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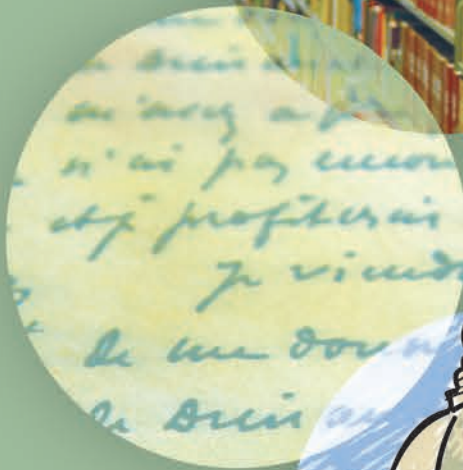
HAYDEN **HM** MCNEIL

University Writing Program, University of Notre Dame **| 2005–2006 | Volume 6**

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Table of CONTENTS

Researched Arguments

McPartlin Award Winners

Acknowlegements

When I ask my students to do peer workshopping of their essays, I tell them that the job of writers is to keep readers reading, and the job of readers is to keep writers writing. The authors published here listened to their readers and kept writing. The result is writing that is much better than what they could have accomplished alone, the result is writing that will inspire others to do the same. Many readers have kept the authors in this edition writing by sharing insight, critique, and encouragement. While we cannot name all the readers whose advice made a difference in the essays printed here in Fresh Writing, we know that First-Year Composition (FYC) at Notre Dame is designed to ensure that every writer has many readers during the process of portfolio revision. We know that those readers include classmates, instructors, Writing Center tutors, and the editors on the board of Fresh Writing. To them, I write: thanks for reading.

And yet there are many others who deserve thanks as well for their role in the challenging process of composition: the authors' friends, family members, and other faculty members who shared something that sparked an interest that became a research project; Writing Program administrators and staff who gave inspiration, organizational support, and institutional recognition for the three versions of FYC (standard, community-based, and multimedia), which are all represented here — Kelly Kurzhal (Administrative Assistant), John Duffy (Acting Director of the Writing Program), Stuart Greene (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies in Arts and Letters), and Kelly Kinney (Coordinator of First-Year Composition and Assistant Director of the Writing Program); McPartlin Award Selection Committee members Susan Ohmer, Terry Phelps, Neil Delaney, and Kelly Kinney; First Year of Studies Dean Hugh Page and the supportive staff of deans and advisors who made sure these students were prepared to excel; our sharp new publishing staff at Hayden-McNeil (Lisa Cabot, Moira Donovan, Kim Moore, and Amanda Humphrey); the OIT professionals who solved computer problems that could have forced unintended revision; Michael Subialka, who became my first co-editor by virtue of his extensive service to writers at Notre Dame, from his work as a tutor at the Writing Center to his own contribution of outstanding writing in the Foreword; and my family — Brad, Sophia, and Harper — who let me jump on the computer many times for "just one more email" when they would rather have seen me jump on the trampoline with them. For all those whose invisible work made these words visible, my thanks.

Connie Snyder Mick

June 2006

Foreword

In a narrative about narrative, Ursula K. Le Guin poses an interesting question:

> The *histoire* is the what
> and the *discours* is the how
> but what I want to know, Brigham,
> is le *pourquoi*
> *Why* are we sitting here around the campfire? [1]

Now, I don't speak French, but Ursula has been kind enough to use only obvious cognates, and the message seems to be an important one. The most fundamental level of human questioning is a simple word: why? Le Guin suggests that this is the motivation for creating stories around a campfire, but it seems reasonable that more than just narrative centers on that question. We might ask ourselves, why write at all? And why read other people's writing? And why take a class about it? These are questions that deserve to be both asked and answered.

And here is where we must let you down. There is no answer waiting on this page. Nor on the next. Why should we write? Why should we read? A simple statement here could never answer such deep, prying queries. Rather, we can suggest only a course of action: keep these questions in mind... and read. And write. The best answer is the experience itself. It is the excitement of reading something new, something that changes your perspective on life and the world; it is the fulfillment of having written something worth writing, of having communicated and expressed yourself.

And why take a class focused on all of these things? Perhaps it is for the same reason that we gather together around the campfire. Alone, we read as we have always read, write what we have always written. Together, it might just be that we can challenge each other with new stories offering new perspectives. We can find different meanings in what we read. Maybe we can even discover new ways of communicating these meanings. In sum, and paradoxically, the answer to the question "why take this class?" may just be the experience of the class itself. The class is the answer, and after having taken it, if you reflect constantly on those questions, we hope you will agree.

And if you don't agree, I personally would advise the following: write your FYC professor a letter. And then fold it up and lick the envelope, and as you do, think about what you have done. The *histoire* — you have written a letter to your professor. The *discourse* — You chose certain words. You arranged them in a particular fashion. This involved employing a sizable set of literary skills, a shared body of vocabulary and grammar, an idea of who your audience is and what might be convincing to her (them).

And *le pourquoi*? You have sought to share yourself and to affect someone else — to take a world of feeling, thought, and experience that exists right there, in your head, and to transport it magically and powerfully into the head of another person, a professor in an office on the other side of campus, in a different world. You have attempted to recreate Michelangeo's famous work from the Sistine Chapel, the two hands, reaching out, trying to touch, to make contact, to create through sharing.

