return the season would be nearly over and because she was a senior in high school this was her last hockey season.

Kennedy ended up fighting through the pain and finished her last season. After the conclusion of the season she took a break and is now completely fine and faces no complications.

**Study Questions:**

1. Kennedy’s father grew up learning that when you are hurt, toughen it up and keep going, so since those have been his core beliefs throughout his life was it wrong of him to do what he did?
2. Because this was her last season, was it morally acceptable for her to play through her injury the remainder of the season?
3. Since both the coach and the trainer knew the potential long term effects of an untreated concussion was it unethical of them to let her play through her concussion for the remainder of that game and the season?
4. If something like this were to happen in the NHL and the player were to insist on continuing to play, like Kennedy and her dad did, how would the actions of the coach and trainer be different?

**Sources:**

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* <https://www.tarponpa.com/blog/lasting-effects-of-untreated-concussion-and-surprising-concussion-symptoms>

**Case 5: Hacking in Non-Competitive Video Games**

Liam and Ben have been playing Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, search and destroy, a game mode where there are 6 people on each team that each try and kill each other. In search and destroy, when you die you are out of the round and can’t respawn. Another objective of the game is that there is an attacking and defending team where the attacking team has to plant a bomb and have it go off without defusing it while the defending team tries to defuse it. All night they have been losing a lot of games. They are just playing the casual side and not competitive. Ben is starting to lose his patience. They join another game and play the first round. They get beaten and get mad so they start trying. They play the second round and Ben gets shot out of nowhere. He feels that there is something fishy with a player on the other team but gives him the benefit of the doubt. In the third round, they get spawn killed, dying right as they spawn into the game, and watch the replay. It’s confirmed, one of the opponents is hacking. They type in their game chat to tell him to turn his hacks off, but the hacker won’t. They find out the hacker is using wallhacks which lets him see through walls, which is an unfair advantage. They decide to leave the game to not deal with the hacker and got off the video game because they were annoyed with the hacker.

George is a major streamer who averages 50,000 viewers while streaming. Today he put on hacks to show his viewers how hacks work in a non-competitive game mode. He ran into Liam and Ben in the game and turned his hacks on. His viewers were loving his stream and thought it was super cool. He then got to the fourth round of the game and two people from the other team left, Liam and Ben. He wondered why but kept playing. A few games later, a message popped up on his screen. He was permanently banned from the game. What Ben didn’t tell Liam is that he reported him. He couldn’t make a new account, he couldn’t borrow his friend’s account, there was nothing he could do. All of his 50,000 viewers were extremely mad that he got banned and said it wasn’t fair. He was playing the game from a non-competitive standpoint and got banned for no reason.

When Ben and Liam played again Ben got a message from Call of Duty saying that the player he reported got banned. He told Liam that the player he reported got banned and told him that he should be proud of him. But on the other hand, Liam actually saw the guy streaming after and saw that he was in tears about getting banned from the game and felt bad for the guy. After all, it was just a casual game with no rewards and it wasn’t competitive.  
  
**Study Questions:**

1. Was it ethical for Ben to report the hacker for hacking in the non-competitive game?
2. Should Liam side with his friend of a long time or someone who is more popular and has more followers?
3. Should the hacker get unbanned by Call of Duty in the game?

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**Case 6: Mayhem at the Capitol**

**Background:**

Kyle Tilbery is a proud American patriot. He is devoted to defending his country and it’s

traditional form of democracy. Kyle also happens to be strongly against affirmative action,

LGBTQ+ rights and organizations, and also openly support white nationalism. Over the years,

Tilbery has joined several social media chat rooms with a few of his peers. Members in these

chat rooms were planning a protest against the election of the new mayor of their city. Mayor

Marilee Jackson stated in her campaign promise that she would tackle the ongoing threat of the

Coronavirus, support social equity legislation, and make inclusive restrooms available in public

spaces. Many members of the chatrooms disapprove of Jackson because she is a young Black

woman who happens to be bisexual. Also due to what she advocates.

Members in the chatroom decided for the protest to take place the next day. Kyle was

thrilled to be a part of the experience. The next day, Mr. Tilbery joined two of his colleagues and began marching with some of the organizers to their state capitol. Soon, hundreds of people joined the march. Police were informed of their protest and quickly guarded the steps of the capitol building.

As the group approached the steps, officers announced over bullhorns that the mob was

prohibited from proceeding to the capitol. Quickly, the protest turned violent. The crowd began

fighting with officers. People that were able to pass the police were trying to break down the

doors of the capitol. Kyle knew that this was wrong, but he quickly disregards his concerns.

Suddenly, shots began ringing out into the crowd. One of Kyle’s colleagues noticed him panting

heavily as he laid on the ground near the door of the capitol. His colleague saw blood coming

from his side. He attempted to save Kyle, but unfortunately, he passed away.

**Case:**

You are watching the mayhem at your state capitol unfold on your local news channel.

The reporter mentions that there has been a death. Baffled by the situation, you decide to scroll through your social media to obtain more information.

