

Naming Matters: “Anglo-Saxon” from Hengist and Horsa to Charlotte the WASP Princess

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Presented to the Faculty

of

Wheaton College

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for

Graduation with Departmental Honors

In English

Norton, Massachusetts

May 2021

INTRODUCTION

Wheaton College requires their undergraduate English majors to complete two pre-1800 courses as a part of their curriculum. In addition to the course in Renaissance and 18th Century literature, the courses that fulfill the requirement include Chaucer, Medieval Literature: *Beowulf* and others, Anglo-Saxon Literature, and *Beowulf*. As an English major, the two pre-1800 courses that I decided to take were Anglo-Saxon Literature and *Beowulf*. Prior to taking Anglo-Saxon literature (which is required before *Beowulf*), I did not have any prior knowledge of the literary works nor culture associated with the Anglo-Saxons. Indeed, until taking the course, I had only associated the term “Anglo-Saxon” with white supremacists. Not everyone has the same associations for ‘Anglo-Saxon’ that I did, and instead many may relate “Anglo-Saxon” to other things, but what almost no one does is connect this term with all of its many meanings over the centuries.

When people think of the term “Anglo-Saxon,” some may, like me, think about white supremacists’ groups that have used the term to signal European racial purity. Others might think about a course in the English department of their educational institution, or about the migrants that settled in England during the fifth century. All are, to different degrees, accurate associations of the word. White supremacists use “Anglo-Saxon” to mean “white with no racial mixing.” There is a set of literary texts that are labeled “Anglo-Saxon.” The Angles and the Saxons were two of the tribes that migrated to England in the 5th century. Indeed, the two words in “Anglo-Saxon,” and the compound word itself have changed their meanings multiple times over the past 1500 years. The historical and scholarly use of “Anglo-Saxon” is intended to identify the Germanic peoples who migrated to England during the fifth century up until the Norman Conquest, but in recent years the term has become weaponized; depending on the group that is

using the term. The term “Anglo-Saxon” can be dangerous. It has been used to promote racism and violence. However, it seems likely that the most common understanding of “Anglo-Saxon” is neither that of the academics or the white supremacists, but instead that promoted in the incredibly popular television program *Sex in the City* through the term WASP. The abbreviation for White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, is used to indicate upper-class white Protestant Americans typically living in the Northeast. Both highlights and satirizes the ideal of racial superiority and elitism.

Even though there are other connotations of the term Anglo-Saxon, the fact still remains that it is problematic. . Although, the scholars who study literature, history and culture of England in the sixth through the eleventh centuries do not appear to intend to be communicating ideas of white supremacy or even upper-class snobbishness, the power and influence of the word “Anglo-Saxon” reaches into academia as well. Dorothy Kim, Professor of English at Brandeis College, and others have spoken out about how colleges and universities can create an unwelcoming space in Medieval Studies for non-white students and even reinforce white supremacy within the classroom.

Even though there are other connotations of the term Anglo-Saxon, the fact remains that it is problematic. Although, the scholars who study literature, history and culture of England in the sixth through the eleventh centuries do not appear to intend to be communicating ideas of white supremacy or even upper-class snobbishness, the power and influence of the word “Anglo-Saxon” reaches into academia as well. Dorothy Kim, Professor of English at Brandeis College, and others have spoken out about how colleges and universities can create an unwelcoming space in Medieval Studies for non-white students and even reinforce white supremacy within the classroom. The lack of diversity within the field, along with the inherent racist narratives adopted

by people outside the field, can often exclude Black people and People of Color. The term being used to implicate whiteness makes “Anglo-Saxon”, and even Medieval studies, a very uninviting space for people of color, especially women--including those who are just beginning to explore the field. In fact, even calling the field “Anglo-Saxon” can make it undesirable space from the very beginning.

Indeed, while taking the courses Anglo-Saxon literature and *Beowulf*, here at Wheaton, I felt as if almost all of my peers, who for the most part were not people of color, had some prior knowledge of Medieval literature, whether it was having read some of *Beowulf* in high school or understanding particular pop-culture references pertaining to the classes. I also felt my peers had inherited or received more of an understanding on the field than I had. Was it because of the schools I had attended, or my personal background as a young Black woman? I also wonder if Wheaton had not required it, would I, as a young Black woman at a predominately white institution, have taken those courses at my own will, especially since I associated “Anglo-Saxon” with white supremacy. The disconnect between the studies of Anglo-Saxon and appealing to people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds has even been a recent focus with the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists (ISAS). In 2019, after pressure for ISAS to change its name and the organization refusing, Dr. Mary Rambaran-Olm, the second Vice President of ISAS and a woman of color, resigned from her position because of its refusal to do so. Following Rambaran-Olm’s resignation, many others followed as well. The resignations then prompted more impactful conversations about the use of the term Anglo-Saxon. Only after the set of resignations did ISAS change its name, which is now known as the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England (ISSEME). Some favored the name change because of the racist history with the term, while others opposed it because of the historical and intended

preservation of the term. A name change can be seen as a step in the right direction to making the field more welcoming to those of different racial backgrounds; however, it does not erase the long history of racism within the field itself. A name change can be seen as a step in the right direction, or it can be merely a distraction.

In this thesis I will be investigating the roots of this controversy. First, I will discuss where the name “Anglo-Saxon” came from. Then I will examine how the term was used after the Anglo-Saxon/Old English language was no longer spoken. What were people talking about when they said “Anglo-Saxon” instead of “English?” When did the term WASP arise, and was it intended to be positive or negative? Who used it and why? I will then discuss why Anglo-Saxon/Old English literature was/is in the English curriculum. When did Anglo-Saxon become popular and why did that popularity change?

With that background established, I will then discuss the specific controversy about the name “Anglo-Saxon” in 2019 and the complicated issues surrounding it. Are Kim and Rambaran-Olm correct in that the name is alienating? Is the name of the field the only thing alienating? How does my personal experience contribute to an understanding of the controversy? Is there any way to resolve it?

THE ORIGINS OF “ANGLO-SAXON”

To many scholars, the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ refers to the ancient Germanic peoples who migrated from northern Europe and settled in England during the fifth century. The Romans called everybody who attacked England from the east “Saxon,” but the Venerable Bede, medieval scholar from the north of England, says there were actually three groups rather than one. A lot of what is known about the origins of the settlers was learned from Bede through his book *The Ecclesiastical History of English People*. In 730, Bede writes that around 500, the migrants that settled in England were from three of the most powerful nations of Germany. They were the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. They each came over separately, all speaking different languages, and settled in different parts of England. The Angles settled in East-Anglia, Middle-Anglia and Northumbria. The Jutes settled in Kent and the Isle of Wight. The Saxons settled in the Wessex (West Saxons, Sussex (South Saxons) and Essex (East Saxons)).^[1] Bede, however, never uses the term ‘Anglo-Saxon.’ He called the island on which he lives “Britain,” and if he had any name for all the people living there in his time, it was more likely to be “Angli” than “Saxons” (Bede 62).

With the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in different parts of the country and even speaking different languages, which shows that although we clump together. This show that although we clump together the people of Bede’s England and call them all “Anglo-Saxons,” those who lived at the time did not. In addition, throughout the period between 500 – 800, the settlers were not “politically unified,” This did not come until King Alfred began ruling in 871. The Viking invasions that started in 793 had, by Alfred’s time, killed all of the English kings except for him.

