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Final Self-Reflective Essay

In 2008, a devastating hurricane formed by the actions of Wall Street traders took wind, destroying the lives of lower and middle-class Americans all over the country as it took their homes from underneath them. However, unlike a real natural disaster, this hurricane was preventable. The hurricane gained power through the lack of empathy demonstrated by the members of the Wall Street “bubble”. Throughout the novels and books we’ve read this semester, such as *The Big Short* and *The Turner House*, we get to see both the perspectives of the people behind this crisis and how this hurricane formed, as well as the perspectives of the innocent families whose lives have been torn apart by the storm. We also got to read books that didn’t directly describe the 2008 financial crisis but were metaphorical in describing how a large force of pressure drives individuals and families out of their homes, such as in *Parable of the Sower*, *A Mercy*, and *King Lear*. All of the books, though, did demonstrate how an individual’s actions have consequences, and how it’s extremely important to remain vigilant to the feelings of the people around you in order to act in good faith.

The first novel we read this semester, *King Lear*, almost sets up a common theme for the rest of the books and novels we read, a theme of an overwhelming force, such as water, forcing individuals and families out of their homes. *King Lear* also involves an instance of using bad faith for personal gains, such as in the situation where King Lear believes his two daughters over Cordelia due to their bluffing of how much they love him. This situation parallels the situation in

The Big Short where Wall Street traders and investors took advantage of innocent people in order to gain profit and advance their careers. On page 367 of *The Big Short*, one of these powerful Wall Street investors explains, “We took them through our trade but I'm pretty sure they didn't understand it.” With their advanced knowledge of economics and trading, they had the upper hand when relaying information to people who knew less than them in this field, and these investors used this lack of knowledge to their advantage, demonstrating an instance of someone acting in bad faith. Bad faith is an important theme within the novels and books we've read this semester, especially in relation to how acting on bad faith was a major factor in the 2008 financial crisis and often leads to people being expelled from their homes.

Parable of the Sower was published before the 2008 financial crisis, yet it parallels a theme of “expulsion” that appears during the crisis. All of the other novels we've read this semester, *King Lear*, *The Turner House*, *A Mercy*, and *The Big Short*, all reflect the idea of expulsion as a result of the nature of human beings. What's truly ironic in *Parable of the Sower* in comparison to other novels we've read, is the fact that Lauren, the main character, has “hyperempathy”, which gives her the supernatural ability to feel other people's emotions. As Lauren explains on page 12, “I get a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me, and that isn't real. But it hurts.” Lauren is so hyperaware of the grief and loss of other people that it physically affects her, which is the complete opposite of how the characters of *The Big Short* perceive the pain of others. In *The Big Short*, each of the characters significantly lacks empathy for others and does not take into account other people's emotions, which affects the way that they make decisions within the book. Unlike Lauren, they show a complete disregard for other people's feelings, and this leads them to take advantage of innocent people for their own personal gain. A quote on page 106 of *The Big Short* perfectly encapsulates the lack of empathy displayed by the Wall

Street investors, “A tiny handful of investors perceived what was happening not just to the financial system but to the larger society it was meant to serve, and made investments against that system that was so large that they effectively gave up being conventional money managers and became something else.” By looking at the extent of the risks to which these investors made on behalf of the entire economy, it’s evident that their eyes were primarily focused on the benefits that they would gain, rather than the whole picture of how their actions would affect the people around them. The actions of these individuals meant to advance their careers affected a larger group of people in the long run, often in the form of expulsion from the homes they have been living in for years.

As is common with all of the novels we’ve read, a force of pressure, whether it be literal or figurative, often leads to the expulsion of individuals from their homes. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren is expelled from her home in Los Angeles after pyro addiction takes over and destroys the neighborhood. Addiction is often not something that an individual can control, but the consequences of overdoing something for personal benefit have the potential to devastate the lives of those individuals or those around them. In the case of *The Big Short*, the risks of partaking in credit default swaps and dipping their feet into mortgage bonds served as sort of an addictive activity to Wall Street investors. Making risky investments was to them what alcohol is to somebody with an alcohol addiction: the more they drink, the harder it becomes to stop. The addiction to making risky investments in *The Big Short* could also be compared to a gambling addiction, as the Wall Street investors were basically gambling with the lives of innocent families and causing them to lose their homes when a risky investment succeeded on their part. The topic of gambling also comes up in *The Turner House* with Lelah Turner’s addiction to gambling being one of the reasons she was expelled from her home, which is ironic considering gambling

on part of the Wall Street investors was the reason behind the Turner's family home being foreclosed within the novel. On page 37 of *The Turner House*, Troy says, "But let some millionaire offer to buy a whole bunch of lots at once...and all of a sudden the city will start cutting deals for them. Pennies on the dollar, I bet you anything." This demonstrates how investors made risky investments as if they were just making bets, it was almost like a game to them, rather than a serious matter that could affect millions of people. When *The Big Short* and *The Turner House* are put side by side, it's apparent that they demonstrate opposite perspectives on the same issue: the 2008 financial crisis. *The Big Short* explains how the financial crisis started, while *The Turner House* illustrates the way that this crisis affected individual families within the United States. It's interesting how different works of literature describe one event with vastly different perspectives and inferences.

Overall, all of the novels and books we've read this semester, *The Big Short*, *The Turner House*, *King Lear*, *A Mercy*, and *Parable of the Sower* display a common theme of bad faith being a driving force for expulsion from a place of living. The individual actions of one group of people have the power to drastically affect the lives of others, whether they're aware of it or not. In the case of the 2008 financial crisis, what was an addictive game to Wall Street traders was a devastating, life-changing event to millions of families. This crisis dramatically altered the trajectory of many people's lives by driving them out of their homes and leaving them with nothing, yet Wall Street investors were too self-involved and egotistical to take notice. While innocent people were being offered fraudulent mortgages that were meant to take advantage of their lack of financial knowledge, the members of Wall Street were celebrating their personal gains and diving deeper into risky investments. In contrast to Lauren's hyperempathy in *Parable of the Sower*, these individuals had extremely limited awareness of other people's feelings, their

thoughts revolved mainly around their work and what they would gain from it. They lived as if existing within a small bubble, separated from those around them and only vigilant to their own surroundings. If they were to have Lauren's ability to feel other people's pain, they wouldn't be able to take advantage of those innocent people without feeling the pain themselves. While this does not justify their actions, it certainly explains how the situation escalated to the extreme extent that it did. This common theme of actions made in bad faith causing devastating situations teaches us to be aware of those around us and to take them into consideration when making decisions. It's a lesson that's extremely important to learn, as if ignored it can have dire consequences.