

The injustice of his sentence  
was very flagrant; all of Paris  
was indignant; and it was judged  
that his religion and wealth  
rather than the crime alleged against him  
had been the cause of his condemnation.

*Frankenstein*

DEAR BEEF

PANDORA'S  
MONOTONY

*My husband and I are hosting a Halloween party and put together a playlist. We added all the current bops, but notice a lot of the music sounds the same. Is something going on here or are we imagining it? What should we do?—Draw Me Like a French Girl for Halloween*

I applaud you for your listening abilities, as well as your proactive party-planning. In self-sabotage, I usually wait until the last minute to choose party music.

The argument that *music out now sounds the same* is a familiar one, in particular where generations are concerned. Growing up my grandma told me my '90s pop music *all sounded the same*, and I disagreed. I'm guessing from your costume you might be a millennial. If you're adding only tracks geared towards gen z and younger to your playlist, it might *all sound the same* to your (older) ears.

It could also be the steady homogenization of soundscapes shaped by the monopolistic control over the music industry exercised by conglomerate media companies and algorithm-driven streaming services. In that case, there's an economic and policy reason for what you're hearing.

The music industry has constricted and turned to streaming at the same time, leaving fewer people making decisions. *Not as many companies in the game* translates to a smaller pool of executive tastemakers who need to be pleased for artists to find commercial success. It also decreases the number of opportunities available for shopping around unique music. *Streaming* cuts humans out altogether, deferring its decision-making to black-box algorithms geared towards passive, endless listening. Half the time, their coders don't even understand them. The result is a musical version of gray interacting with beige, which just so happen to be the colors du jour.

I usually end up outsourcing party music to *humans*. Either friends I know who enjoy being disc jockeys or hosts of old-school *radio stations*. There's *diversity* there.

I hope your party is a success. I'm sure it will be, as long as you don't once say "bops."

# BEEF

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LOS ANGELES

MONOPOLY  
MONSTERS

Beefreaders—Victor Frankenstein keeps me up at night. Protected by family wealth and free from third-party oversight, he creates a creature who murders, stalks, and mansplains.

I've read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* different ways over the years. Lately, what stands out is the book's warning on the dangers of people who pursue technological advancement *just 'cause*, a position Dr. Ian Malcolm summarizes in *Jurassic Park*. Questioning whether the park's founder, John Hammond, thought through the implications of bringing dinosaurs back to life, he says: "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should." (The dinosaurs end up killing quite a few people.)

In these stories, the inadvisable pursuits of creators with the capital needed to realize their ambitions wreak havoc. In addition, no authority steps in to represent the public's interests. Victor digs up bodies from graves; John alives velociraptors without one public hearing. *Where are the governments?*

Frankensteins and Hammonds are all over the place. After decades of lax tax policies and minimal antitrust enforcement, corporate and human monopolies now control broad swaths of our economy, politics, and national interests. They hoard wealth. Create technologies that might destroy us. Do what they want no matter the consequences, and the institutions meant to protect us cannot compete, themselves (like us) starved for resources.

America, land of monopoly monsters. Righting the course will likely require a combination of progressive taxation to recapture resources held by the too few and an antitrust policy aimed at preventing the levels of personal and corporate wealth accumulation we currently see.

## HOW BEEF

|                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| VERY BEEF .....  | <b>Diversity</b>        |
| BEEF .....       | <b>Break Ups</b>        |
| NOT BEEF .....   | <b>Vacancies</b>        |
| NEVER BEEF ..... | <b>Unaccountability</b> |

## BEEF PATROL

**Antitrust: The Law  
Is Just the Tip**

Transactions over certain dollar thresholds are subject to antitrust review by the federal government via the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice. When parties submit a transaction for approval, the FTC and DOJ have two options. Either grant approval or identify antitrust concerns within 30 days and issue a *second request* for more information.

This dry recitation of antitrust practice leaves out what's important: the DOJ's leadership (including the Attorney General and the head of its antitrust division) are appointed by the sitting president and, thanks to recent rulings by the Supreme Court, the FTC's five commissioners are increasingly influenced by him as well.