Alfred was originally king of the West Saxons, but in 886 he became king of both the Saxon and the Anglian parts of England: he was in fact called King of the Angles.¹

In 893, “Anglo Saxons” was mentioned multiple times by Asser of Sherborne, a Welsh monk, who wrote King Alfred’s biography. Translated by Albert S. Cook from Latin, the opening line from the *Life of King Alfred* reads, “To my lord Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, the worshipful and pious ruler of all Christians in the island of Britain, Asser, least of all the servants of God, wisheth thousandfold prosperity for both lives, according to the desires of his heart” (1). Asser goes on to call King Alfred as “The King of the Anglo-Saxons” multiple times throughout the biography. Therefore, although King Alfred disregarded the Saxon addition to his title for Angles, Saxon made its way back to his title through Asser.

King Alfred was the King until his death in 899. Following his death, King Alfred’s son, Edward the Elder was king from 899 – 924. He fought off a challenge from his cousin as well as constantly defending the kingdom against the Vikings. Alfred’s grandson Athelstan turned the tide and went from defense to offense. Athelstan then became the King of the Angles and Saxons from 925 – 939. During his rule, in 937, The Battle of Brunanburh took place. We know of the account of this battle through the Old English poem written by an unknown author. Today preserved in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the poem recalls the fight between King Athelstan, King Olaf of Dublin, the King of Scotland, and Norsemen. The author writes that the Angles and the Saxons were a part of King Athelstan’s army and helped him defeat his opponents. Just as Bede did, the poem highlights the English as being made up of two peoples, the Angles and the Saxons, The poet writes:

¹ During the 800’s, we begin to see the absence of the Jutes from important texts. No one is actually really sure as to why people stopped mentioning the Jutes, but possibly because they were related to the Viking invaders (Jutland is part of Denmark, and the Vikings were called “Danes” by the English).

Swilce þa gebroþer begen ætsamne,
 cyning and æþeling, cyþþe sohton,
 Wesseaxena land, wiges hremige.

60

Letan him behindan hræw bryttian
 saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,
 hyrnednebban, and þane hasewanpadan,
 earn æftan hwit, æses brucan,
 grædigne guðhafoc and þæt græge deor,

65

wulf on wealde. Ne wearð wæl mare
 on þis eighlande [æfre](#) gieta
 folces gefylled beforan þissum
 sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec,
 ealde uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider

70

Engle and Seaxe up becoman,
 ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan,
 wlance wigsmiþas, Wealas ofercoman,
 eorlas arhwate eard begeatan.

60 Also the brothers, king and prince,

Both together went home to the
West Saxons' land exalting in battle.
They left behind the corpses for
the dark-coated, black raven
horny beaked, dark feathered,
the Eagle white from behind [i.e., white-tailed], to enjoy as food,
that greedy war-hawk, and that grey animal,
the wolf in the forest.

There has never been
in this island ever yet
a greater killing of people before this
by sword blades, as we learn from books,
and from old wise men, since that time when hither from the east,
Angles and Saxons came up,
Over the broad Sea to seek Britain,
proud, high-spirited, they overcame the Welsh
those warriors abounding in glory over-ran the land.

“The Battle of Brunanburh” further demonstrates that the idea that we have of Anglo-Saxons as always being one unified people is not necessarily accurate. Instead, it demonstrates that even after King Alfred’s reign, there is evidence of the Angles and the Saxons being distinct

peoples even though they were more politically unified, fighting in battle alongside each other. However, the poem notes that they went to the home of the West Saxons after winning the battle and also makes it a point to call them the Angles and the Saxons rather than one or the other or just Anglo-Saxon.

Old English poems such as “The Battle of Brunanburh,” and prose texts from this same time period kept Angles and Saxons separate rather than just using the term Anglo-Saxon to describe the people living in England. The compound word “Anglo-Saxon” was more common when discussing the titles of King Alfred. Since Alfred was a Saxon, he and his heirs would not want to omit ‘Saxon’ from the name of the people. However, much of the rest of the people in Britain were Angles. For this reason, and because of the popularity of Gregory the Great along with his idea of England as being special because it was “Angel – Land,” the West Saxon dynasty would want both words in the name for the people and the land: Saxon for themselves and Anglo for the tradition going back to Gregory. The use of the compound “Anglo-Saxon” appears to have been a convenient way to make these political points.

Susan Reynolds in her article, *What Do We Mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?* writes: “Meanwhile, the inhabitants of what would come to be called England were, by the early eighth century if not before, using the simple word, “English” (Angli, Anglici) to refer to themselves. As far as they were concerned, the name “Saxon” seems to have been reserved for the people of the southern kingdoms, while even southerners sometimes applied the description of “English” to themselves as individuals and acquiesced in being subsumed under it as a group” (398). Thus, according to Reynolds, rather than referring to themselves as the “Anglo-Saxons” (as most scholars refer to them now), they actually saw themselves as English people. Reynolds acknowledges that Bede uses the phrase “Anglorum Sive Saxonum gen,” [The

Angle or Saxon people] because this is how the ruling family identified (being that they did not want to neglect their Saxon origins). However, the use of the two words together did not appear much again until the 16th century. This is in part due to a new round of Viking invasions in the early eleventh century which eventually culminated in the Norman Conquest. When the French-speaking (but ancestrally Viking) rulers of Normandy took over England, made French the official language of the country, they did not care what the peasants called themselves in their own language. By the time France and England separated around 1200, the Anglian, Saxon and Danish people of England were so intermarried, they no longer distinguished themselves according to their ancestry but were all “English” (in contrast to the “Normal” rulers).

From Henry VIII and The Protestant Reformation to the Victorians, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ was being used again to identify a certain people. Henry the VIII, King of England from 1509 – 1547, triggered The Protestant Reformation during the 16th century. He wanted England to break away from the Roman Catholic Church and return to what he claimed was an original English Church. Henry VIII and his men therefore sought-after evidence of the religious practices in ‘Anglo-Saxon’ texts. Thus, information from the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ period became valuable, causing scholars to investigate ‘Anglo-Saxon’ England (Horsman 10). “Anglo-Saxon” or “Saxon” was a way for scholars to indicate that they were talking about the period “before the Norman Conquest.”

In the 19th century, the Victorians, again revived the term ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ and for much the same reasons as Henry VIII: they wanted to emphasize the links between themselves and the people who had lived in England from 500 to 1066. The Victorians admired King Alfred because he defeated the Vikings, founded the Royal Navy, and championed an “English” rather than “European Identity.” When Victorian scholars discovered that King Alfred had called himself an

“Anglo-Saxon,” they began using the term as well. In addition, Queen Victoria was of German ancestry. Her mother was Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. The “Saxe” in her title was related to “Saxony” in Germany. Queen Victoria therefore had essentially brought a “Saxon” family to rule over the Anglians (English). Emphasizing that some people called “Anglo-Saxons” had lived in and ruled England almost 1000 years before her was a way of suggesting that there was nothing particularly unusual about England being ruled by someone of “Saxon” descent: English and Saxons had always gone together.

