

*Content Warning: discussions of racism and eugenics*

### **Whiteness is Actually the Evil in *Mizora***

Before the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, there was a sectional crisis between free states and slave states that led to the fracturing of the nation. Neither anti-slavery nor pro-slavery factions were able to offer a solution to this issue on the eve of the Civil War. Even those who operated within anti-slavery circles were not always abolitionists. Various ridiculous solutions to the issue of slavery in the United States existed within anti-slavery circles. Some proposed colonization, imagining that transporting African Americans back to regions of Africa instead of attempting to envision a United States which was truly equal was the best solution. Racism was prevalent in every aspect of the United States. By 1880, when Mary E. Bradley Lane began publishing her novel *Mizora* as a serial in the *Cincinnati Commercial*, she, and the nation, had already begun to see the markings of failure of Reconstruction in the American South. In 1876, Republicans and Democrats struck a deal that exchanged the withdrawal of federal troops from the American South for the Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes to assume the Presidency. The conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865 had subjected the Southern states to ratify amendments that were supposed to protect the newly freed Black Americans, but with this deal in 1876, Black codes, and what later became known as the Jim Crow South, emerged to prevent Black Americans from exercising their new rights and freedoms. Lane's *Mizora* struggles to identify the source of corruption within the heart of American democracy in her "radical" feminist utopia through a thinly veiled commentary on the collapse and reconstruction of the United States. Lane locates sources of evil within men, prisons, and religion, and she identifies solutions within education, motherhood, and whiteness. Although Lane's text may initially appear radical on its surface, her central message that

universal education is an essential right of a free world is diminished by her implicit and explicit forms of racism in the text.

In this paper, I will be using “The Social Construction of Race” by Ian F. Haney López and *White Rage* by Carol Anderson as my background and frameworks to comprehend the constructions of race in *Mizora* and the United States at the time of its publication. Anderson’s historical and contemporary analysis of white supremacy in the United States defines a concept that she categorizes as “white rage.” She defines white rage, a form of white supremacy, as the backlash that Black Americans receive from white people (often violent acts), which occurs most often when Black people are seen being successful in public and private. She delineates the formation of white rage from Reconstruction, to the Great Migration, to the Jim Crow South, to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and lastly, the election of President Barack Obama. It is a useful framework to understand the historical context of racism in the United States, as well as how this applies to its contemporary structure. In “The Social Construction of Race” by Ian F. Haney López, he argues that race is a social construction based off of the perceptions that we have of others attributed to their physical appearances, effectively creating, what he denotes as, “a racial fabrication.”<sup>1</sup> Part of his discussion surrounding race is to emphasize that differences in race do not “reflect fundamental genetic differences.”<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century, at the time of Lane’s novel, he notes that there was an urge to create a scientific origin and divisions of race. This sentiment is reflected in the contemporary documents of this time period that held importance in the development of the United States, such as Thomas Jefferson’s “Notes on the State of Virginia.”<sup>3</sup> His piece propagated false notions that there were scientific differences

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<sup>1</sup> López, Ian F. Haney. “The Social Construction of Race.” *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, edited by Richard Delgado, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2013, 191-203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

<sup>3</sup> The most notable instances of Jefferson’s racism in this text take place from pages 149-159.

between Black and white people, effectively justifying the existence of slavery in the United States by arguing that Black people were not capable of living among white people. He writes, “I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”<sup>4</sup> With the weight of the framers of the nation behind this institution, these social constructions of race were prevalent and seemingly justified in nineteenth century America.

In the novel *Mizora*, the utopian society shares a nearly identical origin story to the United States. The narrator of the story, Vera Zarovitch, ends up in Mizora at the center of the earth’s interior, and she documents her journey. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is informed of Vera’s background. According to her, she is born of Russian nobility with “wealth and political power.”<sup>5</sup> Although she does not necessarily have an American background, which may be an intentional choice by Lane to try and remove her narrator from being directly and obviously correlated with American history, Vera’s character remarks on her childhood, which was American influenced. She remembers that her family spent vacations with an American family that exposed her to, “a knowledge and admiration for their form of government, and some revolutionary opinions in regard to my own.”<sup>6</sup> Despite her personal detachment from the ideals of America, she is very clearly American in the way that she is presented to the reader. However, Lane succeeds at allowing the reader to engage with these American issues by creating a character that is not necessarily American in a nation that can be critiqued because it is not technically “America.” After being exposed to these forms of radicalism, Vera loses respect for her Russian government. She becomes jailed for treason, and despite the influence of her