Le Guin offers a very existential answer to the question that she poses, and even if you speak as little German as I do, it may still have some relevance:

> Tell me a story, great-aunt,
> so that I can sleep.
> Tell me a story, Scheherazade,
> so that you can live...
> for the word's the beginning of being
> if not the middle or the end.

The story is life. It is the beginning of a world. The story soothes the listener and makes real the teller. It is the act of creation, and it is an act of conveying meaning. This is why we tell our stories, and this is why we listen as others tell their own.

In the pages that follow, there are a great many stories written as essays. They make arguments and cite facts. They have been selected to model the process of research and investigation that will be the focus of your FYC class. And yet, they do more. They ask why? Why... Why does it all matter? We hope that you will join in asking why.

In the pages that follow, there are a great many revelations. The oil crisis is a positive force. Corporate giants are bound by the same ethics as you and I. Muslims drive minivans. And much, much more. These revelations are kernels of feeling, thought, and experience transmitted from an author to her readers. They represent the story of the author's world, a story that she is telling, if we are willing to listen. We hope that you will join in reading and being provoked.

In the pages that follow, there are a great many arguments for and against all manner of things. They will aim to convince, to employ rhetoric, to crystallize points. They will present interpretive stories that offer new meanings and suggest new conclusions. Le Guin's reader seeks to sleep; we hope that you, the reader of <u>Fresh Writing</u>, will not sleep. These stories in essay form exist to instill in you some new idea, an understanding that will awaken you. Test them; see what they have to offer.

And then, when you have read them, and thought about them, and read and thought about many other books, articles, poems, and other works of artistic and cultural production — write. Live. Tell the story of what you have found. And just as these authors in these pages did for you, inspire another to write as well. This is <u>Fresh Writing</u>. This is fresh thought. This is the ideal of a university. Welcome to Notre Dame.

Michael Subialka

June 2006

[1] "It was a Dark and Stormy Night; or Why Are we Huddling about the Campfire?" in *On Narrative*, W.J.T. Mitchell ed., (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

framed
ARGUMENTS

Author's biography

DAVIDE LIONETTI

Davide Lionetti is an international student hailing from a rural town just outside Milan, Italy. A proud resident of Stanford Hall, Davide is a sophomore majoring in Chemistry and hoping to minor in Medieval Studies. After reading articles from Doris Lessing and Michael Kaufman, Davide combined the main concepts from both authors and used these as a looking glass through which he analyzed his favorite movie, <u>Fight Club</u>. Utilizing the movie's script, he tackled a topic that is dear to him: the process of identity creation. Davide's main source of inspiration for this paper was his own experience of this creation process as it developed in his life. Davide wishes to thank everyone who believed in him and in his work, especially all those who helped him review and polish this essay.

Putting the Club into Fight Club:
AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIETAL INFLUENCE ON THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL

Davide Lionetti

Framed Argument

First–Year Composition

Professor Brandon Fogel

"People are always asking me if I know Tyler Durden…"

"I want you to hit me as hard as you can" is only one of the many punch lines an unrecognizable Brad Pitt delivers all throughout the movie Fight Club (6). Still, many fans of the 1999 blockbuster do not realize that most of those very tag lines, which remained so well engraved in their minds, reach beyond the mere veil of movie fiction. In a similar way, it is not uncommon to misplace the main points of the movie and to end up with a very superficial analysis.

Fight Club is, despite appearances, a lot less about "fight" and a lot more about "club." While fighting in the movie is just a symbol for an efficient discharge of emotions, it is the club around the fight that gains most attention, which is the very reason why this particular movie is cited here. Fight Club deals with issues such as the powerful influence of society as a group (hence the importance of the "club" element) on individuals, and the feeling of pain (both physical and spiritual) related to this influence. At the same time, the movie describes the struggle of certain people to get rid of such pressures and the methods they use to set themselves free. These issues are not at all fictitious; on the contrary, they are very real and worrisome, to some extent, to all of us.

The influence society and, in a way, all groups of people has on its members should not be underestimated: society as a whole has a true shaping ability that not only influences a person but can actually transform individuals by changing the way they look at other people, at society, and, most importantly, at themselves. It is the very notion of a person's true identity that is threatened in this common situation; society deceives people through illusions and a forced inability to show emotions. Even so, people can still look into themselves and find an idealized image of their own identity; by pursuing this ideal, people can negate all unwanted influences of society and groups.

It becomes useful to introduce here the concept of "groupthink" as Doris Lessing, a British writer, defined it: "our thinking changes because we belong to a group" (332). It

is a rather common experience for members of a group to find their personal beliefs in disagreement with the ideals promoted by the group. In such occurrences, "groupthink" is the very reason why these members of the group will not stand up for their own beliefs but will unconsciously conform to the group's ideas. It is "groupthink" that pushes people to agree with most ideals offered by society, even with those which might not be accepted if proposed in a septic environment, as opposed to the biased one (because of society "groupthink") in which we actually live. Michael Kaufman, in one of his essays, brings Lessing's examination a little further and with greater specification: he suggests one of these concepts, which men accept unknowingly, to be "men's contradictory experiences of power" (294), defined as the feelings of pain and frustration due to the large amounts of emotions men must suppress in order to retain their status of power. Kaufman clearly asserts that negative connotations of the possession of power are, in a way, the result of a "groupthink": men's possession of the power role in society is not based on biological differences, rather on the history of society itself, which has nearly always put men higher than women in power over others (and especially over the other gender). Even today, society shapes men from when they are very young, creating their frame by eliminating from them personality traits resembling women's, thus creating males. The effort society makes to differentiate men and women beyond the physical differences creates gender, and is defined by Kaufman as "gender work" (298).