“ANGLO-SAXON” IN AMERICAN CONTEXTS

The use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” after the medieval period was not limited to England. Thomas Jefferson was one of the many eighteenth-century Americans who were very interested in all things “Anglo-Saxon.” Jefferson, along with being the President and Founding Father of the United States, was an early Anglo-Saxon scholar, who had taught himself to read the language so that he could read the Old English laws. Jefferson believed that there was a strong connection between Anglo-Saxon social organizations and American democracy and that Americans were not only spiritual descendants, but literal descendants of Hengist and Horsa, the two brothers who Bede says led the Anglo-Saxon migration into England. For this reason, Jefferson proposed a design for the Great Seal that featured these “Anglo-Saxon” leaders (Frantzen 15). Although Jefferson was not successful in his effort to put Hengist and Horsa on the Great Seal of the United States, he did bring the term “Anglo-Saxon” into American politics, in which it continued to be used, particularly in the early 20th century, when conflicts over immigration became very important.

Except for Native Americans, every person in America was an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants, but by the end of World War I, political conflict had developed between “old” and “new” immigrants. Among the “old immigrants” were those from England, Germany, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands who began migrating to America from Europe in the 17th and 18th century. Many were Protestants who had fled Europe seeking religious freedom, which, along with the “American Dream,” they successfully obtained. In the late 19th century, “new immigrants” arrived from from countries (such as Poland and Italy) that were primarily Catholic. The “new immigrants” were not as successful and prosperous as the “old immigrants,” and there was significant political conflict between the two groups. In order to differentiate between the

two migrant groups, the term “Anglo-Saxon” was applied to “old immigrants,” even though who were not from England (such as the Dutch and the Germans who had come to America in the 18th century) “Anglo-Saxon” was used for purposes of being exclusive and discriminatory, both ethnically and religiously. Those who fell within the Anglo-Saxon category wanted an image for themselves that proved that they were more well off than the immigrants following them. The use of “Anglo-Saxon” by the “old immigrants” led to the the invention of the acronym W.A.S.P. for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, thus demonstrating the political importance of the idea of “Anglo-Saxon” in American culture (Frantzen 10).

When considering the history behind the name “Anglo-Saxon,” Susan Reynolds notes that names of particular social and political groups can reflect both how the members perceive the group itself and others perceive the group (397). These groups do not make room for people who identify as “others.” They may be perceived as racist and prejudiced to those outside of these groups, causing people to go towards the opposite direction. The development of the term “WASP” in the 20th century is an example of this. WASP is a deliberately negative acronym, which suggests that it was not created by the “old immigrants” themselves who were a part of the group. Instead “WASP” is typically used by people who don’t like White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, after all, nobody actually likes wasps, so an acronym that invokes these insects is obviously a criticism or even an insult.

In 1957, Andrew Hacker’s article “Liberal Democracy and Social Control” in the *American Political Scientists Review* gave his definition of a WASP. Hacker wrote, “First of all, they are ‘WASPs’ – in the cocktail party jargon of sociologists. That is, they are white, they are Anglo-Saxon in origin, and they are Protestant (and disproportionately Episcopalian)” (1011). Although it’s not clear that the actual acronym “WASP” was used before World War II

or ever used in a non-pejorative way, the idea of WASP indicated that in order to “deserve” power and influence, someone needed to be white, Protestant, and from a family that came to America before the large waves of late 19th and early 20th-century immigration. This meant excluding “new” immigrants (as well as Native Americans and African Americans) from political and social power. Even though “Anglo-Saxon” continued to denote power and influence, by the end of World War II, these words had picked up other associations as well—ones that were much less positive.

During the mid-sixties the WASP influence began to decline. In 1960 America had elected its first Catholic president, and five years later Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which was meant to help diversify America. By the 1990's, everybody had an image of a “WASP” that was negative. Joseph Epstein in his book, *Snobbery: The American Version*, recalled a joke about two Jewish bees that had been going around during the early nineties. Epstein writes, “In a less than riotous but sociological telling joke, two Jewish bees are flying about when one of them places a yarmulke on his head. “Why are you doing that?” asks the other bee. “I’m doing it” says the first bee, “so that no one will take me for a WASP.” This shows how undesirable being mistaken for a WASP was during the 90’s. WASPs, however, did find their way into the hearts of Americans through television characters, specifically Charlotte York from *Sex and the City*.

“Now, where’s your vodka,” he asked.

“I don’t have any,” she laughed.

“And you call yourself a WASP,” he responded.

In 1998, *Sex and the City* premiered on HBO and became one of the most popular television series of the early 2000’s. Based on the novel by Candace Bushnell, the novel follows four girlfriends in their mid-thirties through New York City. Carrie Bradshaw, Charlotte York, Miranda Hobbes, and Samantha Jones take viewers through the ups and downs of their love lives, careers, and womanhood. Although Charlotte, played by Kristen Davis, faced many of the same struggles as her friends, she was also very different from them. Unlike her friends, Charlotte had a naïve outlook on love and life. She was prim and proper, longed for marriage and children, and had inherited wealth— which made her an elitist snob at times, and even a tad bit sexist.

The writers took the stereotypes of a WASP and allowed Charlotte to portray almost all of them. The use of the stereotype and the negative connotations of WASP did not mean that WASPs no longer had power, money or influence; they were not just as dominant. Throughout the series, Charlotte shows herself lacking self-awareness by using the “WASP” as if it is not a pejorative term. The show’s portrayal of Charlotte’s naivety towards the term as well as other things made her an easy target. Even Carrie, her closest friend, poked fun at Charlotte by nicknaming her “Park Avenue Pollyanna” and “Daddy’s Episcopalian Princess” demonstrating how much of stereotypical WASP Charlotte was. She was loved ² for being herself, and a lot of her WASPiness made up her character, but because of how much she was adored many may have even neglected to see how problematic that aspect of her character really was.

² Fans like Melina Pendulum (YouTuber), writers on themarysue.com, and screenrant.com have created videos and articles giving reasons why Charlotte York was their favorite and the best character on *Sex and the City*.

Viewers first explicitly learn that Charlotte identifies herself as a WASP during a conversation with her brother, in which he teased her about losing her WASP credibility because she did not have any vodka. But with this possible small exception, everything about Charlotte was WASPy. WASPs typically resided in areas like New York City's Upper East Side, Boston, Connecticut, and Philadelphia's Main Line. They had wealth and prep schools and Ivy League educations. Charlotte checked off a lot of those boxes. She was born in Connecticut to a wealthy family, attended Smith College, and had become a lover of the arts, even working as an art dealer at a gallery during the first three seasons of the series. Charlotte's inherited privilege molded and shaped how she presented herself and the men she dated.

Charlotte was always put together—at least on the outside. She wore Lilly Pulitzer, argyle and Ralph Lauren cardigans and sweaters, headbands, pearls, and lots of pink. During her first marriage, she married into another WASP family — the MacDougal's, an extremely wealthy mother and son duo living on Park Avenue and occasionally enjoying tennis and martinis at their mansion in Connecticut. Her marriage to Trey MacDougal, a cardiologist, prompted Charlotte to quit her job with the hopes of becoming a full-time housewife and mother. Their union also gave Charlotte the chance to rise in the WASP hierarchy by trading in her Upper West Side address for Park Avenue. Both Charlotte and her marriage looked perfect from the outside, but, in true WASP fashion, she hid their intimacy and communication issues deep inside their Park Avenue apartment. Yelling, Charlotte explained during a dinner party with her friends, was something that never happened in her household: "We're WASPs. WASPs don't yell. It's genetic." But five minutes later she and her husband argued—very loudly—in their nest. This perpetuated the stereotype that WASPs are emotionally repressed, which is a

rhetorically effective revision of the pre-WWII idea that only WASPS could be trusted to wield power because other groups lacked self-control.

