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Literature, British Literature



James Brock Ms. Miller English 4, Period 4 28 April 2013 The Eight-Ninths of Society Aldous Huxley was a writer, philosopher, and social commentator born in Surrey, England, in 1894. His father was Leonard Huxley, the editor of the prestigious Cornhill magazine, and his mother was Julia Arnold, niece of poet and essayist Matthew Arnold (About the Author 2). He was also the grandson of well-known and respected scientist T. H. Huxley, and his younger brother was the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley (2). Aldous attended the prestigious Eton College, an all-boys boarding school for secondary education. It was here that he contracted a serious disease that left him blind for two years and his vision impaired for the rest of his life. This crushed his dreams of becoming a doctor and studying science, though his scientific mind still showed in his writing. Being from an intellectually superior family and having an interest in science, Huxley wrote a lot about eugenics, especially around the publication of *Brave New World*, and publicly supported classism and the sterilization of the intellectually inferior. He was growing more and more fearful of overpopulation and the birth rate of the less educated compared to the cerebrally gifted around the publication of *Brave New World* (Woaik 2). Evidence of this thinking can be found in essays such as *What is Happening to Our Population* (1934) and *Are We Growing Stupider* (1932). Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is a tale of a future society, where everything is tailored and produced for the masses. Because everything is based on Henry Ford's assembly line style production, every human being is just a piece of the bigger picture. Even the people are mass-produced, sometimes birthed ninety-six at a time in labs. The people's only ambitions are to satisfy all of their needs, and find happiness in numbing

their idle brains with the use of state-distributed drugs and possession-less sex with one another. Where the people do nothing but produce and consume in an endless cycle until they die. Brave New World's dystopian society is a prophetic example of sociological trends coming to a grim fruition in the distant future. The people of the world-state described in the novel are all members of a certain social class arranged by looks, height, and intelligence. Greek letters designate the castes from more important to less important. There are Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon classes, along with sub-divisions of plus, minus and, double-plus. Born into their social standings, they know only of the lives they were designed to live, and only of the job they were given. The lower castes are given a brain just like every other member of this world, "for of course some sort of general idea they must have, if they were to do their work intelligently — though as little of one, if they are to be good and happy members of society, as possible" (Huxley 4). As simple-minded members of the world, they use all of their half-wit to engage in their perceived notions of happiness. Every function of this brave new world is streamlined and worked down to a science. People are merely placed into a position of repetitive labor, and expected to accomplish their small task over and over again without so much as an idea of discontent. This comes after the model their great predecessor Henry Ford designed for mass production. It is truly a streamlined society; perfectly adept at fulfilling the lowly duties it requires to continue running. It is the beauty of the mass man that allows this idea to flourish; the concept that one can be truly happy with being fed shit and never wonder why. This culture of contentment is absolutely necessary for the continuation of this

method (Firchow 3). One has to be happy with laying their humanity down in exchange for never being without comfort. This would cause many sane men to wonder who would choose this life. They wouldn't, so it must be taught. Because it is so necessary that the majority of the population be stupid, most are also handicapped at birth. This world needs people who always say yes, and never ask questions. In the birthing stages, lower castes are given birth-defecting substances and deprived of oxygen to inhibit normal skeletal and brain growth. The position that watches over these conceptions is the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning. When giving a tour of the facilities, he shows the people being developed and says, "these, are the incubators" (Huxley 5). The idea of humanity has strayed so far from nature that man is hatched from incubators at will. It is up to man to decide who will be who. This is all very well sick and disturbing. However, the true horrors lie in the education of man in Huxley's dystopia. The irony here is that these techniques are in place today. The idea of an education is to teach people to think for themselves, to learn, and have an open mind. However, Fordism has taught that certain people need to be cookie-cuttered to perform a certain task. Therefore, people are not educated they are learned. They are instructed just enough to perform his or her duties as a constructive member of society (Brown 2). To further lock in these thoughts and discourage further inquiry into the world, toddlers are shown books and pretty flowers. The lesson is then rubbed in "with a mild electric shock" (Huxley 21). These children will never love books or nature, they will be scared of them/it and the idea of either will make them ill for the rest of their lives. They will not know why either. This is another necessary method to keep the masses