> *"Fight Club is, despite appearances, a lot less about "fight" and a lot more about "club."*

Lessing's and Kaufman's theories are not strangers to each other. In fact, Kaufman's description and analysis of society are supported by a concept of influence that closely resembles Lessing's "groupthink." Kaufman states that society drives males from when they are young to abandon "womanly" personality traits and to acquire the male gender characteristics. He also asserts that this influence on males is never visible: society does not preach to men what values to accept or refuse. Rather, society implies its ideologies in everything males see: they learn by observing the behaviour of other males, such as their fathers. In much the same way, the very fact that men have more power in society is a way for society to show males what they need to become. This influence of society is easily identifiable with Lessing's "groupthink," in which the members of a group unconsciously change their thinking just to belong to that group.

In Fight Club, these concepts are portrayed by an office worker in his thirties who lives a double-faced life: he creates an image of himself as he would like to be and interacts with this "person" as if it were real. In an early conversation between the two, Tyler Durden (the idealized ego of the main character) asks Jack (the name referring to the main character, who never reveals his true name throughout the movie) for a description of modern people; Jack's answer is simple and rather obvious, but it sets the tone for a fundamental interpretation of the movie: "You know, consumers" (Fight Club 5). Jack already sees society as a "groupthink," an entity that has taken control of people. Later in the movie, Tyler asserts, "We've all been raised by television to believe

that one day we'll all be millionaires and movie gods and rockstars — but we won't" (Fight Club 13). Jack's life is also a fitting example of what Kaufman calls "men's contradictory experiences of power" (293). Jack is a man with a secure job, a normal life; however, he feels like he's missing something: he is addicted to the "IKEA nesting instinct," evidently recalling woman-like traits of his personality. Jack also suffers from insomnia, and he manages to cure himself only by starting to frequent support groups for sick or depressed people, allowing him to set his emotions free. Thus, we discover that Jack's problems with his life are closely related to the role of "man" that society has drawn for him. It is also interesting to note that the support group where Jack can best share his emotions is a group for men who have had their testicles removed because of testicular cancer and that his best friend is a man with huge female breasts; it is clear that the underlying message is that men best share their emotions when they accept their feminine characteristics, which is also what Kaufman infers.

Although Fight Club seems a fitting representation of Kaufman's theory, it must be observed that the movie often sets itself at a considerable distance from Kaufman's own approach to a similar situation. While it has already been stated that the actual "fight" element of Fight Club is not of prime importance for uncovering the meanings of the movie, fighting is nonetheless a significant presence. The movie's view of fighting is the concept from which Kaufman's analysis lies furthest: fighting in the movie is a release of emotions, the only way for people to feel truly "alive" (Fight Club 8). Kaufman, on the other hand, views violence as the proof that suppressed emotions take control over men, constraining them to irrational behaviors. The presence of violence in the movie, though, does not stop the viewer from identifying Jack with one of the suffering men Kaufman describes. Rather, it just sets a limit to the application of Kaufman's theories to the movie.

People have a strong tendency to gather into groups; what can a person do to get rid of the influences coming from society and "groupthink" in general? Unfortunately, people can often do very little on their own. However, even though this statement will seem to contradict the previous one, people can set themselves free from society "groupthink" with the help of no one else but themselves. Tyler Durden as Jack finally realizes they are the same person, revealing to the viewers the way people can set themselves free: "You were looking for a way to change your life. You could not do this on your own. All the ways you wish you could be...that's me. [...] People do it everyday. They talk to themselves. They see themselves as they like to be" (Fight Club 20). In this brief explanation we can grasp the most basic idea on which the movie is built: Jack creates Tyler to change his life, which means setting himself free from external influences of society.

Fight Club obviously represents an extreme case: Jack makes Tyler a living person and the consequences of this transformation are dramatic. Nonetheless, the concept of one's creation of an "ideal himself" is to be considered worthy of attention. A person who creates a vision of himself as he'd like to be can set that vision as his goal and start pursuing it in real life. By holding on to this vision's values, the person who

created it, a new Jack, will be able to judge the influences of society and groups in general from an external point of view. He will then be able to identify pressures, and negate those he does not want to accept. It is of fundamental importance, though, for a person to set up his vision as a whole, not just a discrete set of values. Tyler Durden is a complete person; he is so fully defined that Jack starts believing he is authentic. In other words, a person creating an idealized image of himself is actually shaping his own identity just as he'd like it to be. Once a person has done so, being a part of any "groupthink" does not represent a problem anymore: he sees the pressures put on his identity as if he were looking at another person. This capability facilitates the identification of external influences and allows a person to reject all unwanted ones.

