

Harry Potter shows flaws in government



Korbin Keller

The Harry Potter series — books, movies and spinoffs — played a huge role in my childhood. It often filled my head with a world of whimsy and wonder as images of wands, witches and wizards appeared right in front of me. For many of us, the nature of Harry Potter took on an almost quasi-religious devotion. A devotion that I shamefully must admit I have been neglecting. However, recently I have been called back to worship at the altar, thanks to my long-time girlfriend's blasphemous sin — she's never seen the movies before! The only solution was to immediately convert her to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

However, when rewatching the series, I began to notice some interesting themes sprinkled throughout the work. As the saying goes, when I was a child I thought and reasoned as a child. Now, it appears Harry Potter is getting at quite an interesting theme — the government totally sucks.

Throughout all seven books and eight films — and even in the new film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* — The Ministry of Magic, the magical government of the Wizarding World, is shown to be completely inept, corrupt and full-on meddling in the lives of witches and wizards everywhere. For instance, as is mentioned throughout the books, the government was completely incapable of fighting the villain Lord Voldemort. Rather, it took the efforts of private citizens, organized in a secret underground resistance — the Order of the Phoenix — who were the ones brave and strong enough to oppose his tyrannical approach to power. This is a portrayal of the government incapable of opposing the Dark Lord, while a group of private citizens operate outside the scope of government, knowing it was co-opted by Lord Voldemort. This seems to imply it is the voluntary actions of private individuals — not the state — who are capable of fighting against tyranny and standing up for liberty.

As noted in "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," the Ministry of Magic has often resorted to scapegoating and ignoring a proper justice system, opting for an expedited process to bolster its own power. The Ministry blamed poor, innocent Hagrid for the murder committed by Tom Riddle. The Ministry saw in Hagrid a vulnerable minority, a half-giant, half-man, upon whom they could easily place the blame for the killing. This theme resonates again in "The Prisoner of Azkaban." Sirius Black was wrongly sentenced, without trial or investigation, for the sake of "wrapping up the case." We see, in Harry Potter, the government constantly convicts the wrong people rather than be seen as weak. Furthermore, the Ministry sentenced the creature Buckbeak "in order to protect the children." The government decided it needed to execute an innocent creature because it believed in bubble wrapping the kids of the Wizarding World.



Nowhere can the message of an intrusive and interventionist government be seen more strongly than in "Order of the Phoenix." First of all, upon hearing news that Lord Voldemort had returned, rather than addressing the issue, the government chose instead to deny it, censoring the news — no freedom of the press here — and launching a massive cover-up. Eventually, the government went so far as to send the despised Dolores Umbridge to Hogwarts, in order to put a government approved stamp on the curriculum. Hermione gravely stated, "the ministry is interfering at Hogwarts." There are similarities to Common Core to be seen. Umbridge quickly takes to dictating the lives of students, prohibiting freedom to petition, speak, or assemble. Could we see a warning against government setting the curriculum and interfering in the ability for teachers to set the lessons? Are these harrowing warnings against a nanny state, focused on deciding every aspect of our lives? Furthermore, it is revealed that the Ministry has trampled on the rights of marginalized, non-human magical creatures — centaurs, house elves and giants have all been victims of government oppression.

With a government so able to act without constraint, it comes to no surprise how easily Lord Voldemort was able to take it over and immediately set it towards promoting his totalitarian agenda of racial superiority and fascism. Only a very small number of wizards took a qualm to the new ministry policies, while the vast majority of the gov-

ernment appeared content and satisfied with the shifting focus toward dictatorship. Perhaps, these are lessons showing that citizens need constant vigilance in order to hold their government accountable, and that the citizenry needs to remain active in preventing a tyrannical takeover. It is lucky that every wizard possesses the right to bear wands, and that the Order of Phoenix was able to use that tool in order to resist, and ultimately overcome, the forces of evil.