When it came to dating, Charlotte was a snob. Her goal was to date men like herself: white, wealthy, and WASPY, which she was allowed to do because of her privilege. Whereas her friends, Miranda and Samantha, allowed and found themselves to date men and women who weren't white or wealthy. Even before Trey, it was clear the snobby New Yorker had and attracted a type. In season two and episode nine, after another failed relationship she asked her friends, "He was a nice waspy guy, what went wrong?" Things take a turn when Charlotte is filing for divorce from Trey, and she meets and falls in love with her divorce lawyer, Harry Goldenblatt, who, being Jewish, was certainly not a WASP. Being a WASP was exclusive, which left room to discriminate against other religions, races, and ethnicities, but Charlotte decided to choose love over religion. However, diversifying the type of men she dated does not mean Charlotte noble. In season six, episode three, Charlotte goes from "Episcopalian Princess" to being "reborn a Jew." Charlotte's new marriage stripped her of parts of her original WASP identity, but she still had the Park Avenue address. Charlotte was almost like America in a way. The last season with the "new Charlotte" aired in 2004. During that time, society was less about embracing being white, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon, but instead the growth of diversity. Charlotte's character development was embracing diversity in her life with her Jewish husband and a welcoming a Chinese adopted daughter.

From the examples of *Sex in the City* we can see that by the turn of the millennium, WASPs, although still wealthy and powerful, were not as central to American culture—especially in politics—as they had been. In fact, the WASP establishment seemed to have lost much of its political power. For example, it wasn't until George H.W. Bush in 1988 that the

WASP establishment was brought back to the Presidency, which had not been controlled by an obvious WASP since Roosevelt. Truman was working class from Missouri, Eisenhower was a soldier and of German descent, Kennedy was descended from Irish immigrants, Johnson was Texas oil money, Nixon came from California and was not born into a wealthy family, Ford was not established, Reagan was an actor from a middle-class family, and Carter was a peanut farmer from Georgia. The last WASP in the Presidency, George Bush, took office in 2000 when *Sex in the City* was at the height of its popularity.

At the peak of their dominance, WASPs not only dominating politics, but also financial, educational, and religious institutions, not only in America, but beyond. WASPs dominated Canada as well. J.M.S. Careless noted in *Careless at Work*, that British-Canadians that identified as WASPs may not truly have all been Anglo-Saxons or even Protestants; however, the Canadian elites that they followed were Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. WASP elites honored their Anglo-Saxon ancestry through tradition and character (Careless 296). Like American WASPs, British-Canadian WASPs valued uniformity and rejected the “development of multicultural heritage” with it being a threat to the assumed Anglo-Saxon heritage. Charlotte’s first husband, Trey MacDougal’s mother rejected the idea of multicultural heritage. During their short marriage, Charlotte and Trey struggled with infertility which was in part due to Trey being unable to be intimate with Charlotte. Richard Brookhiser, in his book *The Way of Wasp*, noted that a part of the WASP character was anti-sensuality. Brookhiser wrote, “. . .and anti-sensuality setting limits to enjoyment of it; conscience watching over everything — is uniquely WASP” (38). Anti-sensuality was a part of Trey’s character, but it affected Charlotte’s dream and ability to become a mother. Their lack of intimacy prompted Charlotte to look into adopting a child, a “mandarin child” according to Charlotte. However, Bunny, Trey’s mother, did not enjoy the

thought of her “very proud lineage” being disrupted. When told that it was none of her business, Bunny ends the conversation by saying to Charlotte, “The MacDougal name will be carried on by sons of your own, not the daughters of the South Pacific.” Like Bunny, WASPs clung onto their supposed dwindling political dominance, power, and “Anglo-Saxon” by being prejudicial.

Protecting their “Anglo-Saxon” was not only important for superiority in a hierarchy but also a way to continue to distance themselves from association with the British, which began before WASPs had a strong influence in society. Eric Kaufmann in *Rethinking Ethnicity*, uses Reginald Horsman’s words while discussing the origins of the once dominant ethnic group:

Romantic Anglo-Saxonism was more important for sections of the Whig Elite in their attempt to narrate the break with British identity. Edmund Burk, John Wilkes and other English Whigs, many of whom supported American Revolutionaries, already tried to differentiate their ‘Anglo-Saxon’ inheritance from the supposed ‘Norman’ Hierarchy imposed by their true liberal selves (Haseler 1996:34). American Whigs took this reasoning a step further. By their account, the English of the Old Country represented a tired hierarchical Norman influence, whereas the true Anglo-Saxon spirit migrated to the New World where it achieved its full flower (56).

The romance of the Anglo-Saxon identity was important for Americans in the 19th century, specifically ones a part of the Whig Party (which is no longer active, fragments of which became the Republican party at the time of the Civil War”). American Revolutionaries wanted to break away from “England,” but they still needed a way to differentiate their identity from immigrants coming from Germany, Russia, France, and other counties. They wanted to distance

themselves from the British and Norman influence, and did so by claiming an Anglo-Saxon identity. Since they were no longer technically “English,” they could not call themselves that. Instead, they developed a variation of an argument from Henry VIII’s era: they were representing the “true” tradition of England and not as the Norman conquerors, but rather they were the descendants of the “real” English people, those who had come over to the island with Hengist and Horsa, fought the Vikings, and unified under King Alfred. “Anglo-Saxon” began to represent a person living in America who is devoted to America, but of English ancestry.

The romance of Anglo-Saxon England and identity in America was not exclusive to the later 19th century revolutionaries. Those in the 18th century such as the founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson praised what they thought Anglo-Saxons to be, in particular, their imagined democracy. Reginald Horsman noted that Franklin appreciated the freedom that the “Anglo-Saxons” had enjoyed once they migrated to England (Kaufmann 64). Franklin, like other Revolutionaries, wanted to engage in what they had considered the “true” tradition of England, and break away from post-Conquest England. Washington had been interested in Catherine Macaulay, a historian’s, Saxon history (Kaufmann 64). Thomas Jefferson wanted to shape America after “Anglo-Saxon” England through education and understanding and speaking the “Anglo-Saxon dialect,” also known as Old English.

The words “Anglo-Saxon” have had different meanings. However, in general, each of the meanings seemed to be associated with freedom, power, and democracy especially for those who thought that they were descended from the “Anglo-Saxons.”

ANGLO-SAXON/OLD ENGLISH IN THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

My general understanding of the origins of "Anglo-Saxons" came from taking Anglo-Saxon Literature as a part of my English requirements. In this class, we read Old English poetry including *The Battle of Brunanbruh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Cædmon's Hymn*, and my favorite, *The Wanderer*. Along with learning Old English in order to translate the poems, we also learned about the culture and history of the people writing and living during the time period when Old English was spoken. In *Beowulf*, we solely focused on translating the original Old English *Beowulf* text to Modern English, but I was also able to learn more about the different texts within the *Beowulf* Manuscript, adaptations of the text, and even the dating controversy surrounding the poem. Aside from my initial reservations about taking the course, I've come to realize that this material was essential to learn for several reasons. One reason is that as an English major, it is necessary to understand the origins of Modern English, and learning and translating Old English allowed me to do so. Another reason is that reading texts like *Beowulf*, I was able to see the way stories have been told and changed over time. Lastly, I felt that it was important to learn because a lot of the writers that I admire, such as Toni Morrison, have also read these texts and have been influenced by them.