Of course there are some risks related to this opportunity: as we see in Fight Club, a person setting the goal of changing his own life could easily go too far, and the consequences of such an excess are explicitly shown in the movie. Jack has put enough faith in Tyler to make him real, and Tyler has taken control of Jack himself. Jack also loses control of his Fight Club: while Fight Club was still a non-regimented group, where "who you were [in Fight Club] is not who you were in the rest of the world" (Fight Club 8), Fight Club's evolution, Project Mayhem, "is out of the basements" (Fight Club 17), as Jack and Tyler respectively reveal to us. While this newfound way of rejecting external influences is based upon Doris Lessing's concept of "groupthink," she would most likely question the actual efficacy of this process. Lessing would agree that Jack did liberate himself from society "groupthink," but she would, on the other hand, identify Project Mayhem as another "groupthink." According to this view, then, Jack has not achieved a true liberation. At any rate, this consideration does not undermine the strength of the process. If we agree to consider Project Mayhem as a "groupthink," we must realize its differences from society, namely the fact that Jack himself created this new "groupthink" to fit his own idealized identity. As the creator of the group, Jack can force it to stick to his identity, thus never setting the foundations of a "groupthink" that can influence his ideas.

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Author's
biography

Lindy S. Ramer

Growing up in small-town Ohio, Lindy Ramer has had her fair share of experience with Wal-Mart. No night of going out with friends was complete without a trip to Wal-Mart to play with the hula hoops and ponies on sticks; unfortunately, getting in trouble with the Wal-Mart associates was also a part of every night out. It was this bittersweet experience that Lindy couldn't get her off of her mind while writing this essay. Now at Notre Dame, Lindy already feels quite at home at the lovely Wal-Mart on Grape Road. Although she is a science education major, Lindy's career goals are more along the lines of getting married, having more children than you can count on a hand or two, and raising her future family in a Catholic environment. She can't wait to enter the profession of housewifery, and will probably still be shopping, or playing, at Wal-Mart.

America:
THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY
AND WAL-MARTS

Lindy S. Ramer

Framed Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Nicole MacLaughlin

America is the land of opportunity. America is a country composed of immigrants who came to find a better life for their families. America is a place where the average hard-working man can make enough to support his family, even if just barely. These ideas are all part of the American dream, which says that anyone can achieve success by employing values such as hard work and democracy. In several speeches on its website, walmartfacts.com, Wal-Mart unrealistically markets itself as a corporation that makes the American dream into reality by making an emotional appeal to the average working-class American, by playing the role of America's trusted friend, and by acting as a democratic business which listens to the common man.

Many corporations, including Budweiser, McDonald's and Wal-Mart, have used the American dream in their marketing strategies, claiming to make this dream a reality. In "On Reading a Video Text," Brown University professor Robert Scholes illustrates this marketing technique by describing a twenty-eight second Budweiser commercial. It depicts the story of a black umpire succeeding in the major leagues and drinking a Budweiser beer in order to celebrate. This commercial allows Americans to create an entire life story for the umpire, in which he lives happily ever after, by drawing on "the myth of America itself, of the racial melting pot, of upward mobility, of justice done without fear or favor" (Scholes 56). This Budweiser commercial is really just a fairytale. Many people in the same situation would not have experienced such success due to various factors including discrimination, bad luck, or lack of skill. This tactic markets American myths (specifically, justice in the past example) as reality in order to sell a product. McDonald's is a leader in using this tactic, as Eric Schlosser describes in his book <u>Fast Food Nation</u>. McDonald's supports such American values as patriotism, by flying the stars and stripes at all of its restaurants, and heroism, by sponsoring the Olympics. A fast food chain such as McDonald's really has nothing to do with patriotism or heroism, but by latching onto vague iconic values, McDonald's is able to tell the public that buying food from McDonald's will somehow make ideal American values into reality.

Wal-Mart uses this same marketing strategy, claiming that anyone who embraces the American value of hard work will succeed, with the help of Wal-Mart, of course. In two speeches given by Wal-Mart executives, Wal-Mart makes an emotional appeal to the public by claiming that it helps the struggling, hard-working, archetypal American family. In October 2005 Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott began a speech to the general public by reminding listeners that Wal-Mart was started to serve the "overlooked and under-appreciated" customers of America (1). He spoke not of citizens in big cities living in ritzy upscale apartment complexes but of Americans living in rural areas and small communities. Rob Walton, son of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, makes the same emotional appeal, saying in a June 2004 speech that his customers "can't afford to move to a higher price, because if they do, they have to do without something else" (1). While McDonald's encourages patriotism and heroism, Wal-Mart goes beyond simply encouraging a hard-working family. Instead, Wal-Mart takes the myth of a poor, hard-working family that overcomes poverty and claims to make it into a reality, as seen in Rob Walton's claim that Wal-Mart's low prices save families from doing without things they need. However, this is simply an emotional appeal to the American dream because Wal-Mart has no way to prove that they have actually saved any family from poverty. Furthermore, though everyone has an idea of the archetypal American family, does such a family really exist? All Wal-Mart can do is ask the public to believe that they are a protector and friend to such a family.