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<sup>4</sup> Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1787, Apex Data Services Inc., 2006, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, Mary E. Bradley. *Mizora: A Prophecy*. edited by Jean Pfaelzer, 1890, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2000, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

upbringing and politically powerful family members, she receives no commutation of her sentence. Instead, her father bribes her jailors to smuggle her out of Siberia. In this attempt, she becomes shipwrecked in Mizora. When she first happens upon Mizora, she notes the construction of buildings and steps from “white marble.”<sup>7</sup> Next, she notes the “beautiful girls” that she sees upon her arrival, writing, “I noticed that they were all blondes.”<sup>8</sup> Vera enforces the beauty of the place that she has happened upon by directly associating its beauty with its whiteness.

I stood apart from the groups of beautiful creatures like the genus of another race, enveloped in garments of fur that had seen much service. I presented a marked contrast. The evident culture, refinement, and gentleness of the ladies, banished any fear I might have entertained as to the treatment I should receive... from its broad streets came no sound of traffic, no rattle of wheels, no hum of life. Its marble homes of opulence shone white and grand through mossy foliage; from innumerable parks the fountains sparkled and statues gleamed like rare gems upon a costly robe; but over all a silence, as of death, reigned unbroken.<sup>9</sup>

Lane immediately creates a divide between Vera and the Mizorans from the moment that Vera arrives in Mizora. Lane promptly suggests differences between their races and explicitly mentions the “marked contrast” that Vera invokes in comparison to them. In the passage above, Vera calls the groups of Mizorans “beautiful creatures like the genus of another race.” She separates them from herself and associates them as more beautiful, standing apart from them. By elevating the whiteness of Mizora as grand and opulent, she is equating whiteness with these attributes. Moreover, she first notes the prevalence of women, remarking that all of them are

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

blondes, but she does not find this strange initially. However, she does find it peculiar that there are no men.<sup>10</sup> Vera expresses more interest in the absence of men than the exclusive presence of white women. She is not troubled by the exclusivity of whiteness whatsoever. Despite being concerned with why there are no men in Mizora, Vera does not immediately inquire about their absence.

Lane establishes a pro-education stance early in her novel. She reflects on the difficulty of learning the Mizoran language and recalls being sent to their National College to gain better proficiency. While there, she notices the value of education in Mizora. “To be a teacher in Mizora was to be a person of consequence. They were its aristocracy.”<sup>11</sup> Even though there seems to be some elevation of status among teachers and cooks, it appears to be less a form of social class and more a form of distinguishing intelligence. However, Lane detracts from establishing the centrality of education upon Vera’s arrival at the National College. While at the college, Vera points out the significance of whiteness at the college almost immediately. She tells the reader about the elements of artistic study that exist at the institution, detailing the galleries. “It possessed a number of portraits of women exclusively of the blonde type. Many of them were ideal in loveliness.”<sup>12</sup> Lane’s inclusion of these details reinforces her intentions of highlighting elements of whiteness as being central to what she views as the success of Mizora and its reasons for it, as well as the overall prevalence of whiteness in its environment. She notes the exclusivity of their blonde hair and immediately remarks upon their “loveliness.”

Vera also considers the education of young children in Mizora. “The infant schools interested me more than all the magnificence and grandeur of the college buildings.”<sup>13</sup> She is

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 31.

astonished by the good behavior and angelic nature of the students interacting with each other in Mizora. She compares them to children from her “own and other countries, where I had witnessed the display of human nature, unrestrained by mature discretion and policy.”<sup>14</sup> Despite Lane’s authorial efforts to illustrate the importance of education, these are devalued through her primary focus on whiteness in Mizora. Although singularly white schools may have been a reflection of the nineteenth-century schools that Lane was most familiar with, to the contemporary reader, this is more concerning, especially in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and efforts towards integration. Lane also neglects to consider what exactly makes Mizoran education better than in her own world, leaving the reader to conclude that it is because of the qualities that make Mizora different, noticeably whiteness.

