

Lincoln Lyceum Summer Essay Contest

July 25, 2024

"Brave New World: Constant Comfort"

What does a world without pain, devoid of discomfort, and absent of guilt look like? The average citizen of the Western World has an innate fear that a totalitarian regime will come to take control and dominate the populace, leading to a terrifying dystopia filled with horrors that could not have been imagined before. Images of Nazi uniforms lining streets filled with starving children emerge as likely scenarios of a world completely under the rule of authoritarianism. But what if the world instead saw a society filled with prosperity and technological innovation, where every day is not a struggle for survival but instead a utopia where every person lives in complete contentment? This is the premise of Aldous Huxley's 1931 dystopian novel, *Brave New World*. Huxley's book not only anticipates the challenges that the modern world now faces but also warns of the dark future that awaits us if we fail to address them in a way set apart from any other dystopian work of literature.

The governing authority within the novel is the World State, which controls the lives of each individual from birth to death. The methods the World State uses to maintain this control do not involve excessive force or constant surveillance, such as in *1984*; instead, they provide their citizens with a continuous flow of hedonistic distractions. The citizens within the World State never express dissatisfaction with their current reality, primarily because they rely on a mind-altering drug, named Soma. While there is no direct equivalent for Soma there are a variety of

mind-altering drugs that now flood the modern world. The number of young adults and children being prescribed antidepressants increased by 64% over the coronavirus pandemic although the number of people taking antidepressants was on the rise years before. This statistic coincides with studies that suggest over half of all Americans have used marijuana. In both realities, the public uses these not as a temporary solution to fix serious medical conditions such as depression, anxiety, and physical ailments but instead as distractions from the world around them.

The citizens in the World State also are obsessed with sexual pleasure and treat chastity as a taboo. One of the earliest scenes in the book revolves around a group of students in a hatchery building, which artificially creates and raises infants, observing children running around and participating in sexually explicit games. While children in the modern day would be prohibited from participating in any game of this nature, children in the 21st century are undoubtedly exposed to more sexual content than any prior generation. 15% of teens claim they first viewed pornography at ages ten and under and the average age for exposure to pornography is age 12. More than 70% of all teens claim to consume digital pornography.

Sexual degeneracy does not end with the children as while in the World State it is considered outside the cultural norm to be married or have any form of monogamy, it is widespread and normalized to be involved in orgies as well multiple intimate relationships at once. The reason for the World States' aversion to deep interpersonal relationships such as parents, wives, and husbands is they cause strong emotions that don't allow stability. Again, we see many parallels to our own culture. In 2021 marriage rates dropped to an all-time low for every 28 marriages there were 1,000 unmarried women. The average American now will have seven or more sexual partners throughout their life.

Huxley's portrayal of constant hedonism and unceasing distractions in *Brave New World* contrasts with other dystopian novels such as *1984*. While *1984* suggests that governments will strip society of all pleasures to maintain a state of passivity, Huxley demonstrates that governments will instead gift the populace with various pleasures to ensure contentment. Huxley's vision of the future emerged as the clear victor between these two scenarios. In any first-world country, it is unlikely that a reasonable person would claim to be deprived of any form of pleasure. However, many would attest to feeling inundated by amusements, either personally or in observing others.

It is halfway through the book we meet our main character, John. Unlike the rest of society, John was not artificially created in a tube and was not raised within the confines of a hatching facility. He was instead born on a reservation in New Mexico and was taken outside his reservation to join the rest of civilized society. When he arrives in the World State John finds no joy in his new home and is often disgusted by the people that inhabit it. After an episode of rebellion against the World State, John is taken in to meet the Controller of Western Europe and after a long debate between the two over whether the World State offers any form of true happiness, John rejects the sterilized, boring, and degenerate society by claiming his right to discomfort and unhappiness.

John states, "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin." This quote is instrumental in understanding how the World State fails and points to the inevitable failure in attempting to reach a world without pain. People are not designed to be slaves to constant pleasure, people are designed to experience pain, to entertain unpleasant thoughts, and to love more than their temporary pleasures. It is in doing this that we escape from a fate like the People in *Brave New World*, where people willingly allow

themselves to be controlled by totalitarian regimes. By striving for individual autonomy, free thinking, and deep interpersonal relationships as well as accepting the pain and instability that come with them, we can remove ourselves from the chains of constant hedonism and pursue lives filled with true joy.

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