Many people were outraged. Some argued that Mr. Tilbery got what he deserved. “He got what was coming to him. He should not have been a part of this brutish insurrection,” one user wrote. “This was clearly planned because Mayor Jackson is African American and bisexual.

Anyone who had a part in this activity deserved what was coming to them,” another person

posted. The next day, you learn that four more people lost their lives. Two officers and two

additional insurrectionists.

You find yourself with conflicting thoughts on the matter. On one hand, you feel sorry for Mr. Tilbery, his family, and his friends. However, a part of you also believes that this was an

instance of karma being served. Did he and the other insurrectionists deserve this fate if they

supported such ideals? You reflect on whether your thoughts are justifiable or inapt.

**Study Questions:**

1. Karma is the belief that the actions and intentions of a person are destined to come back upon that person. Karma can result in negative or positive consequences. It is derived from Buddhist and Hindu beliefs. If Mr. Tilbery and the other insurrectionists posed a severe threat to the law and order and the public, can his death be seen as a result of karma?
2. Does anyone ever deserve to die? Why or why not? Are there any circumstances in which death can be warranted?
3. Are we morally obligated to feel pity for someone when they die? Why or why not? Do their actions, what they believe in, or the instance in which they passed affect our obligation to feel pity?

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**Case 7: The Marathon to Elite College Admissions**

Asher is a 16-year-old rising senior at Tonbridges International Academy. Delila is also a 16-year-old rising senior, but attends Jefferson High School. Both are prospective students applying to prestigious universities, like Washington University in St. Louis. Asher and Delila are both in the top 1% of their respective graduating classes. Asher is involved in lacrosse, UN council, the mock trial debate team, and student council. Delila is a part of her school’s soccer team and student council. She also babysits her siblings after school every day. Asher’s mother graduated from the University of Michigan with a master’s degree in Biology and she is a research lab assistant. Asher’s father is a PhD candidate at Yale University. Delila is the daughter of a single mother who works full-time at Target.

Since freshman year Asher’s parents have enrolled him in a Kaplan SAT prep course, visited ten schools in the nation, and hired a private admissions counselor. Delila has been using Khan Academy, applied to scholarship programs for free fly-ins, and has spoken with her school counselor about college. Asher feels prepared for college, fortunately he completed his standardized testing prior to the pandemic. He’s satisfied that he scored in the 97th percentile. He has reviewed his essays with his private admissions counselor, and he feels his essays are unique and compelling. Asher still feels a bit uneasy about the eventful transition from high school to college. Delila has not gotten the chance to take the SAT/ACT as she was waiting for her school to provide a free test. She still does not know what her personal statement will be about, and has not been provided with any advising, as she is a first-generation student. This has made her stressed about applying to colleges because she is not very informed on the college admissions process. She has done online research by herself on her home computer, but her time has been limited due to her family also needing it. Delila is planning on applying for the Gates scholarship.

Tonbridge International Academy is a college preparatory school that provides their

students with intensive workshops in the month of October to prepare for college. Jefferson High School has no college prep programs, or TRIO programs. The only college resources available

are the school counselors and teachers who have gone to local state schools.

In late June, Delila and Asher both received an email in their inbox that informed them about a virtual leadership conference taking place the second week of July. Asher was excited about this opportunity to meet with students across the country and talk about how their school’s have been implementing leadership activities during this time of uncertainty. Delila wanted to go, but was unsure if she would be able to attend because her mother needed the computer. Delila strategized and decided that she would use her cellphone. Two weeks later, both of them log onto the Zoom and watch as the panelists present the opening discussion question: “How has COVID-19 affected your learning?” Asher and Delila are placed in the same breakout room with three other participants to discuss the given question. After introductions, Asher begins to describe how his school switched to full-online learning with office hours that students could take advantage of. Another attendee responded back to Asher sharing how their school also went virtual with their normal schedule, and they had final grades still. Delila was puzzled because her school could not afford to go online, and had a pass/fail grading system based on first-semester grades. Delila was embarrassed because she felt that everyone else in the Zoom already had a structured plan to continue learning, while she did not. It was her turn to respond, and she replied with “My school didn’t go virtual because many students in my district don’t have access to technology”. Asher responds to Delila immediately and asks: “How did you learn for the rest of the year? I had no idea that many schools were not switching to the online option.”. Delila tells Asher that she self-studied for AP exams. The group fell silent.

**Study Questions:**

1. How can these students ethically engage in a conversation about opportunity?
2. Whose responsibility is it to address and fix the inequity in education? (Potential parties are, but not limited to: students, parents, district administration, state representatives, federal government, university admission officers, collegeboard?)
3. What can Delila do now to feel academically, financially, and mentally prepared for college when she applies? How can we ethically remodel the system, so others in her position can feel the same way?