In the United States during the nineteenth century, there were also efforts towards educational reform that defined many of the social issues.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, education was perceived as one of the ways to equate the social status between white and Black people, although the pursuit of education goes far beyond gaining the “skills required for White acceptance.”<sup>16</sup> By choosing not to include Black women in this story, Lane is contributing not only to the racial stereotypes of the nineteenth century, but she is also contributing to the erasure of Black women.<sup>17</sup> In a place like Mizora where “intellect is our only standard of excellence,” it asks us to consider why Lane would not include Black women in this story. She created a nation built with the semblance of equality, but by removing Black women from the story, she is making it inherently unequal. She acknowledges the existence of other races and admits their

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Second Edition. New York and London, Routledge, 2000, p. 210-212.

There is a long history of education being tied with activism, specifically Black women’s efforts towards encouraging education.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, 210.

<sup>17</sup> See *A Black Women’s History of the United States* for a survey about the lives and experiences of Black women in the nineteenth century.

elimination, founding Mizora on inequality and genocide. This does not even consider Lane's removal of men from the story. White men and the patriarchal system from a wider standpoint can be justified for removal because of its oppressive nature. The same cannot be said for Black men and women because of the systems of oppression that impact them.

In Mizora, the importance of motherhood is exceedingly clear to the reader. Vera observes that the Mizorans are a practical and almost emotionless people, except remarking that, "the only intense feeling that I could discover among these people was the love between parent and child.... The love of Mizora women for their children is strong and deep. They consider the care of them a sacred duty, fraught with the noblest results of life."<sup>18</sup> It appears that at some point the people in Mizora lowered the depth of emotions that they can feel, based on Vera's remarks. While this could be a problematic solution to issues of inequality, it could also have been the singular solution. If the only emotion that people feel deeply is love, then it is unlikely that a war would occur.

Vera repeatedly remarks in the text on how important the relationship between a mother and child is and how children deserve to have a carefree childhood.<sup>19</sup> Wauna tells Vera that "Childhood is regarded by my people as the only period of life that is capable of knowing perfect happiness, and among us it is a crime greater than the heinousness of murder in your country, to deprive a human being of its childhood."<sup>20</sup> But Lane's efforts to uplift the importance of motherhood are devalued by her focus on white motherhood. "Lane's essentialist celebration of female biology is inexorably tied to a fantasy of purification. She imagines that science can eradicate difference and that this elimination, made possible through white women's

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<sup>18</sup> Lane, 32-33.

<sup>19</sup> This sentiment is clearly influenced by the nineteenth century temperance movement and efforts towards ensuring that children were well-cared for in their homes.

<sup>20</sup> Lane, 118.

reproduction, will cure society of the conflicts and social ills wrought by the degenerative black body.”<sup>21</sup> This is affirmed when Vera experiences the death of a young girl in Mizora. She describes the experience in great detail, noting that every business in the city was closed and that “the whole city was sympathizing with sorrow.”<sup>22</sup> She describes the funeral procession, highlighting the elements of whiteness that were prevalent. Although the mother of the child wore black clothing and a veil, “The sisters wore white, their faces concealed by white veils. Each wore a white rosebud pinned upon her bosom.”<sup>23</sup> The classmates and friends of the girl who died also wore white with white rosebuds. In the grave, her body was covered by the white roses that the attendees had thrown in, as well as the white dress and white veil that covered her. Despite Mizora’s lack of religion, Lane instills here elements of purity associated with whiteness. The mother is dressed in black, a typical funeral custom that American readers would be accustomed to understanding. By including these elements of whiteness among everyone at the funeral except for the mother of the child who died, the reader is asked to question why this unusual characteristic is incorporated in Vera’s account of Mizora. Once more, Lane illustrates and instills the importance and prevalence of whiteness to Mizora’s culture.

When Vera visits the National College of Mizora, the Preceptress of the college appoints her daughter, Wauna, to be Vera’s guide throughout the journey. Vera’s initial observations seem geared towards conceptions of equality. She remarks on how, “the word ‘servant’ did not exist in the language of Mizora; neither had they an equivalent for it in the sense in which we understand and use the word.”<sup>24</sup> She reflects on how in Mizora, women’s occupations were “always matters of choice, for, as there was nothing in them to detract from their social position, they selected the

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<sup>21</sup> Broad, 249.