content with their lives. Another way children are educated is through hypnopaedia. It is a form of behaviorism centered on teaching social values such as what colors they are supposed to wear, who they can associate with, sex, and much more (Woiak 5). While they are in school they sleep while these mantras and suggestions are repeated and etched out into their brains, until "the child's mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child's mind" (Huxley 28-29). The human person then amounts to no more than the repetition and regurgitation of sociological values required of the mass man. There is no why. There are no other options. This is who you are and they will never be anything else, nor will they ever want to. They are perfectly dumb, and perfectly civil. Though more subtle than the world state's, governments today use a poor education or lack thereof, to propagate mass man. This authoritative, totalitarian method is seen everyday in government-controlled education systems. Students are indoctrinated, manipulated, and conditioned without the ability to pursue any other paths (Brown 6). Whereas the ideal education is one that opens doors, the fictional world state's, just as in the real world, closes them one by one. The conditioning doesn't stop at childhood though. Citizens are distributed soma to keep them content. Soma is the perfect drug, because it allows people to do anything from create a small distraction to go on a full mental vacation. To face one's problems head on isn't necessary anymore because it is so simple to escape them. Even after birth, the government manages to maintain ideological control over the values of the people (Peller 19). They also create movie-like experiences known as "feelies" that exhibit all the social values people are supposed to uphold. Newspapers are

distributed by class to manage what information each person receives. It is the same for television, as every form of entertainment and media has a purpose and an intended audience. The entire population is under twenty-four seven ideological maintenance. This is not a new idea. Apparent trends at the time of Brave New World's publication in 1932 caused Huxley to include this theme in his dystopia. However, eighty years later the use of this method is even more prevalent in our society. Today people want to consume, consume, consume. They consume mass media at an astonishing rate and take it for face value. There seems to be an astounding amount of trust between man and his television set. Thus, it is so simple to manipulate the thoughts and therefore actions of a nation. It is happening under the country's nose, just as it was in Brave New World. Just as media is consumed, so is everything else. Today's American society is consumer based. There is an endless cycle of production and consumption. The brave new world needs this behavior in order for civilization to run smoothly. The United States thrives on this behavior as well. From the beginning of the industrialization of America and from Henry Ford, we acquired an efficient system of mass-production. This we know in Brave New World as "Fordism". In Brave New World however, Fordism is more than a system of production. It is the philosophical approach to the entire society. It is the nature of the world state's existence. Fordism in the historical sense was nothing more than pure uninhibited capitalism, uninhibited because it was at the expense of others. It targeted the poor, the immigrants, and the intellectually inadequate. The benefit, however, was in the fact that virtually everybody was employable, because they only had to learn one task. No longer would

the stupid be useless. In fact they would become the most important part of society. Civilization now thrives on the common man, and without it would crumble (Brander 1). Consumerism is then not picked up as a habit. It is taught. It is forced into the brains of every man, woman, and child to the point that to not consume is to not live your life appropriately. As a functioning member of the whole, it is your duty to throw away what can be fixed, replace often, and purchase excessively. Consumption is the most important piece of the system apart from production. A necessity is then created in the reproduction of laborers and the fulfillment of steady production (Peller 3). In today's world, this is accomplished through the stupid maintaining higher birthrates (Woiak 2). Poorly educated people are reproducing at the rate of wild rabbits, while the intellectually capable are waiting until the circumstances are right. In the new world, this is controlled through the government. Which allows them control over the birthing system, which the population revolves around. As a cog in the machine, these people's value is based on usefulness. Everyone must play his or her part or else there can be no machine. The Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning was fond of calling this machine "the hive of industry... Everyone was busy, everything in ordered motion" (Huxley 146). A person under these conditions is essentially dehumanized. They are just a single component of the larger unit. It even shows in the values and culture of the population. Sex is something that comes freely and has absolutely no value apart from pleasing oneself. The women flaunt themselves to attract as many partners as possible, they "think of [themselves] that way... [They] don't mind being meat" (Huxley 93). To paint a picture of the importance of

mass man, World Controller Mustapha Mond compares the optimum population to an iceberg, " eight-ninths below the water line, one-ninth above" (Huxley 223). In a world where science trumps nature, the Epsilons are at the bottom of the system. Yet, they are the epitome of the ideal worker. They have been produced with the least mental capacity and therefore perform their menial job tasks to perfection. As separate people they are easily replaceable, but as a collective unit they are indispensable. The same is true for Deltas. These bottom tier folks are human cattle and oxen. Even the seemingly upper-echelon of classes are below that hypothetical water line. These lab technicians, doctors, psychologists, and educators are just as mindless as the coal miners. Sure they are more educated, and the jobs are more important, but they still blindly accomplish the tasks assigned to them by the one-ninth. Though it was written in 1932, the themes present in Brave New World could not be more relevant at this moment in time. It is eerie how similar the trends of today reflect the end result of a totalitarian government. There is a definite rise in mass man. The imbecile is as important as ever. The only thing we must decide is how this will either benefit or harm civilization. We must wonder if these principles will hold up on a worldwide scale, and if not what can be done to change the course of action. Who becomes the one-ninth of the population, and how do we continue to nurture that aspect as well? Whatever the case is, Brave New World's dystopian society is a prophetic example of sociological trends coming to a grim fruition in the distant future.

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