Perhaps this is the case of the Mirror of Erised affect, where I am peering into a looking glass and only seeing what I wish to see most. However, the constant antagonistic relationship between Harry and his friends and the Ministry of Magic show that many in the Wizarding World are apprehensive at the idea of an overactive government. The government was certainly no friend to Harry throughout the series, and should be approached with a level of distrust when it functions at its best capacity, and to actively resist it when it performs at its worst. Although we see a marvelous world in the Harry Potter series, it does contain some illuminating political commentary. I advise you to watch or read through the series once again, and pay close attention to the political undertones.

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Diversity is not enough to fix inequity



Ben Wallis

Appeals to "diversity" are everywhere. Politicians exhort us to reject bigotry and build multicultural and multiethnic communities. Universities take great pains to display their acceptance of students of all backgrounds. In the workplace, employees are encouraged to participate in "diversity training sessions" meant to develop the skills of "cultural awareness" and "inclusivity." Certainly, these are all more-or-less commendable efforts — the opposite of diversity is homogeneity, established through the separation or suppression of difference. But diversity by itself cannot accomplish justice or remedy social inequalities. Too often, talk of diversity is substituted for frank discussions about equality. If the goal of progressive politics is to eliminate oppression and exploitation, we must aim for more than diversity. We must aim for equity.

The idea of diversity is rooted in the idea of tolerance. "Diverse communities" are supposedly absent of harmful conflicts that occur along the dividing lines of sex, race, culture or creed. While a "diverse college campus" might witness disagreements between its students, these are

resolved peacefully, through dialogue and mutual respect. Tolerance allows dissimilar people to understand and coexist with one another. Diverse spaces are often styled as mosaics in which many unique parts contribute to the whole. But this metaphor is overly simplistic. Mosaics lack a perspective of depth that would reveal the inequalities that exist in diverse communities. The subtle operation of systemic prejudices — whether racial, sexual, cultural, and so on — remain untroubled. Unfortunately, even the most principled application of tolerance does nothing to correct the unequal distribution of material and social resources.

Economic inequality in America presents serious problems for narratives fixated on diversity. For every dollar made by a white household, black households made 59 cents, according to an October 2016 study from Penn Wharton's Public Policy Initiative. In terms of hourly wages, black men took home 75 cents to white men's dollar. Black women took 64 cents, and Hispanic women brought home 54 cents. The specter of housing discrimination continues to haunt communities of color, as owning a home "is the primary vehicle of wealth building in this country," according to the same article. Such an uneven allocation of resources ultimately translates into an uneven allocation of opportunities and advantages in broader social life. Furthermore, extreme inequality exists within and between "identity communities." Any wealthy individual generally has more power than a poor individual, regardless of their other characteristics. The median wealth of upper-income families is 70 times that of lower-income families, according to a 2014 Pew Research report. How can diversity confront these issues?

By locating the ills of society in intolerance — a problem of attitude — diversity tends to overlook the material

bases of inequality. The enormous gaps in wealth between social groups continues to affect their members in all spheres of social existence — diverse or not. So while diverse communities might indeed include individuals of all backgrounds, these individuals often possess unequal means and opportunities. Meaningfully addressing these disparities requires resources to be redistributed and institutions to be changed. This is a costly and time-consuming enterprise. Because of this, cities, universities and workplaces often settle for the appearance of "diversity" in lieu of investing in programs meant to empower marginalized individuals. Programs exclusively focused on diversity are in constant danger of being trapped at a cosmetic level.

None of this is to say that diversity is not a worthy goal of progressive politics. However, diversity in and of itself is not sufficient to ensure equality and social justice. At the university level, calls for diversity must be followed by real investments in programs and institutions that facilitate the overcoming of social inequalities. Acknowledging LGBT students is therefore not enough — an LGBT resource center is needed, to materially counter the disadvantages faced by these students. Similarly, calls for multiculturalism must be married to the expansion of multicultural programs, creating outlets for the expressions of students from different backgrounds. Above all, universities must seek to make themselves accessible to everyone — via affirmative action policies and lower tuitions. A diverse university is desirable, but it is no substitute for an equitable one. We can and should push for better.

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