<sup>22</sup> Lane, 126.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 37.



one they knew they had the ability to fill.”<sup>25</sup> Vera is astonished and bewildered by the appearance of social equality in Mizora. Her tone of discontent at the servants, such as the cooks and chambermaids joining their conversation at a dinner, reveals her true impressions of Mizora. Despite being intrigued by its appearances of equality, she does not approve of their lack of distinct social positions and ranks.

Even though Vera seems to be disapproving of the social structure of Mizora, she comprehends the appearance of success in their society. She notices that there are no unhoused individuals in Mizora because their system of government provides housing to everyone. She asks the Preceptress how to bring back the same level of “this social happiness, this equality of physical comfort and luxury” to her own country.<sup>26</sup> The Preceptress responds with an urging that the poor must be educated and that it must be paid for by the rich. Vera immediately informs her that this would not be possible in her country. Later on in the novel, they begin distinguishing the differences of their various countries. Vera informs the Preceptress that there are men in her country. Vera also tells the Preceptress that she has a husband and son in the world that she is from. The Preceptress is shocked and disapproves, but then, she shows Vera a gallery at the college which contains portraits from thousands of years ago. There are men in the portraits when in previous galleries that Vera had been to, there had only been paintings of women. Vera also notices and asks the Preceptress about the absence of “dark hair and eyes.”<sup>27</sup> The Preceptress responds, “We believe that the highest excellence of moral and mental character is alone attainable by a fair race. The elements of evil belong to the dark race.”<sup>28</sup> Vera asks, “And what become of the dark complexions?” The Preceptress answers, “We eliminated them.”<sup>29</sup> Although

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Vera expresses that she silently disagrees with the Preceptress's view that the success of Mizora can be attributed to the elimination of Black people, by not having Vera challenge the Preceptress, her silence communicates that she has no desire to challenge the problematic nature of this world that she is currently inhabiting. Lane presents this as the solution to the issue of racial equality. There are apparent forms of racism in the dialogue that Lane wrote for the Preceptress and Vera in this context. She labels "evil" as something that belongs to "the dark race." Her writing is clearly influenced by the pejorative stereotype of the menacing Black man that still persists today. Additionally, the Preceptress's statements about the "moral and mental character" are prominent remnants of Jefferson's rhetoric.<sup>30</sup> With the context of the origin story of Mizora, this reads as even more problematic because it indicates that Lane may think that this is the solution to inequality in the United States.

The Preceptress explains the history of Mizora to Vera when Vera begins questioning the absence of men in the nation. She asks the Preceptress what happened to them, and the Preceptress responds that they became extinct three thousand years ago. She emphasizes that her nation began similarly to Vera's, noting that prisons, punishments, and crime were a common occurrence that characterized the social culture and issues of the country. The Preceptress narrates a story of a representative government forming through a revolution against aristocrats, illustrating a very similar story to the colonies of North America uniting together to form a nation that ultimately cut itself off from England. "They demanded a form of government that should be the property of all. It was granted, limiting its privileges to adult male citizens."<sup>31</sup> Although she does not mention race here, she does so later. She illustrates that this government lasted for a century, similar to the United States and that, "the consciousness of liberty is an

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<sup>30</sup> Jefferson, 148-150.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 96.

ennobling element in human nature. No nation can become universally moral until it is absolutely FREE.”<sup>32</sup> She articulates here that the principles of liberty and freedom that were so essential to the founding of this nation, noticeably similar to the United States, eventually led to their own undoing because of their hypocrisy. In the lead-up to the American Civil War, several radical activist groups invoked the words of the framers to justify their own causes.<sup>33</sup> By aligning themselves with ideals of freedom—what they perceived to be the original intentions of the framers—they were fighting for a United States that truly represented freedom and liberty for all. This contributed to the increasing tensions in the United States before the war. Furthering the similarities between these two nations, the Preceptress tells Vera,

But this first Republic had been diseased from its birth. Slavery had existed in certain districts of the nation. It was really the remains of a former and more degraded state of society which the new government, in the exultation of its own triumphant inauguration, neglected or lacked the wisdom to remedy. A portion of the country refused to admit slavery within its territory, but pledged itself not to interfere with that which had.