**Case 8: Monuments and Movements**

Since 2015, there has been a national movement to remove Confederate flags and other symbols of the Confederacy from government buildings. However, from 2015 to 2019, just 114 of the 1,747 Confederate monuments or flags were removed. After the death of George Floyd in 2020, the size of the BLM movement greatly increased, and so too did the call for removal of confederate symbols and racist imagery.

Activist groups have started looking beyond Confederate symbols in government, criticizing universities across the country for having monuments or buildings named after historical figures who are now known to be racist. There has been success in taking down these symbols, but different approaches have been taken at different schools. Ole Miss moved a Confederate monument to a cemetery and built a memorial for the black soldiers of the Civil War, while The University of North Carolina completely removed a statue of a Confederate soldier. Washington and Lee University decided to keep their name, while Princeton University removed Woodrow Wilson’s name completely from their public policy school, stating that his racist views make it inappropriate to have the school named after him.

There has been pushback against these changes: some people see getting rid of the monuments as ignoring history and undermining tradition. Others feel that removing monuments or names from buildings erases viewpoints; arguing either that these viewpoints deserve to be heard, or that to counter them they must be addressed. The common sentiment behind these opinions is that the past cannot be measured by today’s standards, and that the influence some individuals had on the world outweighs their wrongdoings.

Even now colleges and universities are naming buildings after individuals. It is commonplace to name a building or whole college after a donor or prominent figure. After looking at the backlash brought against individuals’ names on public spaces, it is questionable whether this practice should be done at all. As both these individuals and our societal standards change, someone once deemed fit to represent the university may not be viewed the same way in the future. However, honoring influential donors by placing their names on buildings pushes others to donate to universities. Many of the foremost universities are helped greatly by the support of donors, and the money given supports vital education, research, and innovation that greatly benefits society. Without the pull of a named building for donors, universities may be unable to function as they do now.

**Study Questions**:

1. Is it necessary to bring down monuments of problematic individuals or individuals who supported problematic practices?
2. Is it possible to acknowledge the problems of historical figures and take into consideration concerns of modern day marginalized groups, while leaving the monuments or names in place? Must they be removed completely, or are there scenarios where it’s possible to keep them up?
3. Is there a difference between monuments in government and monuments on a college campus? Would there be a difference for public and private universities?
4. Is it ever correct to name a building after a specific individual? Is it better to avoid any future mistake or is there value in accepting that something endorsed now may be problematic in the future?
5. What is the moral value of legacy? Are there considerations against de-platforming or otherwise criticizing largely positive figures for a society?

**Resources:**

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**Case 9: The Right to Write**

Jodi Picoult is a best-selling American author of novels such as *Leaving Time*, *My Sister’s Keeper*, and *The Pact*. Her books often discuss difficult themes such as power, suicide, privilege, and terminal illness, but they have done extremely well; about 14 million copies of her books have been sold internationally, and they have been translated into more than 20 languages.

In 2016, Picoult published *Small Great Things*, a novel about an African American nurse, Ruth, who is blamed for the death of a baby under her watch and finds herself in court over a case that is underscored by racism. In her author’s note, Picoult, who is white, states that she felt obligated to write a book about racism after seeing unprovoked attacks on Black people and realizing her own “color blindness” to race. She knew from the beginning that she wanted to include specific perspectives such as that of the Black nurse. In order to learn about these experiences, Picoult states that she conducted in-depth research by attending racism workshops and interviewing Black women about their experiences with racism. But near the end of the afterword, Picoult briefly addresses a possible criticism: “I will have people of color challenging me for choosing a topic that doesn’t belong to me.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

This is precisely what happened to Jeanine Cummins. In 2020, Cummins published a novel titled *American Dirt*, which featured a story about a migrant Mexican family that travels across the U.S. border. The novel quickly became popular following positive reviews from well-known authors and being chosen as Oprah’s book of the week. However, Cummins, a white author, was heavily criticized for painting an inaccurate picture of the experiences of Mexican refugees, despite claiming that she did five years of research about the topic.

In recent years, there has been a growing discussion about whether authors should be given “permission” to write from the perspective of a race that they do not identify with. Many argue that there are plenty of quality stories written by people of color that accurately capture their experiences in ways that a white author cannot. For example, in 2015, the #ownvoices movement began advocating for people to read books written by authors from the same underrepresented group their protagonist is from. Furthermore, by seeking out and supporting authors of color, the literary world can become more diverse and include a variety of perspectives instead of relying solely on the voices of white authors.

However, some people argue that by restricting authors to solely write from the perspective of their own racial identity, creative potential is hindered. In a New York Times opinion article, American author Lionel Shriver states, “If we have permission to write only about our own personal experience, there is no fiction, but only memoir.”[[2]](#footnote-2) If authors were restricted to only writing what they know, then the fiction genre ceases to exist; it requires the author to write from the imagination, not from fact. Additionally, books written by popular authors such as Picoult are likely to reach a wide audience and prompt more discussions about important issues such as racism and immigration laws. But these books arguably need to include the perspectives of characters of different racial identities in order to write a more complete story about these topics.