"Wal-Mart uses this same marketing strategy, claiming that anyone who embraces the American value of hard work will succeed, with the help of Wal-Mart, of course."

The archetypal struggling American family craves a trusted friend to help them through the rough times, and that is exactly how Wal-Mart has marketed itself. According to Schlosser, a business that acts as a trusted friend exemplifies "the good-will and the unique emotional connection" that people feel when they are with their good friends (502). Schlosser explains that McDonald's invented the idea of a business as a trusted friend, which means that a customer should feel like the business knows and understands him or her personally. Rob Walton claims that Wal-Mart's "everyday low prices" tactic (2), as opposed to having specific sale dates and coupons, built a sense of trust with customers because they didn't have to wait for sales to get good deals. Walton's point is to make each customer feel like he has a friend in the business who will give him a special deal. Realistically this cannot be the case. Wal-Mart has billions of customers and cannot give each one a "special deal." Walton also brings home the idea of the trusted friend in a much more subtle way by referring to his father, Sam Walton, the business powerhouse who founded Wal-Mart, simply as "Dad," not "my father," or even "*my* dad." This allows us to think of Sam Walton as "Dad," like our father playing baseball in the backyard or barbequing on summer afternoons. Sam Walton was not America's "dad." Sam Walton was a tough business man who started a billion dollar corporation and became one of the wealthiest men in the world.

Wal-Mart extends its image of trusted friend beyond just customers to its employees as well through the American ideal of democracy. Thomas Frank explains the idea of democracy in business as defined by corporations and management theorists in his piece "Casual Day, U.S.A." Frank says that the democratic business "is to be the polar opposite of the hierarchical dictatorship," a business that listens to and cares about its employees (207–208). However, Frank is quick to point out that these corporations are run by democracy only in *tone*; management may be listening, but in reality, they will never take any action to make things better for employees. Instead, it is all a show that the management puts on in order to keep their employees satisfied. Wal-Mart uses such a democracy in its "open door policy" in which employees can always communicate with their manager. Rob Walton explains this policy that his father created, saying it is the concept of "pushing responsibility — and authority — down" (5). Rob Walton also brags that Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott often visits Wal-Mart stores around the country, but he "doesn't go to the stores to talk. Like my father, he goes mostly to listen" (5). Lee Scott himself champions a management that listens not just to its employees, but to everyone, claiming that Wal-Mart "spent a year meeting with and listening to customers, Associates, citizen groups, government leaders, non-profit and non-government organizations, and other concerned individuals" (1–2). However, it does not matter how many different people Scott listens to, because all of their ideas can never be realistically implemented. Furthermore, Wal-Mart has its own plan for success, which has no room in it for the voice of its employees or citizens. For example, undoubtedly employees have pointed out that supporting a family on a Wal-Mart income is nearly impossible, yet Wal-Mart has made no changes in this area because they are entirely focused on the corporation's net profit. Still, it gives people the feeling that Wal-Mart is democratic and that it takes everyone's ideas into account when making decisions, though this is not realistic.

Beyond listening to its employees, Rob Walton also explains that Wal-Mart management does not get special benefits and that many managers started as hourly employees; neither of these facts makes Wal-Mart realistically democratic. First, denying management special benefits, such as first class plane tickets when traveling on business, does not help employees in any way. It does not change the fact that the average hourly Wal-Mart employee earns only $14,000 every year, which is $1,000 below the poverty line ("Workers:..."). In the same way, Frank discusses Body Shop founder Anita Roddick, who claims that "she flies first class only so she can strike her blows for the People more effectively upon arrival" (215). It is obvious that Roddick could "strike her blows" just as effectively if she flew coach, but she makes such a statement to trick people into thinking she is leading a democratic business. Second, Wal-Mart asserts that many of its managers started as hourly employees, claiming that all hourly employees have a chance to become managers and that the managers can relate to the lower employees. However, thousands of people have worked at Wal-Mart and the number of hourly associates who have been promoted to manager is a small fraction of the total employees. Simple actions such as flying managers in coach or promoting a few workers do not actually make a democratic environment on the whole but rather aim at making people believe that Wal-Mart has turned the American myth of

a perfect democracy into reality. True democratic actions would require Wal-Mart to actually increase the pay and benefits of its lowest workers or to have a management which really does value the opinions and ideas of the hourly employees.

Through an emotional appeal to hard work, a trusted friend image, and leading people to believe that it functions under a democratic structure, Wal-Mart markets itself as a corporation which turns the American dream into reality. No business, not even Wal-Mart, possesses the magic to make American myths into reality. Businesses can, however, be honest about their practices and can then actually help their consumers and employees. Wal-Mart must be honest in their advertising and admit that they do not have proof that they really save any families from poverty, but that they instead push their employees' families into poverty with their so-called democratic structure. Only when Wal-Mart acknowledges that it is falsely advertising itself can it begin to correct some of its problems and perhaps truly help the American population. Until somebody speaks up about Wal-Mart's false marketing, Wal-Mart will continue to claim that whether it is a struggling family looking to spend as little money as possible or an employee looking for a decent job, both will survive in America because it is a land that rewards hard-working people, a land of opportunity, a land of democracy, and a land of Wal-Marts.