Enmities, however, arose between the two sections, which, after years of repression and useless conciliation, culminated in another civil war. Slavery had resolved to absorb more territory, and the free territory had resolved that it should not. The war that followed in consequence severed forever the fetters of the slave and was the primary cause of the extinction of the male race.<sup>34</sup>

In this passage, it is clear that Lane is addressing the sectional crisis over slavery that occurred in the United States. She alludes to the slave states versus the free states by noting that slavery had

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Abolitionists like David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison all employed tactics utilizing American Revolutionary ideals, such as Douglass’s “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” See *American Radicals* by Holly Jackson for more.

<sup>34</sup> Lane, 96.

only been apart of people's lives in "certain districts of the nation." She also remarks on the neglect of the framers to remove slavery from their new government, reflecting some of President Abraham Lincoln's rhetoric during the war. He maintained that it was the goal of the founders to have slavery eventually die out in the United States, successfully allying the Union with the goals of the framers.

The Preceptress proceeds to emphasize how women responded to the tyranny that emerged in the aftermath of this civil war, writing about the government that they created. "They formed a Republic, in which they remedied many of the defects that marred the Republic of men. They constituted the Nation an integer which could never be disintegrated by States' Rights ideas or the assumption of State sovereignty."<sup>35</sup> Lane contributes to a myth that the Civil War was about states' rights by labeling it here as one of the causes for the war.<sup>36</sup> Instead of choosing this moment to create a utopia where racial equality exists, she does the exact opposite. She creates an exclusively white nation. This is contextualized by the fear of "race mixing" in the United States, propagated by men like Jefferson. Katherine Broad writes about this relationship, "It is not merely the presence of other races that endangers whites, but the risk of contamination through sexual contact. Countering the reality of interracial rape (as well as romance), the emphasis on racial separation in U.S. culture and politics as well as in *Mizora* maintains the myth of a secure and identifiable white identity."<sup>37</sup> It was not enough for Lane to remove men from the story of *Mizora* because she did not want to create or suggest a multiracial nation, which would exist with the presence of Black women. She upholds and preserves white femininity by removing all men and Black women.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> In the aftermath of the war, forms of public history like statues honoring Confederate soldiers, were erected in the American South. Their plaques which mentioned the war for "states' rights" attributed to the Lost Cause myth about the Confederacy. See "The Lost Cause and the Meaning of History" by Grace Elizabeth Hale for more.

<sup>37</sup> Broad, Katherine. "Race, Reproduction, and the Failures of Feminism in Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 253.

Before Lane explicitly mentions slavery, she appears to allude to its existence. In a conversation between the Preceptress and Vera, they discuss the economy of Mizora, which appears to be a socialist structure. In regards to Mizora's infrastructure, she writes,

Machinery, with them, had become the slave of invention. I lived long enough in Mizora to comprehend that the absence of pauperism, genteel and otherwise, was largely due to the ingenious application of machinery to all kinds of physical labor. When the cost of producing luxuries decreases, the value of the luxuries produced must decrease with it. The result is they are within reach of the narrowest incomes. A life surrounded by refinement must absorb some of it.<sup>38</sup>

Lane invokes the word "slave," although not specifically referring to the institution of slavery as understood in this context. She is discussing infrastructure of the economy, encouraging the reader to recall the previous economic structure in the United States. Here, she lays the groundwork for the elimination of Black people from Mizora, by reinforcing that their role in the United States existed primarily as a form of manual labor. The Preceptress tells Vera that, "'No people,' she said, 'can rise to universal culture as long as they depend upon hand labor to produce any of the necessities of life.'"<sup>39</sup> This hints at the economic turmoil that the American South was left in, not only after the destruction of the Civil War on its land, but also to the structure of its economy. Before the Civil War, the American South had completely relied upon the labor of Black bodies, and in its aftermath, they devised a way to sustain this structure instead of creating a different economy that promoted and fostered equality.