Anglo-Saxon was not a normal part of the English curriculum in American colleges until the 19th century, despite Thomas Jefferson's insistence that all students in Law School study Old-English. These academic courses were mostly taught and offered in institutions of higher education. However, not all colleges and universities offered Anglo-Saxon and Old English studies. It was commonly found at more European-research style and liberal arts schools. Allen J. Franzen, in *Desire for Origins*, notes that the academic study of "Anglo-Saxons" during the nineteenth century was not just strictly for pure academic reasons, but it was also politicized.

Those studying “Anglo-Saxon” studies were heavily motivated by their own self-interests (Frantzen 16). These early scholars, while researching the culture of the “Anglo-Saxons,” felt that they could personally identify with the characters and interests of those that they were reading about. This allowed them to feel connected to their “Anglo-Saxon” origins (Frantzen 16). Not only was recognition of their character and interests present throughout their studies, but scholars, like Jefferson, identified with “Anglo-Saxon laws” because of their presumed democracy. Through “Anglo-Saxon” studies, these scholars were able to justify their ideals through their “origins,” or their culture a long time ago.

During the early nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon and Old English studies were popular in and out of universities and colleges. When considering the beginning of Old English studies in higher education, Thomas Jefferson is a name that comes to mind for many scholars. Jefferson was very intrigued by Old English and the “Anglo-Saxon” people and culture. In 1779, Jefferson suggested at the College of William and Mary, his alma mater, create room for “the ancient languages and literature of the North” because he believed these were connected with America's history, laws, language, and beliefs (Frantzen 206). Although this plan did not work out in Jefferson's favor, Jefferson's passion for connecting Old English and law in higher education became a reality for him. Courses in Old English and law became a part of the English curriculum at the University of Virginia. These courses began in 1825 and were also the only English courses taught at the University for a number of years (Frantzen 206).

What I've learned in Anglo-Saxon studies and what others are studying today as a part of Anglo-Saxon studies in their curriculum is most likely not what Jefferson had in mind when he wanted to introduce the study into higher education. In Anglo-Saxon Literature, while reading poems like *The Wanderer*, we focused on the literature itself rather than using it to justify

religion and politics. The wanderer was a lonely man who had lost everything from possessions to the people that he knew, making him a friendless man. In the class, we dove deep into how the “cruel sorrow” was taking over the Wanderer’s life. We read *The Battle of Maldon and Brunnabruh*, to learn about what happened during those battles, but looked at the aesthetics of how the poets recalled and recorded the events during those times. In *Beowulf*, we focused more on the Beowulf’s heroism and the battles that he was fighting. Jefferson, on the other hand, wanted to utilize Anglo-Saxon studies for students to learn more about the American government, specifically about democracy.

This study of Anglo-Saxon and Old English piqued the interest of many, which opened the door for many resources to help improve the study of the language. These include texts such as the Bosworth-Toller *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, which is still used today, but the American study of Old English was still grounded in the American government. The study of the language, culture, and poetry only began to progress when Philology started to become popular.

Becoming popular in colleges and universities in the middle of the nineteenth century (Frantzen xi), Philology allowed people to study the language within the literature. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the scholars that studied philology. Like Jefferson, Longfellow was advocating for Anglo-Saxon studies; however, Longfellow’s approach to Anglo-Saxon and Old English studies looked a lot like what I was learning in Anglo-Saxon Literature. Longfellow encouraged the study of Old English literature itself rather than in relation to the American government. Maria José Mora and Maria José Gómez-Calderón in their journal article *The Study of Old English in America (1776 – 1850): National Uses of Saxon Past*, noted that Longfellow wanted Americans to read Old English literature because it “is built instead on a curious amalgam of literary topics that combine the atmosphere of Gothic romance with values

of cultural primitivism” (327). Old English was not just a language to Longfellow, but instead literature that had dark or gothic romanticism and incorporated primitivism.

Anglo-Saxon studies also found its way into the lives of many young women who were attending colleges during the 19th century.³ Although these were not the first women to learn about Anglo-Saxon studies, they were the first to be exposed to it in an academic setting. In the late 19th century into the 20th century, about thirty-two higher educational institutions, or seminaries at the time, for women all over the United States, mostly on the east coast, offered courses in Anglo-Saxon studies as a part of their English Curriculum. Starting with Vassar College, courses began being offered, and eventually became a part of other colleges like Wheaton, Spelman, and Bryn Mawr (Dockray-Miller 8). Newly formed women’s colleges were trying to provide their students with the best and current forms of education, and Old English studies and philology were very cutting edge during that time period. The hope was to advance over the more tradition-male colleges that were still focusing on Latin and Greek texts. The women taking Anglo-Saxon studies would have had previous exposure to Latin and understood the Modern English Language well, which made them great candidates for studying Anglo-Saxon studies (Dockray-Miller 10).

These women that were now learning Anglo-Saxon studies in college during that 19th century were embarking on a journey through a very male dominated education system as well as a male dominated academic field. Unfortunately, this did mean some changes in certain aspects of the women’s curriculum. Specifically for Anglo-Saxon studies, the women had a slight change in the literature that they were reading. They tended to read more poems that were

³ Elizabeth Elstob also might be the first woman to learn Old English in the Renaissance, but she did so on her own and in private study with her brother, not at an institution of higher education.

thought to be more “geared” towards women, or that included main characters that were women like the poem *Judith* (Dockray-Miller 10). In other words, it was more important for the women than for men studying Anglo-Saxon to learn about women. While I was learning more about Anglo-Saxon literature in my courses, we explored the experiences of women in the texts; however, we did not look at women such as Judith and Juliana. I learned more about the poem *Judith* while doing research for a presentation that focused on other texts within the *Beowulf* Manuscript, in which *Judith* is contained. Included with curriculum changes, Anglo-Saxon studies within women’s seminaries in the late 19th century did not necessarily offer an ample number of courses within the field; more like one or two. These courses were electives and not required of the students. However, as the seminaries became more established and became recognized as colleges, Anglo-Saxon studies became a requirement once again (Dockray-Miller 21). Whether or not it was required, having Anglo-Saxon studies as a part of the curriculum was important to colleges, especially women’s colleges, because it was seen as prestigious.

Wheaton is one of the women’s seminaries turned colleges to have Anglo-Saxon studies as a part of its curriculum in the early twentieth century. Although the school is no longer just for women, courses in Anglo-Saxon studies are obviously still being taught. One of the first professors to teach Anglo-Saxon studies at Wheaton was Ida Josephine Everett. Before teaching at Wheaton, Everett taught at Mills College in Oakland, California. Everett came to Wheaton to teach from 1905 – 1934 (Dockray-Miller 24). Everett’s impact at the college was major. Today, she even has a dorm hall named after her. Her knowledge of Anglo-Saxon studies put her at an advantage for teaching college level rather than grade school. Many women were going off to different colleges and universities to teach Anglo-Saxon studies and then eventually receiving their PhDs in Anglo-Saxon studies (Dockray-Miller 24). The once male dominated field was

opening its doors to women all over. Anglo-Saxon studies were ultimately an important step in the advancement of women in the professional world. Not only were women making strides professionally, but women like Everett were also helping incorporate and develop the Anglo-Saxon studies into the curriculums as well as adding to the field itself.