**Study Questions:**

1. Should an author write from the perspective of someone with a different racial identity?
2. Does a story belong to a certain group of people? Who should have the power to decide who gets to write that story?
3. Does an author’s research on race relations make their work, written from the perspective of a person of a different race than the author, more ethical?
4. To what extent could limitations on the “permission” to write from other racial perspectives restrict creative potential?
5. What does an author owe to their audience in terms of transparency about their identity and their writing process?

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**Case 10: Loot Boxes**

**Background:**

Microtransactions (small transactions for virtual items that take place inside of a game) have been in video games for years and they can serve the purpose of supporting the creator post-purchase. This way, consumers have a way of supporting their favored creator while getting a reward inside of the game in return. Other forms of microtransactions come in the form of DLC (Downloadable content). This allows for creators to release more content for a game that has already been sold as an add-on. Another type of microtransaction that is currently being debated over are loot boxes. These items contain an assortment of virtual items for a specific game.

The items contained in a loot box may vary in terms of rarity. Some games like Counter-Strike Global Offensive have loot boxes that have a community market where items from these loot boxes can be resold amongst players in return for profit. Because the money received from selling rare items can not be liquidated, many 3rd party websites have spawned as an alternative location to sell these virtual items in return for money that can be converted into cash. There have been recent studies to determine whether loot boxes are considered a form of gambling or not Many consumers believe that it holds many similarities to casino gambling and that the U.S. government should place regulations upon loot boxes that match regulations on gambling at casinos. While companies like Electronic Arts compare loot boxes to kinder eggs, those toys that your parents bought for you when you were 5 years old. Arguing that they are quite harmless. Many consumers believe that loot boxes are implemented into video games with a large audience of children for the purpose of taking advantage of young consumers. This may lead to children developing an addiction to opening loot boxes with the hopes of getting rare items.

Although loot boxes have been present in video games since the early 2000s, they only caught the attention of the media in 2017. When Electronic Arts (EA) released Star Wars Battlefront 2 they came under fire for making progression incredibly slow to encourage players to purchase loot boxes to get ahead of the game compared to those who do not spend money. This caught the attention of politicians around the world, thus resulting in countries handling this new concept differently.

**Case:**

Cathay Miller was a journalist for the New York Times newspaper, she had two kids who were gigantic *Star Wars* fans. Recently, Cathay bought her sons the new game by Electronic Arts (EA), Star Wars Battlefront 2 for their Birthday. This game had been recently released to the public and everyone in town was playing it. Cathay’s kids had begged and pleaded for this game as a Birthday present. For a single mother with a new job as a journalist, money had been an issue and could not be spent at every turn, but Cathay really wanted to make her kid’s birthday the best one yet by purchasing the $60 Star Wars game.

After a few days after the release of the game, Cathay’s kids had been complaining about not being able to play as Darth Vader, one of the most iconic villains from the Star Wars franchise. Cathay looked into this to find out that there were two options for unlocking this character. One, spend a total of 40 hours to unlock the one villain, or two, spend money on a randomized assortment of items (known as a loot box) with a chance to obtain the credits needed to purchase the character. Cathay’s kids were only allowed to have 2 hours of screen time every other day. To Cathay, this seemed to be a steep time investment placed in the game to encourage the purchase of the loot boxes. Cathay was furious at this predatory practice that allowed Electronic Arts to siphon even more money out of the consumer’s pockets. Cathay would use her platform to spread awareness about this issue.

After getting the OK from her higher up, Cathay wrote an article about how gaming companies employ predatory tactics in the form of microtransactions, she used Electronic Arts’ Star Wars Battlefront 2 as an example for her article. She writes about how this system enforces a pay-to-win mentality, the idea that people with boatloads of cash will have an edge over those who are not as financially well off. She also points out that this form of microtransactions is incredibly similar if not identical to casino gambling. Saying, “Opening a loot box and getting random rewards that may or may not be worthless is similar to that of pulling the slot on the slot machine”. Cathay even points out that this practice has gone unregulated by the government when it needs to be investigated immediately for correlations to casino gambling.

Cathay made waves around the subject matter, this unified many consumers, throwing criticisms toward Electronic Arts and other companies using this method of microtransactions. Other news outlets had followed suit and wrote a piece on loot boxes and microtransactions. Even politicians began to take notice and placed EA and other companies underneath the magnifying glass. This was not just noticed by the government of the United States, but other countries began to take up this issue and debate it amongst themselves. This was amazing! Cathay brought recognition to this issue and was receiving praise from everyone about bringing this to light. Everything seemed right in the world… Until she received an email informing her of what problems she had inflicted upon other’s livelihoods.

