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“I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you?
They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways.
Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine.
I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What's your surname, anyway?”
- Draco Malfoy, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Harry Potter and the Battle of Blood

For decades, the *Harry Potter* series has provided its global readers and cinema viewers with essential life-lessons some may use throughout their lifetime, proving the series is more than just a handful of books or a story on-screen, it's a way of life. J. K. Rowling's hit series, which includes seven novels and eight feature films, chronicles a young boy's new and unique life in the wizarding world; all while supplying fans with a plethora of moral implications that may be extracted from these mediums and used in everyday life scenarios. However, there's one underlying overtone that riddles the series as a whole: the pure-blood supremacy that affects each character within the series, spawning a radicalized blood debate as to who in the wizarding world reigns supreme and who indeed does not. This constant battle between Pure-Bloods, Half-Bloods, and Muggles dominates the series and ultimately leads to the largest war in wizarding history, all while providing fans an inside look as to how blood divisions can lead to an upheaval of culture within certain communities; a theme many societies across the globe have witnessed and undergone first hand. What do the lives and legacies of the characters within the *Harry*

Potter series, and their perception toward these distinctive blood divisions, ethically teach *Harry Potter* enthusiasts on the overwhelming topic of blood segregation within a culture? Although J. K. Rowling molded these wizarding complications around real-world ancestral alienation, she displays them in a manner that ultimately educates the audience on such relevant concerns and strives to promote a positive outlook on diversity by virtue of showcasing the immense struggles surrounding such elitist traditions within the wizarding world. By doing so, the *Harry Potter* series becomes a moral vehicle for readers and viewers of all backgrounds to extract such biases from the series and understand them more fluently within their own cultures; drawing attention to the *Harry Potter* blood debate in a realistic fashion for fans to better recognize this timeworn dispute.

The impression of blood hierarchy is exceedingly distinguished throughout the *Harry Potter* series, as the novels and films begin with this very issue. Set in the early 1990s, a newborn Harry Potter is left on the doorstep of his aunt and uncle's home in the suburbs of London, orphaned by his parents who were murdered by the most dangerous wizard of their time, Lord Voldemort. Throughout the series, *Harry Potter* audiences follow Potter as he attempts to find his way through the wizarding world, which includes battling Lord Voldemort in the Battle of Hogwarts; a duel solely based upon blood dominance within the magical culture, as Voldemort attempts to overtake wizarding society and turn such traditions into an exclusive Pure-Blood society. According to *Pottermore*, J. K. Rowling's website which frequently posts updates on behalf of the wizarding world, she describes the term Pure-Blood as, "A family or individual without Muggle (non-magic) blood," and while that term may seem broad, only twenty-eight families within the wizarding community remain wholly Pure-Blood, dubbing themselves the

‘Sacred Twenty-Eight’ (Rowling, “Pure-Blood”). Muggles (or non-magic folk) are born without any wizarding ancestry, and the term ‘Half-Blood’ spawned from the occurrence of Pure-Bloods having children with Muggleborns; quite literally birthing a half-wizard, half-Muggle child (strictly known as Half-Blood). Rowling goes on to state that the Sacred Twenty-Eight’s mission is to, “Help such [pure-blood] families maintain the purity of their bloodlines,” a theme which automatically shuns Half-Blood and Muggleborn individuals from such blood-related traditions (Rowling, “Pure-blood”). While some may say these hierarchies are based upon the notion of race, arguably these issues are purely blood-based; a theme which audiences across the globe are shown both on-screen and within the written series. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of ‘race’ is, “A group, especially of people, with particular similar physical characteristics, who are considered as belonging to the same type, or the fact of belonging to such a group,” (Cambridge Dictionary, “race”). While the wizarding world boasts a plethora of races (English, Asian, African-American, Indian, etc.) the notion behind their supremacy throughout the wizarding culture is not based upon their outward physical characteristics or cultural appropriations, rather the actual blood that runs through their veins and whether that blood has ties with the Sacred Twenty-Eight. Therefore, the argument put forth is one that discerns this historic wizarding debate as exclusively blood-related, mastering the doctrine that if one goes against such Pure-Blood mentalities, they’re forever epithet is ‘blood traitor,’ (Rowling, “Pure-blood”).