In the United States today, there still exists a deep racial inequality and social divide. One of the most noticeable spaces for this exists within the prison industrial complex. Early

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<sup>38</sup> Lane, 60-61.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 62.

suggestions of this are echoed in Lane's authorial decisions in *Mizora*. In *Mizora*, there are no longer any prisons. While traveling with Wauna, the two of them go to what is left of the last prison in *Mizora*. The prison is described as being "a medium-sized residence of white marble" on a beautiful island.<sup>40</sup> "Art and wealth and taste had adorned the interior with a generous hand. A library studded with books closely shut behind glass doors had a wide window that commanded an enchanting view of the lake..."<sup>41</sup> Lane first establishes a prison that is vastly different from any prison that might be imagined in the nineteenth century. Here, she creates a prison that is not demoralizing and a place where someone could actually live their life to some sort of fulfillment. Then, she describes the painting that depicts the last prisoner of *Mizora*. She describes her as a blonde woman with straight blonde hair wearing a dress made of thick white material. From this first moment, she redefines what a prisoner may look like in *Mizora*. Contrary to nineteenth century understandings of crime and femininity, the last prisoner in *Mizora* was a beautiful blonde woman.

Her attitude and expression were dejected and sorrowful. I had visited prisons in my own land where red-handed murder sat smiling with indifference. I had read in newspapers, labored eloquence that described the stoicism of some hardened criminal as a trait of character to be admired.... To waken sympathy for a criminal who had never felt sympathy for his helpless and innocent victims, and I had felt nothing but creeping horror for it all. But gazing at this picture of undeniable repentance, tears of sympathy started to my eyes. Had she been guilty of taking a fellow-creature's life?<sup>42</sup>

Lane asserts that the *Mizoran* woman felt remorse for whatever her actions were that landed her in prison. She compares it to the prisons from her world, specifically the prisoners which occupy

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 116-117.

it. Lane does not have Vera engage in any commentary on the harmful construction of the prison system in her world, but she focuses on what she indicates as a lack of possibility for rehabilitation. She focuses on the depravities of the people occupying those places, concentrating on their indifference and appearance of joy and humor at the crime that they committed. She compares this to the woman from Mizora who appears to be in deep remorse in what she calls “undeniable repentance” in the passage above. This observation asks us to consider what the goal of a prison is, and if someone feels repentance, should they be released?

Vera asks how long the woman was confined in the prison for, to which Wauna informs her that it was a lifetime imprisonment. She is not still alive and died over a century ago. The woman did not commit murder, and Wauna tells Vera that murder has not been committed in Mizora for three thousand years. Vera asks what the reason for her imprisonment could have been, given that it was lifelong. “‘She struck her child,’ said Wauna sadly; ‘her little innocent, helpless child that Nature gave her to love and cherish, and make noble and useful and happy.’”<sup>43</sup> Vera’s first reaction when Wauna tells her this is to ask how serious the physical injury was, but Wauna clarifies that the physical injury does not account for any mental injury that the child may be impacted with, which could present in their personality later in life. This focus on the healthy upbringing of children on the surface appears to be very well-intentioned. However, the implications of race remain relevant here. In Mizora, only white children are blessed with the opportunity to enjoy a happy childhood whereas in reality, Black and brown children are not afforded these same opportunities.

In the documentary *13TH*, they delineate how the clause of the 13th Amendment “except as punishment for crime” provided a loophole to essentially preserve slavery within the prison system. They discuss how, “after the Civil War, African Americans were arrested en masse. It

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 117.

was the nation's first prison boom."<sup>44</sup> This nineteenth century relevance likely informed Lane's perspective when writing *Mizora*. This also has a contemporary relevance in how Blackness was criminalized, and how Lane's novel attributes to early efforts towards this through her exclusion of Blackness. Carol Anderson considers Nixon's campaign ads and how they portrayed Black people in derogatory ways, suggesting that they created destruction in society: "crime and blackness soon became synonymous in a carefully constructed way that played to the barely subliminal fears of darkened, frightening images flashing across the television screen."<sup>45</sup> These circumstances have a clear and direct correlation to the early institution of slavery in the United States.<sup>46</sup> While Lane writes that slavery is the root of some of the evil and social inequality within the nation that existed before *Mizora*, her choice to not create a society with racial equality also serves as a way of neglecting the responsibility of white persons for chattel slavery in the United States and its harmful implications. In *Mizora*, there are not any current forms of active crime, and Vera remarks on how no doors are locked. What makes *Mizora* different from Vera's world and nineteenth century realities? Why is there no longer crime in *Mizora*? These questions persist in the text. The reader is left with either concluding that the prison reform in *Mizora* worked to create a better society or that their form of reproduction and eugenics played a role in eliminating crime from their nation.