The email she received was from a group of indie developers reading as follows, “Good morning Cathay, we would like to congratulate you on your recent appraisal by many with regards to your recent article. You have outdone yourself with this article and you deserve the credit you are receiving. However, as indie developers, we would like to inform you of our current circumstances due to light brought to this subject. We are not a big company like Electronic Arts. Quite the opposite in fact, we are only made up of 20 people and we barely get by on what we currently have via the microtransactions page on our game. With this recent negative publicity toward the way we have handled microtransactions, our jobs may be in jeopardy. We are aware that loot boxes do not guarantee any items of value, but had we put our coveted virtual items up for purchase directly, then we are losing out on money that has helped many people here get by. Not to mention that the items in-game are only cosmetic, and do not provide any sort of edge over other players. We emphasized the idea of purchasing loot boxes was directed as more of a “support the creator” rather than a means of scamming our customers. I do not write this email to make you change your stance, we just wanted to show you the opposing view to this loot box subject.”

Cathay laid back in her desk chair, this hit home as Cathay also struggles to make enough money for her family and she realizes that she may have just jeopardized indie developers around the world. “ Was this the right choice? I mean, only writing from my position alone?”. She still believes that EA should be investigated, but she began to ponder whether or not it is right to have a blanket ban on all loot boxes country-wide.

**Study Questions:**

1. If another article were to be published that was in favor of loot boxes, how much damage could be reduced? Or is the damage irreversible?
2. What restrictions, (if any) should be applied to loot boxes? What lead you to come up with that answer?
3. Was placing the indie developer’s jobs in jeopardy a necessary step in bringing justice to the misuse of loot boxes? Did the indie devs deserve this?
4. What should happen to Cathay for possibly destroying the devs’ livelihoods? Should anything happen at all?
5. The Developers may now end up in financial trouble because of this new attention on microtransactions. Do the ends justify the means? Why or why not?

**Case 11: Genocide in Xinjiang**

Over the past few decades, a new global power in the form of China, under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has risen. With a dictatorial government, the second largest economy in the world, and a military of over 2 million active personnel, China has vast influence around the globe. We have seen the CCP take advantage of their power, whether it be the crackdown on freedom in Hong Kong or the military threats on the vibrant democracy of Taiwan. We have even seen them use their power in dealing with the coronavirus and their COVID coverup and corruption of the World Health Organization. However, today’s subject is not about any of these, but is instead about the current genocide of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang.

The Ughyur people are a mostly Muslim group of people living in the north-western region of China, known as Xinjiang, officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). With a population of around 12 million, they are considered an ethnic minority in China, and while the XUAR should have some powers of self governance, in reality, the CCP has strict control over the region.

The story of the forced labor and ultimately, genocide of the Uyghur people, starts in 2003, when local CCP officials created programs that transfered rural Uyghurs to perform agricultural and factory work throughout China. Authorities at that time relied on tactics such as coercion to recruit participants, however, this only became international news around 2017 when internment camps started being built and were claimed to be “re-education” camps. Through leaked documents and survivor accounts, we know that these camps were run as high security prisons, where physical, mental, and sexual torture occurred. In July of 2019, officials announced that the re-education camps were closed and that the trainees graduated. However, these people, in reality, were either transferred to prisons to serve long sentences or were assigned to factories across China to become slave labor.

In October of 2019, a video surfaced on the internet showing hundreds of bounded and blindfolded men being led from a train in the Xinjiang region which evoked many worrying connections to the Holocaust in the 1940’s. Then, in around June of 2020, it was revealed that the CCP forced hundreds of thousands of minority women to use intrauterine devices, sterilization, and even abortions, for the goal of curbing China’s muslim population. This, according to international convention, is a genocide: “the intent to destory, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group”.

In March of 2021, various Western clothing brands such as Nike, H&M, Burberry, Adidas, Converse, etc, all expressed concern over allegations that the Uyghur people were being used as forced labour to pick Xinjiang cotton, which supplies around 20% of the world’s cotton. This came after several western countries imposed sanctions on China, and have caused these companies to be erased from China’s digital world and online platforms. With companies starting to understand and acknowledge the atrocities that are being committed in Xinjiang by the CCP, the big question is: what as a society can we do to stop this?

**Study Questions:**

1. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have in their “what we do” section the words: “Protect Human Rights”. Yet, China is still an active member of the United Nations. As an international organization that was created at the end of one of the biggest genocides the world has ever seen, does the UN have a heightened obligation to do more than condemn China with words for their human rights abuses? And if not, what message does that send to the world?
2. How do we balance the economic advantages of dealing with China and the unethical practices they are committing?
3. Should countries only intervene in active genocides only when they know they can win and with little consequences (consequentialism) or should countries always intervene due to it being morally correct (deontology)?
4. How much is human life valued? And how does a country and a society decide when to risk the lives of their people to save other lives?
5. Does intervention in terms of sanctions and such matter when the actual genocide is not stopped? At what point, if we have an obligation, is our obligation fulfilled?

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**Case 12: No Jab, No Job?**

The Coronavirus pandemic has had serious detrimental effects upon society: businesses and schools were shut down for months on end, social contact was cut scarce, and a stopper was effectively put upon the year of 2020. But now, after over a year of mask-wearing and social distancing, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel: the issuing of Coronavirus vaccines. Though not a certain guarantee in prevention of the disease, the Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson booster shots have been a hopeful hint towards a return back to normalcy for many Americans. Since December of 2020, the month in which the first emergency use authorization for the Coronavirus vaccine in the United States was issued, over 66 million Americans have been administered one of the three shots.

