

Examining the Connection between Material Wealth and Societal Worth
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Introduction:

As an undergraduate research assistant for the English Broadside Ballad Archive I have worked alongside my peers in associated images as well as learning new techniques in Photoshop. Throughout the quarter being a part of this project has expanded my knowledge of technology and innovativeness concerning research and collaboration. This opportunity has provided a network of support and purpose in the midst of the global pandemic. Through this research the archive has provided a canon of past periods and many of the topics parallel our modern time. Working in part to organize and analyze each of these pieces of media and literature there are several similarities that can be identified in relation to material wealth and social worth. The ballads that intrigued me as an undergraduate research assistant include those that deconstruct, and even lament, upon one's value as dictated by society. This experience has provided me as a student with great appreciation for the collection and memorialization of media as a reflection of what is considered important during the given period it was produced. Furthermore, reading over these materials has allowed me to question what people in the future will take away from our society today as being valuable.

Discussion:

Reflecting back on this quarter as an EBBA undergraduate research assistant I am extremely grateful that I got to be a part of this project. I feel more connected to the university as well as the department which was integral to me succeeding as a student in my second to last quarter at UCSB. This program provides a sense of purpose in contributing to a massive resource which is also utilized by other scholars around the world. The archive itself is fascinating because it indicates so much about the population and their experiences during their lifetime. This also has put into perspective that one day our current media may be a part of an archive that examines our society. Our current political, social, and interpersonal affairs may one day be examined and analyzed in this same manner. I am greatly intrigued by this possibility and pondering what will be included in an archive of the times we currently are living in. In EBBA I learned to be meticulous and how to communicate with mentors who increased my knowledge of applications such as Photoshop which I had no previous experience. EBBA also taught me to look closely at material and find the main "lesson" or "message" of the piece. I had no previous knowledge coming into EBBA regarding print culture and I was fascinated by so many of these pieces by the media produced regarding class status and material wealth. Examining the social structure of the period as well as its parallel to material wealth/capital as influential over one's treatment by society is still prevalent in our period. I applied my skills that I learned in EBBA to find pieces from the archive that reflected my interest in this field, and through the database found several parallels that pertain to my research question. One of the first pieces that I found was EBBA

33436 titled “Tis Money makes a Man: / OR, The Good-Fellows Folly” integrates discussion regarding money and societal value. The main character expresses that “Then make much of a Penny as near as you can, / For if that be wanting thou’rt counted no man” this cycle is also perpetuated by the character’s struggle with alcohol (EBBA 33436). In this piece the lesson expressed by the ballad coincides with social status/value and masculinity as a failure to live up to the standard equates to ostracization. Social value and social class are a part of modern society’s determination of value and the ballad cements this parallel with the lines, “‘Tis money you see makes a Lord, or yet, Earl, ‘Tis money you see that sets out a young Girl” (EBBA 33436). Without material wealth there are two simultaneous messages sent to the reader of the ballad as a warning. First, the class message indicates that without material wealth the person lacks value and will live under those who do. Second, the gendered message about material wealth and interpersonal relationships indicates that without money one will not attract partners and their masculinity is questioned. “A Dialogue betweene Master Guesright and poore neighbour Needy”, is another ballad from the archive that connects the relationship between material wealth and social worth while cementing social hierarchy. The lack of money is compared to illness in the ballad which emphasizes the emotional and physical effects upon the afflicted, “For money I want and believe so do you... I know you are sicke of my sore disease” (EBBA 3005). This ballad connects to the class stratification experienced in the period of the ballad and modern day as material wealth determines one’s quality of life. Money is a contributing factor in one’s acceptance in society and their experiences in the final lines of the ballad confirms that, “men do more for money than love” (EBBA 3005). Both of these ballads strung together the questions that I posed concerning what our media reflects about our culture and the connection between the two periods (past and present) is social stratification and the “gap” between classes.

Conclusion:

I am very fortunate that I was able to be a small part in this program and its efforts to collect research as well as create a database accessible to all scholars. The database itself is meticulously organized through the work of our mentors and fellow undergraduate researchers to provide easy and clear classification of material. I look forward to learning more applicable program skills and mastering Photoshop as well as adapting to our online format. I am very appreciative of the opportunity I was given to work within EBBA and look forward to collaborating on work to extend the database in the future.