While it is important to mention the women that helped the development of Anglo-Saxon studies in the English curriculum, it is also important to acknowledge others who have taught it as well. We could argue about how male-dominated Anglo-Saxon studies has been since the 1980s, but there is absolutely no question that the field was not just white-dominated, but nearly white-exclusive (with a few exceptions I will discuss below). The dean and Anglo-Saxon professor at Bryn Mawr, M. Carey Thomas, even reiterated during an address to the college. In the article, Anglo-Saxon Thomas said during the address, “If present intellectual supremacy of White races is maintained, as I hope that it will be for centuries to come, I believe it will be because they are the only race that have seriously begun to educate their women. . .” (Dockray-Miller). Thomas believed that white intellectualism should be maintained, and Bryn Mawr was one college that was doing exactly that. It seems reasonable to conclude that with beliefs like this being spoke openly, Black scholars would be unlikely to become part of the discipline, and indeed, despite exhaustive research, scholars have only been able to identify a single Black professor who taught Old English in the early 20th-century.

In the early 20th century, Gordon Davis Houston was a professor of English at Howard University that taught Old English studies. There is not much written on Houston teaching Old English studies at Howard, but Dockray-Miller and Rambaran-Olm have together found out more information on Professor Houston at Howard which Rambaran-Olm mentions in a recent blog post from 2020. At the end of “Houston, We Have a Problem: Erasing Black

Scholars in Old English,” she notes that she and Dockray-Miller were simply just looking for professors that taught Old English at Howard and happened to come across Professor Houston. Dockray-Miller was able to discover a syllabus from 1918 -1919 that described what Professor Houston was teaching a course called Anglo-Saxon poetry and there would be a strong focus on reading the poetry along with metre. It seems that the course was not required for all students; however, there was a prerequisite in order to take the class, which was common.

Houston was also so knowledgeable about and experienced in Old English he was even able to include it within this book, *Basic English Grammar* which was published in 1936 (Rambaran-Olm). But one Black scholar -- no matter how effective or sophisticated he might have been -- does not change the fact that, to the best of our knowledge, the field was almost entirely white in both students and teachers. Since Frantzen in the 1990s, Anglo-Saxonists have celebrated Elizabeth Elstob, the first woman to write an Old English grammar, but they were entirely unaware of Professor Houston, who is possibly the first Black scholar to publish on Old English.

WHY NAMING MATTERS

“Anglo-Saxon” studies have demonstrated historically and presently white, and white nationalism and supremacy becoming increasingly more visible within the last six years, rethinking the use of “Anglo-Saxon” matters. In 2019, Rambaran-Olm delivered a very public resignation at the Race before Race conference in Washington, which triggered a wider conversation about the problematic use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” to indicate an academic field. Rambaran-Olm argued that The International Society of Anglo-Saxonist’s (ISAS) continual use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” was emboldening white supremacists (Natanson). A conversation was not the only thing that followed but noted in the Statement of Support for Rambaran-Olm by the Medievalist of Color, it also triggered threats of “bodily harm” against Rambaran-Olm from white supremacists. The statement from the group stated, “White supremacists have threatened Dr. Rambaran-Olm with bodily harm in response to her recent talk . . .” (Medievalist of Color). Despite all the threats, Rambaran-Olm also received lots of support from her colleagues within the field that are a part of groups such as the Medievalist of Color, Society for Medievalist Feminist Scholarship, and Queerdievalists. However, the threats for calling for a name change, and the slow action taken by ISAS exhibits how the name “Anglo-Saxon” can be troubling not only for Black and POC scholars, but for the future of “Anglo-Saxon” studies. Not only does it display that people are very proud of their “heritage” and will obviously go to extreme lengths to “protect” it even if that means at the expense of other people, but it also shows that white scholars, who know the historical inaccuracies that are associated with the term, will not go the lengths necessary to denounce how the term is being weaponized to incite violence and racism.

The use of “Anglo-Saxon” within and outside of academia and the field of “Anglo-Saxon” studies, has been used as a weapon to exclude people racially and ethnically for

over a century. We've seen it outside of academia in the 19th through 20th century through the term WASP, and inside academia through excluding Black scholars from being remembered and acknowledged within the field and the racist narratives professors pushed. Today, the weaponization of "Anglo-Saxon" is still heavily present, but through different groups and ways academically which have been increasingly more dangerous.

The Alternative Right or Alt-Right is an example of a group that has contributed to the term's negative connotations and have used it as a weapon. While white supremacy and nationalism have been present for a very long time, there seemed to be a large resurgence of supremacists and nationalists during and following the 2016 election through the Alt-Right movement. The Alt-Right have utilized the internet, including social media and online forums to spread their racist and anti-Semitic views. In a short documentary from *The Atlantic* titled *Rebranding White Nationalism: Inside the Alt-Right*, Nathan Damigo, an attendant of the Alt-Right conference in Washington D.C. held by Richard Spencer in 2016, said "We're trying to break through the largest taboo of our times: identity for people of European heritage." Although not explicitly using "Anglo-Saxon," Damigo and all of his peers attending the conference were not referring to Europe today, but the "Anglo-Saxon" England that those like Jefferson and WASPs of the 19th and 20th century have connected themselves to. Over time, people including those of the Alt-Right community have been using "European heritage," "European," and especially "Anglo-Saxon" interchangeably with "white" which creates a false impression of what the term "Anglo-Saxon" actually refers to.

I took Anglo-Saxon Literature in the fall of 2019, which was in the middle of the controversy surrounding the name change. By 2019, I was very aware of the Alt-Right agenda, and a lot of what I had associated with the term came from what I had seen on Alt-Right Twitter.

It was, of course, mostly white men using the term to show they were in support of Trump's immigration policies or defending themselves against people that were denouncing them.

In a 2020 blog post by Rambaran-Olm titled *History Bites: Resources on the Problematic Term "Anglo-Saxon". Part 1,* she gave multiple examples of people sharing their opinions online using the term "Anglo-Saxon" to indicate white. One person wrote, "If these people hate whites so much why did they decide to study medieval Europe in the first place?" and another wrote "Anglo Saxons are white. How the fuck is this offensive?" These posts make it clear that there is the misconception that Anglo-Saxon means white, and that calling for a change in use of "Anglo-Saxon" means white hate. The idea of white hate fuels the Alt-Right and their motives to protect their white identity. An example this type defense is seen in the comments of a YouTube video "Ban Anglo-Saxon? The woke left try to remove "Anglo-Saxon" from academia" by Survive the Jive following Rambaran-Olm's (who he calls a grievance monger) resignation. Survive the Jive, or Tom Rowsell, received a master's degree from University College London in Medieval History. As he explained in another YouTube video, Roswell's main interest while obtaining his masters was the paganism of "Anglo-Saxons" and Norse peoples. Rowsell goes on a one hour and ten-minute rant on the "terrible new development in Medievalism " sparked by Rambaran-Olm, and how she uses her platform to incite "racial hatred" against white Europeans and those of European descent. @PoliticHistoric commented, "We must protect the legacy and memory of our ancestors, whatever the cost." This comment was also liked by Survive the Jive. Comments like these demonstrate that this is where the use of "Anglo-Saxon" by white supremacists and nationalists is dangerous. When white supremacists feel that are under attack for identifying as "Anglo-Saxon," they feel the need to incite violence in order to protect their "white European" identity.