But four months into the US vaccination drive, there are already red flags emerging: in several states now, vaccine demand appears to be on the verge of outstripping vaccine supply, leading to cancelled vaccine appointments even as the country remains at least some 100 million immunizations away from herd immunity. Hospitals in Michigan, for example, have canceled hundreds of appointments over the past five weeks because of vaccine shortages, according to the Michigan Health and Hospital Association. Faced with the prospect of a protracted public health crisis, a growing number of colleges and employers have mandated that their students and workers get vaccinated. Such vaccine mandates played a pivotal role in wiping out the Massachusetts smallpox epidemic of the early 1900’s, and similar results are desired for the Coronavirus. But controversy has arisen regarding the ethics of such directives: are they a necessary step in the path towards herd immunity, or an unethical, potentially illegal policy that could set the country back on its progress?

The legality of such mandates typically depends upon the entity issuing the requirement. Broadly speaking, private vaccine mandates (such as from private businesses and universities) have been considered legal in the past. According to the New York Times, since the 2009 swine flu pandemic, “the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has held that employers are allowed to require their employees to receive certain vaccinations, provided that they are offered reasonable accommodations based on religion or disability”. Even with these anti-discriminatory accommodations in place though, UC Hastings Law Professor Dorit Rubinstein Reiss has pointed out that an employee’s inability or unwillingness to comply with vaccine mandates may result in them being fired due to their inaction, regardless of reason. “The general legal reality is that employment in the United States is at-will, and employers can fire employees for almost any reason, with few exceptions from anti-discrimination laws,” said Reiss.

The story is a bit more complex for government-issued mandates. Since 1905, when the US Supreme Court ruled in support of a Massachusetts law that levied fines against people who refused smallpox immunization, the courts have routinely upheld the states’ authority to enforce vaccination if necessary for public health. According to the New York Times, it is because of that precedent that “all 50 states have been able to impose school immunization requirements. Adult immunization mandates are much less common (which complicates the Coronavirus issue to that degree), but at least 16 states require some form of vaccination for postsecondary education”.

What further complicates the matter is that the FDA hasn’t fully approved the use of the vaccination shots: they’re only approved for the broadly-defined area of “emergency use”. And even though the FDA sets a very high standard for authorizing Coronavirus vaccines for emergency use-- “a clear and compelling demonstration of safety and efficacy from a Phase 3 clinical trial” --much is still left to learn about the full side effects of vaccine administration, including their effectiveness against asymptomatic infection, death, and transmission. Only until full understanding of these effects is achieved will the FDA fully-approve the use of Coronavirus booster shots. Furthermore, under the 2004 federal law that governs emergency use authorization, “individuals must be informed of the option to accept or refuse administration of the product, as well as the possible consequences of refusing administration of the product.” These guidelines for individual autonomy are in direct conflict with the fundamental concept of vaccine mandates.

**Study Questions:**

1. Are mandates for the Coronavirus vaccine an ethical course of action? Why or why not?

* If yes, how should individuals with accommodations based on religion or disability be factored into the equation? What kind of entity (governmental agency, business employer, etc) should be responsible for issuing such mandates?
* If not, what are alternative procedures to encourage vaccination? Would your answer change if the vaccine were fully-approved by the FDA?

2. Consider the values of public health, personal autonomy, and medical care privacy (whether it’s justified to disclose vaccination history to the public) in the context of this situation. Which of these should be prioritized over others? Or which of these should not be prioritized? Why?

3. Is it ethical for employers to fire employees due to the employee’s unwillingness to get vaccinated? Would this vary with the reason for inaction on the part of the employee (ie: if the employee had a religion-based accommodation versus if the employee was part of an anti-vaccine movement)?

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**Case 13: The Road to Hollywood**

Child stars have long been viewed as cultural icons, and integral pieces of the American entertainment industry. Take, for example, the Olsen twins (Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen), who gained widespread recognition for their shared role as Michelle Tanner on the ABC sitcom *Full House*, after being cast at just six months old. Their highly prosperous careers continued throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, during which time the pair quite literally became the faces of the child entertainment industry: their music videos grossed over 500 million dollars, they starred in countless film and television productions, and according to Forbes magazine, they’ve been among the richest women in entertainment every year since 2002 (since the twins were at the age of 15).

But this immense fame at such a young age begs the question, “at what cost”?

As with many other child actors, Mary-Kate and Ashley never made the choice to act themselves; those decisions were made for them, as the pair were under the jurisdiction of their parents and other authoritative figures at the time of their debut. Having practically been born on the set of *Full House*, the twins stayed in the public spotlight for over a decade under the command of others. By the time they were allowed to make their own choices, the Olsens abruptly shied away from their fame, kept their distance from the public eye, and were even suspected dead. In 2010, shortly before leaving the entertainment industry, Mary-Kate Olsen opened up about her experience as a child actor in an interview with Marie Claire magazine. Characterizing herself and sister Ashley as “monkey performers”, she stated that she would “never wish (her) upbringing on anyone”.

