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Week 2 – Takeaway 1

Terms I Had Been Unfamiliar With:

1. Specious: having a false look of truth or genuineness (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
2. Mahometanism: An obsolete term for Islam (Wiktionary)
3. Turgid: Pompous, bloated (Cambridge Dictionary)
4. Libertine: a person who rejects accepted morals and social conventions, living instead to pursue physical pleasure and personal freedom (Wiktionary)
5. Bugbear: Persistent source of irritation (Merriam-Webster)
6. Preponderates: to be greater in number, weight, power, influence, or importance than something else (Cambridge Dictionary)
7. Coverture: English doctrine stating that a married woman's legal rights and identity merged with her husband's (Wiktionary)
8. Jurisprudence: the scientific, philosophical, and theoretical study of law and legal systems. (Cambridge Dictionary)
9. Synecdoche: a figure of speech where a part of something represents the whole, or the whole represents a part (Dictionary.com)
10. Clandestine Marriage: a secret, illegitimate (either legally, religiously, or both) marriage

What I Learned:

Having no background whatsoever in British laws or their women's suffrage movement, I learned a lot about the semi-linear path that led to women gaining various rights, such as the right to vote as well as obtain custody of children and manage their own finances. I also appreciated how Montgomery specifically emphasized the lag in inclusivity and intersectionality, as earlier movements focused primarily on the rights of white, middle and upper-class women, and therefore women of color and working-class women often did not reap the benefits of such progress right away, stating "Care must be taken, however, with the use of the category 'woman'. All women did not have the same work experience: class and later ethnicity affected women's lives" (Montgomery 2). I noticed a lot of such bias in Wollstonecraft's piece, as she frequently equates the discriminative treatment of English women by English men as something that is more like the treatment of women in Muslim culture. She acts in these comparisons as if the way women are being discriminated against is un-British, when it is, in fact, a British institution.

I also learned a lot about British trade and business law, particularly from Phillips, and how coverture often immobilized women economically, when I had only been more focused on how marriage institutions restricted women politically and socially. She describes the economic hinderance coverture caused, listing symptoms of the lack of personhood such as being unable to

sue, have no grounds to protest a woman's business being shut down or stopped by her husband, and the inability to keep her business's earnings for herself (Phillips 23). I also found it interesting when Phillips stated that coverture has not yet been explicitly repealed, but instead just rendered inconsequential (Phillips 24). I also learned about exactly what a clandestine marriage was and the legal rationale for criminalizing it in the 1750s, as marriage status had legal implications as well as associated rights and loss of rights that incentivized the government to regulate the act, since single and married women were considered different types of entities. (Hardwicke)

In class, it was really interesting to articulate the "British Woman" we were picturing when going through the reading. I personally also envisioned a white, middle-class, decently educated and urban-living woman, which I hadn't even realized I was picturing. I was especially interested in what Kristiana said about British women had separate laws that applied to them and different rights awarded to them and therefore signified they were a different category of citizen. I think this could be expanded as women were also categorized further by class, race, educational attainment, and so on. I think the idea that laws usually catch up with society and not vice versa (Phillips) is also very thought-provoking because it made me think about how much more there was to each law, as there had to be a public push for it, pressure on lawmakers for and against it, as well as politicians drafting, defending, and eventually passing the law, which makes me wonder how many laws were struck down leading up to the ones we see in Montgomery's list.