Events within 2020 have shown that when white supremacists and nationalists feel threatened and feel like they are hated, they take matters into their own hands. Kyle Rittenhouse, who was seventeen years old at the time, decided to shoot and kill two protesters at Black Lives Matter protests that were taking place following the shooting of Jacob Black in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Rittenhouse is just one example taking action proving that the threats made by white supremacists and nationalist are not always empty.

Former President Donald J. Trump has indirectly (and directly at times) encouraged the efforts of white supremacists a part of the Alt-Right group to go out and protect what's theirs. Along with the awakening of the Alt-Right, groups like the Proud Boys (a far-right, all-male group) and Q-Anon (a far-right conspiracy group) were born. A lot of the members of the groups resonated with Trump's policies, especially ones that rejected the ideas of multicultural America and the protection of their idea of democracy. The members of all far-right groups were present at the insurrection at the United States Capitol on January 6th, 2021. The insurrection injured many and even led to the death of five people. Although the white supremacists and nationalists present did not explicitly use the term "Anglo-Saxon" to describe themselves, their actions show the lengths that they will go in order to protect their beliefs when encouraged by people who hold high positions in society such as the President and members of congress and senate. Watching all of this unfold within the last year has been scary and concerning to see not only just as an American citizen, but also as a Black woman.

We have recently seen the direct use of "Anglo-Saxon" being used by American politicians again. Georgia Republican Congresswoman, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and Arizona Republican Congressman, Paul Gosar, have decided to launch a new caucus called America First Caucus. Both Greene, a known Q-Anon supporter, and Gosar, are supporters of Donald Trump

and his policies. A recent document, obtained by Punchbowl News in mid-April of 2021, which appeared to be the America First Caucus' policies was released using the term “Anglo-Saxon.”

Under the section stating the caucus' thoughts on immigration, it says:

The America First Caucus recognizes that our country is more than a mass of consumers or a series of abstract ideas. America is a nation with a border, and a culture, strengthened by a common respect for uniquely Anglo-Saxon political traditions. History has shown that societal trust and political unity are threatened when foreign citizens are imported *en-masse* into a country, particularly without institutional support for assimilation and an expansive welfare state to bail them out should they fail to contribute positively to the country. While certain economic and financial interest groups benefit immensely from mass immigration, legal as well as illegal, and the aggregate output of the country increases, the reality of large segments of our society as well as the long-term existential future of America as a unique country with a unique culture and a unique identity being put at unnecessary risk is something our leaders can afford to ignore no longer.

The document emphasizes that America's policies have become stronger because of the respect for “Anglo-Saxon political traditions;” however, this is another way of saying that they want to reject multicultural and ethnic America. Like Jefferson and early scholars of “Anglo-Saxon” studies, the authors of the document are justifying their ideals for American democracy through the “Anglo-Saxons” and their politics. And like WASPs or the “old immigrants,” the authors of the document do not like the idea of “others,” specifically non-whites, immigrating to America. Rather than embracing a diverse America, they are trying to find ways to differentiate themselves from those immigrants threatening their culture and identity and are doing so through

the formation of the America First Caucus. When the document was released, the use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” caught the attention of many. Following this, people have criticized Greene and Gosar’s use of the word calling them racist, which was apparent through the praise of “Anglo-Saxon political traditions.” Both Greene and Gosar have been advocates for stronger boarder security and anti-immigration. This implies that their supposed choice of words indicates, especially for immigration, they are indicating racial domination rather than just the political tradition of the “Anglo-Saxons.” However, Greene and Gosar have denied any relation to the document.

Through recent events and online commentary, white supremacists have shown that they believe they must and are willing to protect their white identity. They have also shown that they are unable to separate white from “Anglo-Saxon.” And rather than putting out clear statements that denounce the use of “Anglo-Saxon” by white supremacists at the height of the term’s use by the Alt-Right from 2016 through 2019, ISAS seemed to remain rather silent on such matters. The silence also left it up Black and POC within the field to visibly fight those battles with white supremacists and address the issues that the organization as a whole was unwilling to do. The scholars on the Advisory Board of ISAS failed to use their platform publicly to educate and correct, which like Rambaran-Olm said, emboldens white supremacists and nationalist.

In a letter from the Advisory Board on September 19, 2019, they note that a name change has been a topic of discussion for multiple years, but it was not until May 2019 that someone had put in a proposal to change the name. According to the letter, there was a discussion about the name change at a conference between July 29 - August 2, 2019, that included the Executive Committee and other members of ISAS. Following the conference, there

was going to be an electronic vote for the name; however, the process was expedited due to pressure from members, social media, and the resignation of Rambaran-Olm. The letter signals that while it was being discussed, there was not a sense of urgency until they received pressure. While many were in favor of the name change, some were not. In an essay on Aeon.com, Howard Williams, Professor of archaeology at The University of Chester, shared his thoughts on the name change. Williams wrote, “However, I think that the term’s continuance and coherence in scholarly discourse and public engagement and education is the best way to guard against its misappropriation and abuse by racist and supremacists.” Howard is one of many people that have argued that changing the name would give into white supremacists. However, a name change is essentially the smallest way ISAS could have “given into” racists. They have done more “giving into” white supremacists by not being more vocal about their incorrect use of the name and creating a hostile environment for Black and POC scholars causing them to not feel welcomed within the field.

The idea of “giving into” white supremacist through a name change also shifts all of the blame onto white supremacists and their use of the term. In the beginning of the letter from the Advisory Board, ISAS does shift a lot of the blame onto the use of the term outside of the field. They wrote, “It has sometimes been used outside the field to describe those holding repugnant and racist views and has contributed to a lack of diversity among those working on early medieval England and its intellectual and literary culture.” However, ISAS plays a role in why there is a lack of diversity, which they do acknowledge. Towards the end of the letter, the Advisory board writes, “At the same time, we recognise that many of our colleagues have felt marginalized and unwelcome within ISAS, and pledge to effect changes to the way the Society is run. Both of these acknowledgements especially how the use of “Anglo-Saxon” by white

supremacists has played a part in the lack of the diversity within the field proves that naming does not only matter outside of the field. It also matters when it comes to attracting people who may want to do scholarship in early medieval studies.

WHY NAMING MATTERS IN ACADEMIA

Attending a predominantly white institution can already be challenging for Black and POC students. A lot of curricula feature mostly literature and the histories of white people. The majority of the professors teaching these curriculums are white as well, and the majority of the students in those classes will more than likely be white. These factors contribute to the feelings of isolation and uncomfortableness Black and POC students may feel generally while taking a class. And at first glance, when looking at a course catalogue and seeing title of a course that includes “Anglo-Saxon,” a Black or POC student may dismiss the class strictly because of its name, which is unfortunate because the actual content that is being taught is not necessarily exclusionary. All of these factors, but more specifically the course name played a part in why I would have rather taken a course containing literature by Shakespeare (which has its own issues surrounding race) than one featuring “Anglo-Saxon” literature; however, because of the recommendation from my advisor, I decided to reluctantly take the course and discovered that I actually enjoyed the content. Using the term “Anglo-Saxon” matters in general because it has been used incorrectly and even weaponized by white supremacists, but it also matters within academia too. One reason why naming matters within academia is because using a name like “Anglo-Saxon” to name the course may cause students to associate professors teaching it with white supremacy. Another reason why it matters is because it may attract certain students, and turn away others as well, especially those who can contribute new and fresh perspectives to the field.

