

Graduate Research Symposium Proposal

Title – The Caste of Poverty: Nineteenth-Century Literature and the 1834 British Poor Laws

Program of Study – British History

Presentation Type – PowerPoint (Remote Oral Presentation)

Mentor and Mentor's Email – Dr. Tess Stockslager (trstockslager@liberty.edu)

Student Name and Email – Kandy Crosby-Hastings (kacrosbyhastings@liberty.edu)

Category – Textual or Investigative

Abstract: "... Don't call the Institutions of your country a muddle, or you'll get yourself into a real muddle one of these fine mornings. The Institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do is, to mind your piece-work."¹ This Charles Dickens quote from *Hard Times* epitomizes an attitude against the poor in nineteenth-century England. This attitude, Jack Katz argues in "Caste, Class, and Counsel for the Poor," led to a caste system of poverty. He bases this idea upon three criteria that a caste system is restricted to a specific location, has its own, unique identity, and is morally unique. The poor, especially the poor in nineteenth century, Industrial England, fit these criteria.² As Friedrich Engels writes in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, the Industrial Revolution changed everything about ordinary society.³ The Poor Laws of the era saw to it that those who lived in poverty were viewed with disgust and were outsiders of decent society.⁴ This paper will explore Katz's caste argument using nineteenth-century literature written by Dickens, Thomas De Quincey, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Engels as examples of how the poor were viewed by the rest of society. It will investigate the authors' role as advocates of those who were thrown aside due to the British Poor Laws. It will compare historical research and primary source documents with the claims made by Katz and the literary authors to determine the accuracy of the authors' claims. Finally, it will include sociological examination and historiographical research regarding the treatment of the poor due to the British Poor Laws. This historical study leaves room for further investigation of Katz's theory as it relates to other eras and to poverty in today's world.

¹ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), 59.

² Jack Katz, "Caste, Class, and Counsel for the Poor," *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (1985): 251-255.

³ Friedrich Engels, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, ed. Victor Kiernan (London, England: Penguin Books, 1987), 50.

⁴ Katz 1985, 254-255.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. London, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995.

Engles, Friedrich. *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. Edited by Victor Kiernan. London, England: Penguin Books, 1987.

Secondary Sources

Katz, Jack. "Caste, Class, and Counsel for the Poor." *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (1985): 251-291.