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Author's biography

MARJORIE ROSMONOWSKI

Marjorie Rosmonowski is from Winfield, IL, a suburb of Chicago, and currently lives in Cavanaugh Hall. She is majoring in Finance with a supplementary major in Spanish, and she hopes to have a successful business career and possibly teach at the college level someday. She works for <u>The Observer</u> and is also involved with Notre Dame Campus Ministry.

Through her essay, Marjie demonstrates that violence cannot be corrected with violence. History shows that Americans consistently resort to violence to solve problems. The constant flow of violent images in today's media encourages unnecessary fear in many Americans. Action must be taken to escape this vicious cycle.

The Vicious Cycle
OF VIOLENCE

Marjorie Rosmonowski

Framed Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Margaret Uttke

In Michael Moore's film <u>Bowling for Columbine</u>, members of the Michigan militia state their belief that it is their responsibility to possess firearms in order to protect their families, for they fear becoming victims of violence. Since the media is constantly feeding us violent images and unnecessarily increasing our fears, these men and women are convinced that they are in danger and need weapons for protection. As a nation, we have entered a vicious cycle of using violence as "protection" from violence. Violent behavior has been a part of our history since our nation was formed, and the media continues to reinforce this idea that violence is the best means of protection. What we do not realize is that by doing this we are causing more violence rather than putting an end to the cycle.

One of the chief reasons that many individuals see violence as protection from our fears is that history tells us that problems can be solved through violent acts. We are constantly exposed to violent behavior through "cultural reinforcement," which Robert Scholes defines as "the process through which video texts confirm viewers in their ideological positions and reassure them as to their membership in a collective cultural body" (56). In the film <u>Bowling for Columbine</u>, Moore shows a cartoon presenting the history of the United States and points out a pattern that most have not noticed. As the cartoon shows, when the first Pilgrims came to America, they were frightened by the Native Americans, so they killed them. When the colonists feared being forever controlled by Britain, they fought the American Revolution. "If the United States can use violence to overcome their fears, why can't I?" many individuals might ask. The history of the United States, taught to young Americans through history books, oral stories, and cartoons such as this one, constantly says that violence is an acceptable means of problem solving. History is an important part of our culture, as we often learn important lessons from our ancestors and follow in their footsteps. Moore's cartoon emphasizes the violence in our past and reinforces the idea that it is the best way to solve problems. As Scholes and Moore show, violence is reinforced through numerous aspects of our lives, including literature, history, art, and especially the media. Although

not all people would go to the extremes of actually behaving violently, violent history sends the message that violence is a proper solution to our fears.

Since the media "culturally reinforces" the belief that violence is the only way to solve problems, Americans tend to resort to violence for protection much more often than individuals in other countries. In his essay "Striptease Culture: The Sexualization of the Public Sphere," Brian McNair describes America as "a gun-worshipping society where individuals tend to shoot first and ask questions later" (370). The statistics shown in <u>Bowling for Columbine</u> provide overwhelming support for McNair's belief. The film informs viewers that there are over 11,000 deaths by shooting in the United States each year, while most other major world powers have less than 300, and Canada has less

"…there are over eleven thousand deaths by shooting in the United States each year, while most other major world powers have less that three hundred, and Canada has less that seventy. As shown through these statistics, Americans resort to violence much more often than individuals in other countries…"

than seventy. As shown through these statistics, Americans resort to violence much more often than individuals in other countries who tend to find other ways to overcome their fears. Americans turn to violence in this manner because the media tells them that this is the only way to solve their problems. Likewise, Gabriel Tarde argues that crime is largely due to imitation. Tarde says, "All the important acts of social life are carried out under the domination of example…One kills or does not kill, because of imitation" (qtd. in Murdock 79). Tarde's imitation theory coincides with the idea of "cultural reinforcement," as we imitate the actions that we see reinforced in the culture around us. After seeing violence in the media, individuals believe that they have only two options: either act violently or become a victim of violence. The media does not allow people to see that there are other choices, and as a society, we often give in to the fears that we face. We enter into the vicious cycle of violence because that is what the media tells us everyone else is doing.

Furthermore, the media increases our fear by telling us that we are in danger and in need of protection. Even in the early 1900s, crime was exaggerated to make people feel as if they were in danger of being attacked. Newspapers at this time featured articles about "hooligans," youths who were constantly misbehaving and causing trouble, so frequently that all teenage males were seen as a threat. As Chapman demonstrates, the idea of the hooligan was embellished to the point that "it was quite dangerous…for a group of youths to walk together down a street. They were sure to be charged with insulting behavior" (qtd. in Murdock 74). Similarly, in his article discussing common myths the media presents to society today, J. Francis Davis's #1 myth states, "The world is a dangerous place and we need guns, police and military to protect us." At that time in our history, newspapers and other forms of media convinced society that all young men were dangerous "hooligans." Just as the newspapers used to focus on "hooligans," modern nightly news constantly focuses on the bad in society. After the Columbine incident, news reports flooded the country with stories of the tragic events that had taken place because, as Davis points out,

violent, shocking stories are more entertaining and raise the company's ratings. While violence in movies and fictional television programs may be brushed off as fake, violent news stories increase our fears because we know that there is truth behind the story. However, even though these negative stories are given a great amount of attention, they are only a small part of the events of that day. News programs focus on the misfortunes in society and encourage our fears when it is not necessary to do so.