Dorothy Kim, in her article for *In the Middle*, “Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy,” discusses how professors who teach medieval studies may be perceived by students. Kim writes, “Today, -medievalists have to understand that the public and our students will see us as potential white supremacists or white supremacist sympathizers because we are medievalists.” Because of the use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” and identifying with medieval England by white supremacists, students who do not know much about medieval studies may associate the people teaching with white supremacists. With students potentially associating their professor with white supremacy, they might not feel safe in these spaces to speak out and even reconsider taking the course. This shows how a name alone of a course can hold so much power because of how one might associate it. It can signal to a student that they might feel powerless and without a voice, and that their professor may not even create a safe environment for them. Thankfully, I did not feel like I was in an unsafe space and felt like I would have been able to share my thoughts in class without the fear of having a white supremacist attack me; however, that is not the reality of every non-white student studying a course in “Anglo-Saxon” or medieval studies.

While Kim focuses on Professors in the classroom, Marcia Chatelain shares insight on students being white supremacists. Chatelain does not focus on medieval or “Anglo-Saxon” studies, but instead colleges and universities as a whole and how these institutions can provide students who are white supremacists with a platform. Aligning with Chatelain’s claims, Kim, in her article writes, “The medieval western European Christian past is being weaponized by white supremacist/white nationalist/KKK/Nazi extremist groups who also frequently happen to be college students.” Kim acknowledges that not only can professors be seen as white supremacists, but the students taking the course can actually be white supremacists. Utilizing the name like

“Anglo-Saxon” for a course name can attract students who are white supremacists. They may be seeking ways to assert their views into the classroom or look for ways to justify their views.

However, if a professor does not establish boundaries early on and address the incorrect use of the term “Anglo-Saxon,” they will be giving those students the platform to incite verbal violence against non-whites in the classroom (Kim). The use of the term does not only matter outside of classroom, but inside of it too. Online is not the only place where white supremacists take their views, but they can take it to the classroom too. This proves that the use of names like “Anglo-Saxon” do not only matter in outside of academia but outside of it as well.

My Recommendation

A name change is one of the first steps in the right direction for “Anglo-Saxon” or early medieval studies, but it is minimal. Acknowledging how both white supremacists and the leadership of ISAS, have played a role in the lack of diversity and creating an uninviting space is an even greater step. However, words can only do so much, and words do not always have meaning behind them. But now that those faults have been addressed, it is time to take action. The field cannot successfully survive on its own without diversifying itself and doing more to educate people on the term. With those efforts being taken, the field will continue to be something that scholars would want to join and continue to be a part of. Overall, based on my personal learning experiences and the research I have done for this paper, I think there are two main ways that can help the field be more inviting to people of different races and ethnicities which would help move the field forward rather than backwards.

It is important to acknowledge and amplify the voices of Black and POC within the field. This can be carried out in many ways especially within the classroom when teaching new generations of medieval scholars. In Anglo-Saxon literature, we mainly focused on the literature rather than the history of the “Anglo-Saxons.” However, learning about the culture and important historical event was not neglected at all, and I think that’s where voices from non-whites can be amplified, especially for an introductory class. It was during Anglo-Saxon literature that I learned that “Anglo-Saxon” was not the name they called themselves. When discussing the origins of the name, it could be a perfect opportunity to share works from Black and POC that have written about the name. An example of this would be sharing Rambaran-Olm’s written work, like “Misnaming the Medieval,” which discusses how “Anglo-Saxon” is an inaccurate way to describe the ancient Germanic peoples that migrated. It also acknowledges the use of the term

by white supremacists, which is also important to understand especially from the perspective of a woman of color. Dorothy Kim is also another scholar of color whose work could also be shared in the classroom. Kim wrote “The Question of Race in *Beowulf*” which discusses the Tolkien and Toni Morrison’s thoughts and work on *Beowulf*, and even highlights that there are very few Black people that have published work on *Beowulf*. I also think it would be worthwhile to read Toni Morrison’s essay “Grendel and His Mother.” I think reading works like Morrison’s essay would have made reading *Beowulf* a more enjoyable for me. Reading scholarship from Black and People of Color probably would have also made me a little more interested in what I was reading.

Amplifying non-white voices is not exclusive to the classroom, but at conferences that are held by ISMEE going forward. Many scholars of color, like Seeta Changanti, have felt that past conferences have not been as diverse as they should have been. After learning about Gordon Davis Houston, I realized why it is important to support non-white voices within the field. If they are not supported and given the platform to share their work, they may go unnoticed and eventually be forgotten just as Houston was. Allowing more Black and POC scholars to have their voices heard will attract other Black and POC scholars that will continue to contribute to the field. There will hopefully be a day where no one will point out that there are very few Black people that have studied literature such as *Beowulf*.

Although ISAS is now ISMEE, I think that it is important to still acknowledge the inaccuracies in the way some people use “Anglo-Saxon” especially if it is being used in a class. Not only should the inaccuracies be addressed, but the negative connotations of the term should be as well. What made me feel lot more comfortable taking Anglo-Saxon literature was hearing Professor Drout discuss how people outside of the field have used the term. As I mentioned

before, I had taken the class in Fall of 2019 which was right around the time that Rambaran-Olm resigned and ISAS decided to change its name to ISMEE. Therefore, Professor Drout had shared information surrounding the controversy behind the name change of the group during class. This may seem like a small thing, but in reality, it was really big to me. It gave me a little comfort knowing that I was not completely wrong for associating white supremacists with the class strictly because of its name. Because I felt more comfortable, I was able to fully allow myself to actually enjoy reading the literature.

Explaining the inaccuracies and negative uses of the term at the beginning of the course or throughout the course, might make someone feel more comfortable with taking the class. However, it also can encourage the right use of the term in the future. This can be helpful because white supremacists are not just middle-aged white men. They can also be sitting in college classes and taking a course like Anglo-Saxon literature. Educating people early about the term may not completely eliminate all of the improper uses of “Anglo-Saxon,” but it can definitely help. Understanding that “Anglo-Saxon” does not mean white and should not be used interchangeably with white will encourage people to not use it that way and to educate other people who may use the term negatively.

Informing people at the start of their journey through “Anglo-Saxon” studies about the inaccuracies surrounding the term will also take the pressure off of other Black and POC scholars to do most of the educating, especially online. Following Punchbowl News sharing the alleged America First Caucus document and the term “Anglo-Saxon” being used, many articles were released addressing the use of it. Of course, Rambaran-Olm was a scholar who helped explain more on the term “Anglo-Saxon” in an article with Time.com. While Rambaran-Olm has done a lot of notable work within the field to tackle the racism and inequality, she should not be

alone in educating the masses. It's something that a lot of scholars within medieval studies should do and want to do, especially to protect the field from people who are tarnishing and using the name to promote racist ideas.

While the term "Anglo-Saxon" has been used to racist towards non-whites and even certain ethnic whites for many years, it does not have to continue that way especially for people who want to continue to use the term properly. Recognizing the problem and why the name matters, will help keep the actual meanings of the term alive rather than taken over by the false and dangerous narratives that people have giving the term. With that, it would be more welcoming to Black and POC scholars allowing for new and diverse perspectives within the field. And as the poet who wrote *Doer* said, "Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg." ⁴

⁴ "Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg" translates to "That was overcome, so may this be, also"

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