**HM4412 Portfolio - Semester Two**

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**Critically examine and explain one or more representations of Christopher Columbus and/or the discovery of the Americas. These could be monuments, exhibitions, films, art, literature, or historical work**

Representations of Columbus have changed from admiration at the time of discovery and sometime after, crediting him to have expanded the Spanish Empire and his “discovery of the Americas” being the catalyst of European expansion and imperialism. To the realisation and recognition of the damage of Columbus’ actions on the native people of the Americas, these differing interpretations through time can be seen within many artforms such as paintings, treatment of statues and cartoons. During his journey, Columbus raised the Lions and Castles Flag seen in McConnel’s *The Santa Maria* which represents the unification of two houses by the marriage of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, which supports the argument that this journey helped Spain and its Empire, and that Columbus was funded and supported by the monarchy.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Spanish monarchs of 1492’s titles of the ‘Catholic King and Queen’[[2]](#footnote-2), also reinforce the Catholic mission element to his journey from Palos.

Paintings from the 19th century such as Gottlieb’s ‘*The Departure of Columbus from Palos in 1492*’[[3]](#footnote-3) and Tolin’s *The First Landing of Christopher Columbus* reflect a European perspective on this discovery and how it impacted Christendom and the expansion of the European Empires. Gottlieb’s painting glorifies Christopher Columbus and reinforces the image of Columbus as a saviour, with the support of the Spanish who are praising him and his journey from Palos for the Spanish Empire, with Christopher Columbus at the centre of the painting as a ‘martyr [whose] prepared to sacrifice himself on the open sea.’[[4]](#footnote-4) Among the crowd there are monks, emphasising the religious implication of Columbus’ journey and invasion.

McConnel’s *The Santa Maria’*s use of the crusade symbol further highlights the Christian mission element to Christopher Columbus’ journey to America with direct connotations to the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries crusades in an attempt to conquer Israel. This red cross has been a symbol of Christianity since Pope Eugenius III’s approval in 1147, and for the ‘Crusader, the red cross represented martyrdom and reminded them of the sacrifice of Christ’[[5]](#footnote-5). Reinforcing the image of Columbus as a martyr, as well as a saviour of the new world in the name of Christ, reflected in both Gottlieb and Tolin’s paintings of Columbus. On the other hand, this painting could be in opposition of this image of Columbus. Edwin McConnel’s work could be interpreted as a critique on this journey with its inclusion of the symbol linking to the failure of the crusades. Although the inclusion of the cross could have been there to redeem this symbol of European Christian expansion and show that this symbol can succeed to expand Christendom outside of Europe. The depiction of this grand ship can be seen as a symbol of power over the indigenous peoples of America in 1492, with this trio of ships battling the elements to consolidate Christian and Spanish influence in the New World.

Tolin’s ‘The First Landing of Christopher Columbus’[[6]](#footnote-6), with Columbus on his knee before God, and the explorers bringing light to the “new” continent creates Christian symbolism with the use of “light” representing enlightenment while the natives are hidden among the land, in the dark which could represent the lack of Christianity and “civilisation” before the invasion. Tolin’s painting includes a monk using a crucifix to bless or exorcise the New World, suggesting that the Natives are not protected by God and Christ and the invaders need to save them by bringing them into the light, religious enlightenment, with the support of Pope Alexander VI. Columbus’ departure from Palos was the catalyst to Spanish exploration and further European expansion into the “New World” and the ‘elevation of 1492 as a decisive step towards modernity’[[7]](#footnote-7), influencing future imperialism and the spread of Christianity, for example, with Mormonism.

While 20th and 21st century representations and interpretations of Columbus and his “discovery” are critical of the explorer. With Notre Dame University deciding to cover the Columbus murals painted by Gregori from 1882 to 1884, which were ‘a point of pride to Roman Catholic students and alumni’[[8]](#footnote-8) as Pope John Paul II recognises that the ‘cultural oppression, the injustices of [Native American’s] way of life and [their] traditional societies must be acknowledged.’[[9]](#footnote-9) This recognition is reflected in Lalo Alcaraz’s satirical cartoons and conveys contemporary attitudes towards the explorer, mocking Columbus with him on the side of the road, asking for money and holding a ‘Lost. Will work for savages’[[10]](#footnote-10) sign, juxtaposes the earlier centuries support. The title itself ‘La Cucaracha discovers Christopher Columbus’ invalidates his discovery of the Americas and condemns his exploitation of it and its people. Along with the oppression of Native Americans throughout history since 1492, to the white settlers’ wanting to ‘wipe these untamed and untameable creatures from the earth,’ [[11]](#footnote-11), along with modern ‘persistent anti-Indian racism’.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Other work by Alcaraz such as ‘Christopher Columbus discovers ‘gravity’’[[13]](#footnote-13), reflects the Black Lives Matter movement that sparked in America 2020 with the removal of statues of those who oppressed people of colour. This is reflective of the vandalism of Christopher Columbus statues, as ‘a 125-year-old statue of explorer Christopher Columbus in New York City's Central Park was defaced’[[14]](#footnote-14) in protest to the praising of Columbus and his invasion. These modern oppositions to this invasion lead to ‘Columbus’ statues [being] daubed, celebrations [being] boycotted… [these] protests are part of a process of image-making and image-breaking’[[15]](#footnote-15), along with support of replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous People’s Day. Within the late 19th century Columbus was seen as an ‘intrepid explorer who embodied progress and bravery’[[16]](#footnote-16) and credited for European empirical expansion and success, now in the 21st century we have learned of Columbus Day’s ‘origins, its true meaning, and its importance to US identity and persistent anti-Indian racism’[[17]](#footnote-17) some states have replaced this Italian American holiday with Indigenous People’s Day.