Mary-Kate’s negative recollection of her time in stardom is not without reason. The Olsens were often plagued, from early on in their performing careers, with encounters of sexual abuse and assault from managers, producers, directors, employers, and fans. In the years leading up to the twins’ 18th birthday, numerous fan sites popped up with “countdown timers” to track the moments until the young celebrities reached adulthood, and thus their age of consent. This disturbing predatory behavior isn’t unique to the Olsens. Nearly every child celebrity has encountered such perverted behavior from fans or authoritative figures, and these experiences leave a deep scar long after they occur. “I remember on my 18th birthday I came out of my birthday party and photographers laid down on the pavement and took photographs up my skirt, which were then published on the front of the English tabloids the next morning,” said Harry Potter star Emma Watson at a HeForShe press conference in 2016. “If they had published the photographs 24 hours earlier they would have been illegal (considered statutory rape), but because I had just turned 18 they were legal.”

Various opinions exist on the ethicality of children in the entertainment industry. Aside from pointing out the industry’s long history of sexual abuse, critics claim that parents of child actors often exploit their children for personal gain. Whether for the purpose of creating a positive social image, fulfilling personal dreams of stardom through their children, or for monetary reasons, many parents are willing to cash in benefits from their kids, sometimes against the child’s own will or knowledge. In addition, regulations regarding child acting are few in number, vary based on location, and often are worked around. In most states, minors under the age of 16 working as actors are exempt from child labor laws, and the only regulation is to have a work permit (though California has more extensive policies). Additionally, some projects film in remote locations specifically to evade regulations intended to protect the child. Longer work hours or risky stunts prohibited by California, for example, might be permitted to a project filming in British Columbia.

However, others argue that exposing your child to a variety of activities, especially those that the child has expressed a degree of interest in, is part of being a good parent. And while there are certainly parents out there who force their children to participate in activities against their will, we as a society cannot necessarily condemn that activity blanketly unless the activity is clearly exploitative and dangerous to the child. Furthermore, even though many child actors tend to grow up miserable, dysfunctional, or in a downward spiral of drug abuse due to the unhealthy childhood experiences they fall into, there are numerous other child actors (ie: Shirley Temple, Brooke Shields) who grew up to lead normal, healthy lifestyles. But is this just akin to claiming that child abuse is tolerable because some victims recover from its wounds? Or is this a valid justification for pushing children into show business?

**Study Questions:**

1. Is it ethical for parents to push their children to enter the entertainment industry? Why or why not? (Note that this question is not asking whether or not the industry as a whole is ethical, though that should certainly be considered in your response).

* Would this vary with the intent of the parent?
* Would this vary with the will of the child (given that the child is expressing strong interest/disdain towards entering the industry)?
  + Should children be regarded to have the cognitive capability to make such decisions for themselves?

2. In what ways is the ethicality of the child entertainment industry similar to the ethicality of youth sports leagues, child pageant shows, or even a parent signing their child up for music lessons? Are these examples similar in magnitude?

3. Should there be more regulations in place to ensure the wellbeing of child actors? Why or why not? If so, what measures should such regulations take? How should they be enforced?

4. The ever-expanding development of CGI (computer generated imagery) has opened the door for new possibilities in film and entertainment, such as replacing child actors with computer generated graphics. However, such imagery still has a long way to go before completely resembling reality. Given the possibly traumatizing experiences brought on by child acting as well as the rise of CGI technology, should the child entertainment industry be abolished for good? Or is there value in letting the industry live on? Why?

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Case 14: Dealing with Delilah’s Death

In many Asian cultures, an elder with a terminal illness is never informed about their inevitable death. The belief is, the elder will be able to pass with a better mental state worry free from the fear of death. The happiness of the elder is seen as the most important factor and it should be the families responsibility to carry the burden of death for the elder. Going as far as getting doctors and medical professionals to lie, the family will do everything to ensure the secret is kept safe.

Sam’s first generation Asian-American parents force this cultural norm onto her when her grandmother, Delilah, is diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. When caught late, treatment for pancreatic cancer is usually focused on prolonging the life of the patient rather than curing the illness. Even with treatment, there is only a 1% chance the patient can live for 5 years. On average, a patient will live for one. Sam’s parents want to give Delilah the best quality of life for the remaining time she has.

In the beginning, it is easy for Sam to deal with the secret. Her grandmother is not suffering much from the illness, and it simply feels like nothing is wrong. However, as time goes on, Delilah’s condition is getting worse and worse. Everyday, Sam sees the cancer sucking the life out of her grandma. Her grandma is skinnier, paler, and weaker by the day. The pain medications are starting to lose their effectiveness, and Sam can see the pain her grandmother is going through. The day Delilah passes, Sam wonders if she was truly the happiest she could have been in her final moments. Sam's family assures her that Delilah was happy that she could spend time with her family in her last moments. However, she still questions if she should have told her grandma about her illness.