Furthering the differences between the prison of *Mizora* and the prisons of Vera's world, Vera recounts to the Preceptress how in her world, prisons are "almost exclusively occupied by the male sex. Out of eight hundred penitentiary prisoners, not more than twenty or thirty would be women; and the majority of them could trace *their* cries to man's infidelity."<sup>47</sup> In this instance,

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<sup>44</sup> Duvernay and Moran, *13TH*, 3:09.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, 104.

<sup>46</sup> Haney López, 191-192.

<sup>47</sup> Lane, 132.



Vera merely focuses on the sex of the prisoners, asserting that all crime stems from the faults of man. She makes no mention of the racial background of the prisoners.<sup>48</sup> The Preceptress's first question about the information is what is done to reform people while in prison. Vera responds that they hear the gospel on Sunday and work the rest of the time. The Preceptress's unequivocal solution to this issue is that the prisoners must be educated to be reformed. "Educate your convicts and train them into controlling and subduing their criminal tendencies by *their own will*, and it will have more effect on their morals than all the prayers ever uttered."<sup>49</sup> Lane's argument for education and against religion comes through, but it is overshadowed by some of the language that she uses. Although Vera has made no mention of race yet, it is likely that some of the convicts in her world are not white. There is clearly a racialized tone within this passage, especially when you look at it alongside Jefferson's rhetoric. He writes of the physical and moral differences between Black and white people. Reinforcing these constructions of physical labor capabilities, he writes, "A black after hard labour through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning."<sup>50</sup> He also claims that Black people do not have the same capacity for "thought above the plain level of narration."<sup>51</sup> These forms of racial stereotypes appear to be reflected subtextually in Lane's descriptions of the prisons in Vera's world. The Preceptress also says to Vera, "The more ignorant the human mind, the more abject was its slavery to religion."<sup>52</sup> Again, Lane invokes terms regarding slavery without actually addressing it and its role in the United States prison system. Despite her larger point of education being able to free the mind,

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<sup>48</sup> Recent scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Carol Anderson have both researched the U.S. criminal justice systems and its role in imprisoning a disproportionate number of Black Americans. While these efforts are very much contemporary considerations of the subject, they point to a long history of placing the worth of white lives above Black lives in the United States.

<sup>49</sup> Lane, 133.

<sup>50</sup> Jefferson, 148.

<sup>51</sup> Jefferson, 149-150.

<sup>52</sup> Lane, 133.

this connotation of ignorance coupled with the racist undertones threatens the quality of her argument.

Lane's anti-religion rhetoric assumes that the emotions of the women who live in Mizora have also diminished. In Vera's conversation with Wauna, Wauna expresses speculation over the utility of religion.

Prayer will never produce an improved air-ship. We must dig into science for it. Our ancestors did not pray for us to become a race of symmetrically-shaped and universally healthy people, and expect that to effect a result. They went to work on scientific principles to root our disease and crime and want and wretchedness, and every degrading and retarding influence.<sup>53</sup>

The motivations towards an anti-religion state are diminished when considering what Wauna is implicating here. In her emphasis on scientific principles, it is clear that she is advocating for eugenics, arguing that there are biological reasons why disease and crime exist. Lane's racist tones diminish any form of argument that she could establish. Instead of considering the role that religion may play in upholding social structures which encourage the negative aspects of society, she merely locates her solution within white supremacy. Lane's harmful language does not end here. In Vera's exchanges with the Preceptress about the faults of religion, the Preceptress claims that, "The intelligent and humane began to doubt the necessity of such dreadful and needless torment for every conceivable misdemeanor, and it was modified, and eventually dropped altogether." Here, the Preceptress concludes that only the intelligent and humane doubted the foundations of religion. While organized religion is perhaps reasonably regarded with disdain and speculation, in the explanation of the Preceptress about the faults of religion, it neglects an understanding of why spirituality emerges for humanity. By neglecting the potential values and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 121.

importance of spirituality and religion, she also chooses to ignore the white and Black women intellectuals and activists who organized within churches. In each moment, there is an opportunity for Lane to include Black women in the story of Mizora and she forgoes this.