While fans have the opportunity to read about these extreme differences within the novels, cinematically, the *Harry Potter* films bring these idealizations to life, uniquely displaying such blood divisions for audiences across the globe. Introduced within the first 02:57 minutes of

the original film, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (known as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* via the title of the first book), the term 'Muggles' is vocalized; displayed during a scene between Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall, as Professor McGonagall describes Harry's aunt and uncle as, "The worst sort of Muggles imaginable," (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Chris Columbus). This immediate bias toward Muggles cues the audience that such a term is considered derogatory; a thread that's upheld throughout the entirety of the film and novel series. An even worse byname for Muggles is the term 'Mudblood,' which is considered to be the most disbaring and abusive title for non-magical folk (a term Lord Voldemort and his loyal followers frequently use). Although Professor McGonagall is considered to be a good-natured character, even her initial negative outlook and bias toward Muggles is alarming; showcasing the immediate categorization of people not associated with the wizarding community and exhibiting such ideals to the audience less than three minutes into the first film. Tess Stockslager, the author of *What it Means to Be a Half-Blood*, argues that such prejudice from both good and bad characters within the *Harry Potter* series stems from, "Being a pureblood," which, "comes with privilege but also comes with expectations," (Stockslager 6). Stockslager's argument is strong because the series (both cinematically and written) forces its audience to understand the difference between such Pure-Blood, Half-Blood, and Muggle divisions; producing the focal point and function of the series as a whole. For many avid *Harry Potter* fans, their alliance with certain characters materializes solely by means of which side the character ultimately chooses: the good side (the side Harry Potter fights and fundamentally risks his life for) or the dark side (spearheaded by Lord Voldemort and his need to promote, nurture, and elevate a Pure-Blood society). Rowling has

admitted in multiple interviews that Voldemort's ideology and future expectations on what is best for the wizarding world is tainted, and goes on to say, "Voldemort is, of course, a sort of Hitler," a theory many *Harry Potter* fans have latched onto since the series debuted over twenty years ago (Stockslager 26).

Nevertheless, Voldemort's need to kill Harry was in view of understanding Potter was the only soul in his way of overtaking the wizarding world and spreading such Pure-Blood mentalities throughout the culture. Harry Potter stood for the morally great in wizarding culture, and as viewers watched in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*, Harry willingly risks his life for the greater good of the wizarding world as he fearlessly meets Lord Voldemort to duel, assuming if he dies at the hands of Voldemort, the lives of the Half-Bloods and Muggleborns he has consistently hunted would be spared. Whether or not Voldemort would have kept his promise is irrelevant because Potter ultimately kills Voldemort in the end, however, it's important to note that Voldemort's blood supremacy ideology was so deeply rooted inside him that he was willing to spare the lives of countless witches, wizards, and Muggles for the ultimate prize: Pure-Blood superiority. Interestingly enough, Voldemort himself was not a Pure-Blooded wizard. In a rare quote by Lord Voldemort on the topic of his estranged, yet entirely deceased family, he harshly speaks of his father in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, and declares, "Surely you didn't think I was going to keep my filthy Muggle father's name?" (Rowling 211). The very thought of his father and his family surname (Tom Riddle is Lord Voldemort's birth name) fashioned pure anger and despise from Lord Voldemort, displaying his absolute hatred toward his own flesh and blood; a bodily fluid which happened to be Half-Blood. J. K. Rowling constructed Lord Voldemort to become the villain who is terrifying for his unwillingness to face

his personal tragedies related to his ancestral background, which is why he battled his entire life to prove the contrary. Voldemort's very nature throughout the series was secretive, as fans learn in the final film and novel that he lied about himself and his upbringing to those around him to ensure his loyal followers accepted the deception that he was Pure-Blooded, zero questions asked. Lord Voldemort's motivation behind a life of lies was determined by his extreme desire to be in the exclusive Sacred Twenty-Eight society; an aspiration he entertained since the days of his childhood. Such childlike dreams and intolerable bigotry against Half-Bloods and Muggles lead to Tom Riddle becoming Lord Voldemort; shaping him into an adult whose boyhood wishes turned into the greatest wizarding war of all time. Suman Gupta, the author of *Re-Reading Harry Potter*, asserts this internal blood battle in a section of his book solely dedicated to this concept; literally chaptered 'Blood.' Gupta states:

The evil that Voldemort and the Dark Side personify has to do with this prejudice – hatred of Muggles and the desire to exterminate them and all who are contaminated by them, preservation of pure-blood wizards, presumably the desire to take over all worlds and rid them of Muggle blood altogether and populate them with wizard blood only (Gupta 101).