Antitrust policy is not only what's written in books. Equally important, it's about *who makes the decision concerning a second request*.

Ultimately, the president's leadership will guide that decision. Not only in how the administration interprets and prioritizes antitrust enforcement, but also through the chief executive's ability to operate a fully staffed and efficient government. (Three of five FTC commissioner slots are currently empty!)

You can have the most beautiful laws, *like ever*, but if the chief executive is not capable of running a professional and efficient operation geared towards the full and faithful execution of them—they *don't really matter*.

**WHAT ANTITRUST  
MEANS TO ME****A Way  
to Tackle  
Beasts**

Antitrust gives perspective. It moves past sideshows that distract from important issues.

Current talk about artificial intelligence seems to center on the tension between whether the technology will create a uniform monoculture and/or be a net positive for humanity (and the economy). These conversations ignore one critical factor: only a handful of companies and people control AI. Which means filtering AI concerns through an antitrust analysis moves us faster to what matters.

Consider what we already know about monopolies and closely held sectors.

They reduce cultural diversity. Look at media. Disney, once it gobbled up ABC, Lucasfilm, and Marvel Entertainment, turned the Oscars into a celebration of its acquisitions. The stage began to take on the aesthetics of a Marvel movie due out, and the sonic landscape focused inward on princess films and *Star Wars* tracks. Were these decisions made by organizers to curry favor? Were they demanded by the overlord to save money on royalties and cement cultural supremacy? Who cares. They were made. The results solidified winners and losers.

They increase consumer prices. Look at aviation. Executives will tell us airfare has increased due to rising fuel and operating expenses, but the airline industry's consolidation is a reason, too. With each carrier that disappears, it's easier for the remaining ones to increase prices and demand travelers pay for features that were once previously part of the ticket. Waiting for the day when we have to pay up to buckle up.

They decrease access and quality. Grocery-store combinations offer insight. When chains merge, it's common for new owners to close locations in underperforming (aka *poorer*) areas and swap out quality ingredients for cheaper ones (while telling us *they didn't*).

They exacerbate income inequality. Aside from higher consumer prices, monopolies can also decrease wages and exclude much of the population from sharing in wealth

creation through what's known as shareholder wealth concentration. It's a self-fulfilling prophesy. People need money to invest in companies, like through the stock market. If fewer and fewer have the disposable income to do so or high-growth companies are closely held by a select group of insiders, wealth creation increasingly flows to the already-wealthy.

Stopping here, we have a clear vision of AI's future. It will eliminate diversity. It will make things more expensive. For consumers who rely on companies that use AI, it will mean higher prices. For entrepreneurs wanting to start their own competitive businesses, it will mean ever-higher start-up costs. For businesses currently using it, it will mean increased operating expenses. Its free or cheaper versions will also decrease in quality, making its most promising and sophisticated features increasingly out of grasp for most people. The proceeds of its blockbuster IPOs will disproportionately benefit millionaires and billionaires.

Antitrust pulls back the curtain. These aspects of AI are not unique. They relate to the proven consequences of monopolies and our public policy's inability to foster economic diversity with effective antitrust policy.

Put this stuff behind us. See what is exceptional about AI. Will it destroy us? How can we control it? Can it be made environmentally sustainable? What does living comfortably alongside it look like? What happens if it becomes sentient? And, by the way, is it even worthwhile?

*BEEF'S IDEAS*

***Break Up Monopolies.*** Monopolies, particularly in the tech, media, aviation, food, and healthcare sectors, should end. AT&T was split in the 1980s, with seven independent Baby Bells emerging. Enough with big. Let's be baby.

***Reform and Enforce Antitrust Policies.*** Antitrust laws and enforcement practices have demonstrably failed to protect the general public and our economy. Regulations should be rethought and then strictly enforced.

***Tax Extreme Wealth.*** Lenient tax policies enable the formation of monopolies and allow corporations and people to pursue ambitions no matter their impact on society at large. Unlock extreme wealth for the common good.