Overall, representations of Columbus have increasingly became negative with contemporary understanding of the damage this invasion caused and continues to make room for ‘persistent anti-Indian racism’[[18]](#footnote-18) with the celebration of this explorer.

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**Feminism**

For this presentation I researched transgender people in sport, focusing on the Olympics and their rules for transgender athletes, specific examples of the first transgender man, transgender women, and non binary athletes in the Olympics. I also focused on Renée Richards, Santhi Soundarajan, and Caitlyn Jenner on specific cases of transphobia affecting the careers of transgender female athletes and cisgender female athletes. Then I mentioned transgender laws/bills and the physical “examinations” on transgender people, and the almost complete ban on intersex athlete participation in sport and how intersex infants have invasive surgery to make them “’grow up normal.”’[[19]](#footnote-19)

These laws and attitudes towards transgender people in sport relate to the feminism lecture content as these rules and regulations restrict and oppress transgender people in sport link to the changing of laws discussed in the lecture on women’s freedom to vote, divorce their husband, and have access to their wages, property, and their children after divorce. Laws we discussed in the lecture such as the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864, 1866, and 1869’s ‘invasive medical examination’ are reflected in the 1950s visual genital inspections of female athletes who wanted to compete. [[20]](#footnote-20) These visual inspections were only implemented on the female athletes, extending the double standard into the Olympics. With articles discussing the ‘threat’[[21]](#footnote-21) that transgender women pose to women’s sport widely spread on most news outlets with little media coverage on transgender men in sport. This is an example of transmisogyny along with the discussion over transwomen’s success or lack of in sports, ‘If we win a race, we have an “unfair advantage”; if we lose a race, we didn’t train hard enough”.[[22]](#footnote-22) The inspections oppress women along with the ‘2003 International Olympic Committee’s requirements for a transgender athlete to compete, emulate the restrictions of the women’s right to vote with the need of property, to be over 30 years old before the equal suffrage of men and women.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Renée Richards’ aim to compete in the 1976 US Open meant that she ‘challenged the classification structure of tennis.’, linking to the Suffragette Movement discussed in lecture, these women challenged societal structure and norms in order to gain equality.[[24]](#footnote-24) Emulating Suffragists tactics, with passive actions against authority such as, ‘focusing on her feminine appearance’ and downplaying her athleticism in order to convince the committee and other athletes to include her in the US Open.[[25]](#footnote-25)

After her 2006 victory, ‘Santhi Soundarajan was subjected to a disrespectful and invasive scrutiny of her biological sex.’[[26]](#footnote-26) These invasive sex tests began in ‘1950 after the International Association of Athletics Federation (IASF) began physical examination, also known as “nude parades” of female athletes.’[[27]](#footnote-27) Which are still practiced in the 21st century reinforcing the misogyny and transmisogyny within sport, these regulations continuing emulate the constant struggle female-assigned people and feminine presenting people face.

Caitlyn Jenner is one of the most well-known transgender athletes and transgender women since her coming out in the July 2015 issue of Vanity Fair magazine cover titled ‘Call Me Caitlyn’[[28]](#footnote-28), this exposure to transgender people aided feminism in the fourth wave by displaying the diversity of women and the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. Caitlyn Jenner explained that she wasn’t ‘doing this to be interesting. I’m doing this to live.’[[29]](#footnote-29) This allowed the cisgender community a small insight into transgender struggles, mirrored by feminist films and literature such as the Suffragette film from 2015, mentioned in the feminism lecture discussion.

Intersex infant and child surgery mirrors restriction on feminists’ fight for reproductive rights for female-assigned people linking with the feminist fight against Female Genital Mutilation in order to protect young people from invasive procedures and exploitation. Kimberly Zieselman explains that ‘The devastation caused by medically unnecessary surgery on intersex infants is both physical and psychological,’ bringing light to the damage parents and doctors pose to intersex children.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Chronological structure of the timeline of laws and inclusion of transgender athletes in sport worked well in order to articulate my research and develop a coherent development of transgender peoples’ rights and ability to compete in sport throughout history. The use of three short biographies also worked well because they allow people to understand modern day transphobia in sport by learning from personal experiences of a few athletes rather than just statistics. Using the example of Santhi Soundarajan explores transphobia as a social issue and how it can damage anyone’s career based on a blood test and chromosomes. However, these biographies could have been developed to go in depth in the processes these women were forced to go through and how they had to prove their worth to compete in their correct category in sport. Ending the presentation with a quiz could have enhanced the impact on those listening by reminding them of the content of the presentation and answer any questions they had after our presentation. Overall, my part of the presentation conveyed what I aimed to, bringing light to the challenges faced by transgender people, and the struggle of transgender women facing transmisogyny within sport and the media.

Our presentation’s structure and variety of topics allowed us to present a widespread view of feminism and women’s struggles in many aspects of life. The use of biographies, a Suffragette film review, sex workers and feminism, religion and feminism, and transgender people in sport allowed us to explore centuries of oppression and rebellion of women. The presentation style I used enhanced my skills as an historian as I sectioned the information into topics in order for it to be digestible information for a large group instead of one large block of information. The short sentences explain the laws, experiences, and oppression transgender people, and particularly transgender women, face in sport. My contribution to the feminism presentation enhanced my skills as a historian as I was able to collect research and organise my findings in a way that may help in similar tasks later on in the course. These skills could carry over into my final dissertation in presenting my research and ideas on the dissertation topic.

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