Cinematically, Voldemort's authoritarian mentality was displayed throughout each film, as audiences witness Lord Voldemort murder countless innocent victims on behalf of his utmost prejudice against Muggles. Although the films brought these senseless murders to visual life, the novels chronicled these blood-based assassinations much more closely, giving fans a way to document exactly how many Muggleborn victims were magically put to death under the Avada Kedavra curse. Beginning with his own family, Lord Voldemort murdered his Muggleborn father,

grandmother, and grandfather in an epic rage against the very blood that ran through his veins. Other notable Muggleborn victims, such as Lily Potter (Harry's mother), Myrtle Elizabeth Warren, Frank Bryce, and Charity Burbage (Muggle Studies professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry) were all subject to Voldemort's blood-hungry revenge (Rowling, "Remembering Voldemort's victims"). Notably, Voldemort's killing quest initially began with the sole slaughter of Muggleborns, however, as fans learn throughout the films and novels, he quickly turns his attention to both Half-Bloods and Muggles, generating the ultimate sense of fear against those who are not Pure-Blood. In a webpage dedicated to Voldemort's Half-Blood and Muggleborn victims, J. K. Rowling laments, "For Lord Voldemort, cruelty knows no bounds," a motif she made clear through the entirety the series (Rowling, "Remembering Voldemort's victims"). Although Voldemort and his followers are the only perpetrators throughout the series to happily kill Muggleborns and Half-Bloods, it's important to question how many lives could have been spared if the supremacists had no prior knowledge of someone's blood-type or relationships within the wizarding world. While people today tend to notice race by the color of someone's skin, the wizarding world only knows such bias by family name or association throughout the culture. Simply put: if your surname does not grace the Sacred Twenty-Eight index, you're immediately deemed less than by most across the community. Despite this, that does not necessarily signify a family or individual will be treated badly, or, as a result of Voldemort's rise to power, murdered. It merely dictates who in the wizarding world has birthright precedence and who does not.

Thus, how do these sadistic killings morally edify *Harry Potter* fans on the ever-present topic of blood-bias within the series? While numerous scholars contend the novels and films

were created for children, arguably, the series quickly broke such stereotypes, proving the lessons learned throughout the written and on-screen versions are for all ages to share. Jackie C. Horne, the author of *Harry and the Other: Answering the Race Question in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter*, grapples with such racial morality displayed throughout the novels and films in her popular 2010 article. Although Horne describes these forms of segregation as 'racially' motivated (while I continue to contend it's strictly based upon one's blood), her article provides solid insight as to how this concern is instilled both on-screen and on-paper. Stated in her opening, Horne argues, "As many readers have noted, the *Harry Potter* books are deeply invested in teaching their protagonists (and through them, their readers) how to confront, eradicate, and ameliorate racism through its deception of the racism that underlies Voldemort's campaign against Mudbloods," (Horne 76). Such lessons via the cruel actions of Voldemort and his loyal Death Eaters continuously hit fans over the head, as this theme is omnipresent throughout the series as a whole. It's plausible to deem this constantly occurring cultural theme affects *Harry Potter* viewers and readers, considering how obvious Voldemort's bias against Half-Bloods and Muggles becomes. What's even more apparent is the understanding that if such extreme blood-based bigotry was a non-issue all through the series, the epic Battle of Hogwarts would have never come to fruition, ultimately reshaping the *Harry Potter* series altogether. Dr. Kevin McGrath, a Professor at Harvard University, recently lectured on the topic of anthropological themes in feature films, arguing, "How you view culture in cinema is important because it signals how society is structured and how those in such societies are deemed," (Dr. Kevin McGrath, lecture). By understanding the culture surrounding Pure-Bloods, Half-Bloods, and Muggleborns within the *Harry Potter* series, viewers and readers have the ability to cognitively

conclude their morality, giving audiences a more in-depth and virtuous milieu to indulge with. Early on, the series demonstrates the intention behind the Battle of Hogwarts, as readers and viewers quickly grasp Voldemort's deliberateness toward the massive killing against all who do not side with his singleminded Pure-Blooded ethics and traditions. Granted, few Pure-Blooded witches and wizards did fight against Voldemort's evil rampage, however, a majority of the Pure-Blood group sided with Voldemort in fear of their lives and future bloodline. They knew if they did not side with Voldemort's savagery they would be killed, and the logical understanding their bloodlines would be forever gone coaxed many non-believers into hesitant followers.