Even after the death of her grandmother, Sam is still conflicted between her two cultures and the way her family dealt with Delilah’s illness. Growing up in America, Sam has adopted some of the western culture. From that western side, she believes her grandmother should have had the right to know about her illness. She thinks that if she was in her grandmother's position, she would want to know about her death and live the rest of her life with no regrets. At the same time, she understands her grandmother does not share the same cultural views as her. As time goes on, Sam’s mental health has been deeply affected by this dilemma. Was the regret, guilt, and confliction Sam is faced with worth the lie she upheld for her family? Was it ethical for Sam and her family to lie?

**Study Questions:**

1. What responsibilities does Sam have to respect and uphold her family’s culture?
2. Are there times when it is okay to tell a lie?
3. If the chances Delilah could survive was high, how would the situation change?
4. Is there a difference between the importance of Sam and Delilah’s mental health?
5. Do medical professionals have an obligation to tell their patient about their illness?

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* <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2019/09/16/the-farewell-dilemma-would-y> [ou-tell-loved-one-theyre-dying/2115192001/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2019/09/16/the-farewell-dilemma-would-you-tell-loved-one-theyre-dying/2115192001/)
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**Case 15: Should I Stay or Should I Puerto Rico?**

In the wake of Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico was left with widespread infrastructural failure, a constantly increasing death toll, and an insurmountable financial crisis. Despite these issues being addressed in the continental United States, Puerto Rico lacked the same aid and manpower, partly due to the misjudgement of the situation by legislators in charge, and partly due to the isolated nature of the island. Many Puerto Rican and American citizens were left with a pressing question: How should Puerto Rico be regarded in terms of independence and statehood?

The island of 3.2 million people, acquired at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1897, has long been the subject of debate over how Puerto Rico should be represented, with multiple referendums suggesting that Puerto Ricans are in favor of statehood (the most recent result was 52% in favor). If Puerto Rico achieves statehood, it would be larger in terms of population than 19 states, and would be able to send representatives and senators to Congress, alongside being able to vote in presidential elections and other nationwide issues. Such representation might prevent crises similar to the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in the future, and allow Puerto Rico’s issues to be considered on a national level. Furthermore, Puerto Rican citizens are considered American citizens, although they might not enjoy the same rights in full. Being accepted as a state will likely pave the way for Puerto Ricans to gain the full range of rights that American citizens have, voting included.

However, there is a significant amount of Puerto Rican citizens who are against statehood, suggesting that such an action would imply acceptance of the imperialist values that led to Puerto Rico becoming a US territory in the first place. Puerto Rico already has multiple aspects of being an independent country, such as having its own sporting and Olympic associations, being completely self-governing without major US involvement, and being recognized by the UN as a separate government, albeit a territory of the US. Furthermore, referendums aren’t an entirely accurate representation of the collective opinion of Puerto Rican citizens, and have very little legal or official implications. It would also seem logical that because of the US’s constant neglect of the island throughout its history, Puerto Rico practically acts as an independent entity, without political interference from the US.

There is also the role that the United States plays in “supporting” Puerto Rico, and it could be argued that part of the reason Puerto Rico was devastated so severely by Hurricane Maria was because of the lack of intervention by the US. To many citizens, both from Puerto Rico or from the states, if Puerto Rico were allowed to become a fully independent country, it would not be able to achieve economic success or sustainability. If this were to be true, surely statehood, or even remaining a territory, would be preferable over independence, but it remains a hot topic of debate.

Something also to be considered is that the historical precedents and the potential precedent that Puerto Rico could set, regardless of if the island becomes a state or a country. While other imperialist countries, such as Britain or France, have released much of their territory, the US has very few precedents for allowing independence for its territories, which is only further complicated by the modern context of the situation. On the other hand, Puerto Rico gaining statehood might set a precedent for other parts of the US, such as the District of Columbia or Guam, gaining statehood as well.

**Study Questions:**

1. What factors should be prioritized when making a decision on the political status of Puerto Rico?
2. If Puerto Rico has an official vote and decides to become a state, or decides to become a country, is the United States ethically responsible to comply with Puerto Rico’s wishes?
3. From the perspective of the United States, when is intervention into Puerto Rican issues morally justifiable?

**Additional Research:**

* <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/03/737001701/i-don-t-feel-safe-puerto-rico-preps-for-another-maria-without-enough-government>
* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/03/puerto-rico-statehood-bill-pedro-pierluisi/>
* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/09/puerto-rico-a-year-after-hurricane-maria/>
* <https://welcome.topuertorico.org/government.shtml>

1. Jodi Picoult, *Small Great Things* (New York City: Ballantine Books, 2016), 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/opinion/will-the-left-survive-the-millennials.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)