During the Civil War, both the Confederate and the Union soldiers justified their cause in a variety of ways. Religion was one of the natural justifications because any cause can be grounded on and believed in if there is someone who is convinced that they are on the side of God. For soldiers on both sides, many of them thought that God stood with them.<sup>54</sup> Because of its malleability, religion also poses a great danger. In Mizora, the Preceptress explains this power and hazard of religion to Vera. “Two nations at war with each other, and believing in the same Deity, would pray for a pestilence to visit their enemy. Death was universally regarded as a visitation of Providence for some offense committed against him instead of against the laws of nature.”<sup>55</sup> The Preceptress points out the illogicality of this argument—that death is a sign from God. However, in a time of war when there was such deep uncertainty, battles that were lost and suffered many deaths could sometimes serve as the only way to find reason in what was unexplainable.

In the post-Civil War America, the world that Lane is creating within Mizora is clearly informed by the events that transpired during the sectional crisis of the United States. These similarities between America and Mizora are consistent throughout the novel, asking us to draw parallels across these two worlds. This is affirmed when Vera expresses that she does not tell the Preceptress that she had been giving her a version of her own history and “remarked the resemblance with the joyous hope that in the future of my own unhappy country lay the

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<sup>54</sup> Gary Gallagher’s *The Confederate War* studies motivations that Confederate soldiers fought in the war, citing religion as one of the motivating factors. Chandra Manning’s *What This Cruel War Was Over* also discusses motivations for both Confederate and Union soldiers, citing religion as a motivator in both cases.

<sup>55</sup> Lane, 135.

possibility of a civilization so glorious, the ideal heaven of which every sorrowing heart had dreamed. But always with the desire to believe it had a spiritual eternity.”<sup>56</sup> Vera desires for her own country to not only no longer be unhappy but also to be “glorious” and “the ideal heaven.” This expectation that happiness comes from looking like Mizora is concerning, given what Vera knows about Mizora’s elimination of Black people. Despite this, she still asks Wauna to come with her back to her world.

Vera expresses that her desire to return home to her own world was accompanied by a desire to bring back the “noble lessons and doctrines” that she learned in Mizora.<sup>57</sup> Wauna is initially excited about the proposition that Vera wants to bring her back to her world, but the Preceptress expresses skepticism about Wauna’s ability to adjust to the conditions that exist within Vera’s society. She even contends that it may be more harmful to Wauna than beneficial to Vera’s nation. Wauna wants to go, and ultimately, they begin their journey. When they reach Vera’s world, Vera remarks that Wauna’s “unusual beauty and her evident purity attracted attention wherever she went.”<sup>58</sup> Even once Vera has arrived back in her own world, it is evident that whiteness remains the most beautiful and pure from her perspective, based on the public’s reaction to her appearance. Unfortunately, any hope that she had for Wauna having a positive impact on her world is quickly rebuffed because “the respect felt for a character so exceptionally superior” made “imitation and emulation... impossible.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Wauna quickly begins to lose the quality of her health after living in her world.

When Wauna tells Vera that she is not suited for her world, she names a litany of reasons why there is an incompatibility that exists between the two different worlds. She enumerates the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 145.

organization of Vera's people, the ill treatment of children by mothers, the selfishness, and even the food. Wauna also says that it is difficult to reconcile the existence of men. In the moments where Vera is describing her return to the world from Mizora, she notes the situational and environmental changes that occur. In neither of these instances does Vera mention the existence of race in her world. But, she does seem to echo racialized sentiments that she has reiterated throughout the text. "Though we cannot hope to attain their perfection in our generation, yet many, very many, evils could be obliterated were we to follow their laws. Crime is as hereditary as disease."<sup>60</sup> What evils is Lane referring to here, when she previously equated the "dark race" with "evil"?<sup>61</sup>

Although Lane advocates for educational, prison, and implicitly, gender reform in her novel *Mizora*, she detracts from her argument through her efforts to center whiteness and her own views about its goodness and purity. Mizora is not real. The eugenics that Lane advocates for are not ethical, and it is unlikely that they would even lead to the apparent harmony that she portrays in Mizora. There is strength, creativity, and love found in diversity, and Lane neglects to understand this version of humanity. She makes love and motherhood one of the pillars of the nation that she creates; yet, it is clear that she does not understand love herself by removing Black women from the story of this nation.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 92.



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