Furthermore, it's important to note that the series itself also deals with other blood-based bias matters, specifically against house-elves, giants, goblins, and numerous other creatures alluded to across the series. All of these segregated issues consistently reinforce to the audience that regardless of who you are and what blood you possess, there's always going to be a group of people who will never see you as their equal; a staunch tradition that has plagued the wizarding world for centuries before the Battle of Hogwarts was even conceived. On the topic of the senseless murders conducted by blood motivation, J. K. Rowling admits on her *Pottermore* site that, "Sadly, Voldemort claimed more innocent lives than we'll probably ever know," leaving *Harry Potter* fans with an unjust aftertaste as, by the end of the series, many of the beloved characters had died in the battle against blood (Rowling, "Remembering Voldemort's victims").

Withal, not one of these bigoted takeaways matters if the audience does not participate in these ethical principles collectively demonstrated on-screen and on-page. The role of the audience, either with a book in hand or at the movie theaters, is to consume the media they're presented, and from there, do as they please. Interestingly, the *Harry Potter* audience has sparked

a new wave of embodying the series, both individually and on a grander, more collective scale. These many forms of audience participation include dressing in *Harry Potter*-themed costumes at book-releases or midnight movie showings, to gathering at Universal Parks & Resorts in Florida to experience The Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park. Like anything, popularity comes from an audience, and *Harry Potter* arguably has one of the greatest followings of any modern-day book or film series. Yet, how does the excitement from audience participation spawn into teaching valuable lessons to such fans? Dr. Gordon Gray recently discussed the topic of audience participation and film experience in a lecture at Harvard University, as he insists, “Audience participation forces the viewer to consider their role in not only their society, but on a larger, more worldly scale on big topics, such as race, religion, and economics,” (Dr. Gordon Gray, lecture). In a dual sensory strategy, the *Harry Potter* series does just that; it allows readers and viewers to embody such wizarding traditions, but with those comes the ultimate question: does one side with a Pure-Blood, Half-Blood, or Muggleborn character? While most fans categorize themselves by which character they most associate with, the agency behind such participation may open their minds to more than just who their favorite personality is. By linking one’s self to a *Harry Potter* character, they’re immediately assuming the role of half-them, half-character, which could urge the participator to act differently when considering how the character would or would not respond to important life happenings alike blood-hatred or racism. I, myself (associating my personality closest with Harry Potter) have wondered how Harry would react in certain situations I’ve come across that are similar to such occurrences within the novels and films; personifying more than just my personal beliefs, but the beliefs of my favorite character. Considering this, to all *Harry Potter* fans, it’s obvious which character(s) define themselves

through hatred and prejudice toward others, arguably asserting fans to want to embody the greater good of the wizarding world versus other ethically tainted characters. Dr. Gray goes on to state, “Audiences impose their own questions and interest on the topics at hand, which is a great place for audiences to gain interest, questions, and action toward a certain topic,” (Dr. Gordon Gray, lecture). By questioning how one’s beloved character would or wouldn’t react to a situation not only fuses their own culture with the fictional, but it creates a new tradition that takes such interests with the motivation to find a solution. For Harry Potter, his solution to the outward blood-bias within the wizarding community was to fight to the brink of death for the greater good, showing the audience his immense respect for those of all blood-types. Harry’s action toward the topic of bigotry was one that presented more than just heroism to the audience, but a form of inclusive love that ultimately saved the wizarding world forever. While it may be difficult to staunchly proclaim the *Harry Potter* series teaches every fan the customs surrounding our modern-day forms of blood-hatred or racism, it’s more than plausible to conclude after seven novels and eight movies the *Harry Potter* series and the real-world struggles demonstrated to the masses have a positive effect on the audience as a whole. One cannot complete the series without possessing a solid grasp on these sociopolitical issues, offering hope that the fantastical realism and morals displayed for such audiences may have a lasting impact on our nonfictional world.

At last, the series demonstrates that love and an appreciation for all is the answer to life’s most difficult questions and circumstances. Yet, the broader picture demonstrates to *Harry Potter* enthusiasts that one’s attitude toward another person or race is just as significant throughout the series as it is in our physical existence. Regardless of which character one may closest associate themselves to, the extreme blood-segregation displayed both on-screen and on-page consistently

illuminate these unfortunate issues within the wizarding world, and yet, they perfectly mimic our modern-day societies across the globe. By extracting such morals and placing them in everyday scenarios, *Harry Potter* audiences have the potential to adapt these core values from the series and utilize them in their own cultures and societies; inducing the opposite of Lord Voldemort's wishes and creating a better world for all to peacefully coincide in. Although J. K. Rowling chose to present these real-life biases in the form of the wizarding world, her motives behind educating the listenership on such relevant matters have resonated with audiences for over twenty-years; showcasing while we all have both good and bad within us, it's how we act upon such virtues that truly show others who we are.

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