While Davis and Chapman would agree that media is affecting violence in today's society, Graham Murdock would be likely to disagree that the media images have any effect on people's behavior. Murdock does not believe that violence in media images causes violence in real life. With regard to a group's response to a violent image or article, Murdock argues, "Some readers may be attracted to the aggressor but many more are likely to identify with the victim" (74). While this may be true, this violence will still affect those who identify with the victim by leading them to live in fear. Murdock is correct in stating that media images are not the only cause of violence, but he is naïve in believing that the media has no impact. Television has a significant influence on youth, as today's youth spend a great deal of time watching television each day. While children still need to be taught right from wrong by parents and role models, the constant flow of violent images in the media is contributing to the unnecessary cycle of violence.

Fear of attack reinforced by the media's constant flow of violent images has led many to buy into the vicious cycle of violence and purchase firearms to keep in their homes. In his film, Moore interviewed Charlton Heston, a prominent member of the National Rifle Association who led conventions both in Denver after the Columbine tragedy and in Michigan after the shooting of a six-year-old girl by her male classmate. Along with many other NRA members, Heston believes that it is his constitutional right to keep a loaded firearm in his home. He argues that the weapon is necessary for protection, but he also states that he knows he will never be attacked. He admits to having no need for protection, yet he still keeps a loaded gun in his home. Jackson Katz might presume that Heston owns firearms as a symbol of his violent masculinity. According to the FBI, roughly 90% of violent crimes are committed by males (Katz 458). Katz argues that the media associates masculinity with violence, and many men "latch onto big, muscular, violent men as cinematic heroes" (460). Heston, an actor well-known for his roles in violent, action-adventure movies such as <u>Planet of the Apes</u>, was a cinematic hero himself, and his connection to media violence makes him a prime spokesperson for the NRA. He has convinced himself and others that we need weapons for protection, and as the media frequently exposes society to violent images, fear of attack will be unlikely to diminish. Heston admits that he knows he will not be attacked, but yet he clings to his firearm as unnecessary protection from an imaginary danger. He realizes that there is no basis for his fear, but he holds onto it anyway, telling those who look up to him as a cinematic hero and NRA leader to do the same.

Unfortunately, America has recently experienced violent tragedies such as the events of Columbine and September 11th, but as a nation we need to view these misfor-

tunes as lessons that violence cannot be corrected with violence. In both of these tragedies, violence made the problems worse instead of fixing them. Rather than trying to "protect" ourselves by purchasing firearms, we need to remove these weapons from society in order to prevent future crimes. If we start focusing on the good in the world around us rather than the bad, we may be able to overcome our fears and end the vicious cycle of violence. As the media continues to "culturally reinforce" our fears by bombarding us with images of violence, we must remember that these are not representative of society as a whole. The effects of the media can be counteracted by avoiding violence in our personal lives and ending the cycle. By changing our own views on violence, we can change the impact that "cultural reinforcement" from the media has on society and our own lives.

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Author's biography

MEGAN RYBARCZYK

Megan Rybarczyk is a native of Muncie, Indiana and a graduate of Delta High School. Now a resident of Lyons Hall, Megan is currently pursuing a major in biology and a minor in anthropology. She plans to attend medical school and possibly to work as a missionary in the future.

Megan is passionate about the ideas behind this essay. The account of the smoking ban meeting came from her attendance in support of the ordinance, and she participated in discussions about friendship and rhetoric in her First-Year Composition class and in the community while helping to make a documentary. She was influenced greatly by the writings of Ellison and Plato that she read in this class and firmly believes in the need for openness, respect, and equality in communication in order to create true friendship.

Knights and Gladiators:
INSTRUMENTS OF DIVISIVENESS OR DEFENDERS OF CIVIC FRIENDSHIP?

Megan Rybarczyk

Framed Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor James Shortall

Imagine a large arena with townspeople and commoners from all over the area scattered in haphazard rows in the back or standing along the sides. Two strong-willed individuals are battling at the center, while prominent leaders look on from a raised platform at the front. What might sound like a medieval jousting tournament or a scene from the Coliseum of ancient Rome is actually a scene from the public hearing on the smoking issue in South Bend, Indiana. Public hearings are opportunities for ordinary citizens, business leaders, and other members of a community to come together to debate an issue and attempt to influence the vote of the council on an ordinance or other type of legislation. Those involved in these events are usually personal friends or civic friends (citizens who share a common concern for each other and for the community). During this particular hearing, however, one might question whether friendship of any kind was important or not. In this case, it appeared as if this hearing only polarized the community on the basis of being for or against the smoking ban, but there was also a hint of animosity present amid these "friendships" in the rhetoric of the evening. Many issues potentially produced this animosity, among them rhetorical or societal differences among social classes. It seemed as if no matter what issue citizens brought to the forefront, though, each side thought of the other as an enemy, not a friend. Unfortunately, the unwritten rule was that this process of taking a side and making an enemy was the only way to achieve the esteem of a "victory." This begs the question: Is it even possible to debate effectively with someone and still remain his or her friend, or must each person assume a combative position with no chance for redemption of friendship? Are the "knights" and "gladiators" in this case only promoting divisiveness, or do they have the potential and the ability as warriors, collectively, to defend civic friendship? The only way to answer that question is to examine the rhetoric of this hearing on the St. Joseph County Smoking Ordinance.

The Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) of St. Joseph County began the "St. Joseph County Tobacco Quit Project," or S.T.Q.P., in 2002 as a result of funding from the Indiana Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Agency. Its purpose is to "create a culture

within the community where the use of tobacco is no longer socially acceptable behavior" ("S.T.Q.P."). The St. Joseph County Smoking Ordinance is at the heart of this project. The ordinance was designed to ban smoking in all public places in St. Joseph County. This caused a huge division in the community, however, and the document was subsequently revised by the group. The latest copy brought before the county council listed many places exempt from the ban and reduced the number of changes that would have to take place as a result, such as appropriate signage for smoking and non-smoking facilities. Members of the community discussed this ban before the council at the meeting on Tuesday, September 6, 2005.

> *"Unfortunately, this community does not realize all the ways through which everyone is connected to everyone else, and it does not realize that if everyone would take the perspective of the 'little man at Chehaw Station,' then each and every person would be on the same level in thought and action. Some may be "lower class" slaves in the arena and others "upper class" knights, but all are warriors, not in a combative battle against each other, but in a struggle together to develop unity and civic friendship against the divisiveness of society."*

The council meeting itself was conducted in the style of an open debate. Each speaker was allowed three minutes, and members of opposing sides had to alternate. Anyone feeling so moved could approach the podium to address the council and those present. Those persons from the community who chose to speak presented their arguments using a diverse range of rhetorical tactics. Unfortunately, this variability obscured the issue, and it was difficult to discern the truth. These tactics were extremely confusing and distracting, but also, ironically, interesting and informative, if examined for their rhetorical style and not their content.

A speaker who uses obscure and variable rhetorical tactics is either uniformed or intentionally trying to mislead others. Socrates, in Plato's <u>Phaedrus</u>, presented a contrasting view of rhetoric in reference to a speaker who is both informed and who is seeking to inform clearly. In this work, Socrates said:

> First, you must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking or writing about; you must learn how to define each thing in itself and, having defined it, you must know how to divide it into kinds until you reach something indivisible. Second, you must understand the nature of the soul, prepare and arrange your speech accordingly...Then, and only then will you be able to use speech artfully... either in order to teach or in order to persuade... (Plato 83)

In other words, Socrates was saying that in order to use rhetoric effectively, one must know the truth of the subject, one's self, and one's audience. This applies to any time any person uses words. Every time a person speaks, an idea of authenticity must be conveyed from the speaker to the audience. This can only be achieved when the speaker truly knows himself or herself. Socrates then stated that one must dissect every aspect of the subject and examine all sides, until one discovers the heart of it — the truth. This produces a feeling of authenticity about the speaker. After an idea of authenticity, or honesty, has been achieved, the truth may be found,

and a level of trust will have been established between the speaker and his or her audience. The only way a speaker can achieve this trust is to respect each person and treat each one as a potential friend, instead of a combative enemy. Only then can one's words effectively persuade or teach.

Many at the hearing would have done well to read this statement by Socrates. Much of the language at the hearing consisted of sensationalist words from a hate-filled and inflamed crowd. Those opposed to the ban used statements, such as "This is Nazism," questions, such as "Why don't they just go to Russia if they want to oppress people like this?" and other sentiments similar to these (Malone). If these speakers had followed Socrates' first point, they would have examined their statements fully and would have seen that the past governments of Russia and of Nazi Germany are hardly comparable to each other, let alone to this democratic debate in South Bend, Indiana. Using this type of language only creates tension and arouses emotion. It does not convey a sense of friendship.

Inflammatory and sensationalist language like this tends to strain and to be divisive, not persuasive. Using this kind of language only pushes the other side further away instead of moving them to the "right" side. For example, if someone in today's society mentions the word "abortion," everyone usually takes one side or the other. It would be a beautiful thing to be able to say one word and have someone think before taking one of society's preset sides. Society itself, however, has taught people that when individuals use words such as "the right to smoke," "Nazi," "Russian," and "abortion," then people automatically pick sides. These words traditionally and historically have strong connotations connected to them, but it is mostly a shallow, predetermined reaction they evince. It is even accepted and comfortable to act that way too, because it gives people a false sense of connection to a group, a connection they believe to be genuine. Only by breaking down these shallow barriers can individuals really connect in true friendship and dissolve the rigid and predetermined sides of combat. In a time of marked division and a growing threat of physical combat, the poet Walt Whitman offered the alternative of civic friendship to this divisiveness in "Song of Myself" from Leaves of Grass: "I celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (Whitman 23). Whitman acknowledged this inner connection and friendship that all people should have despite the shallow barriers.

On the other hand, saying things in many words tends to be just as mundane and tends to foster a lack of thinking as well. Many of those in favor of the ordinance were "academic types" that came with presentations and multitudes of facts. Spouting off facts, though, can be impersonal, and the fact that cold, unfeeling data were coupled with emotional "sob stories" seemed incongruous. Many speakers used these stories to meet each person in the audience at a deep, personal level, but it was all lost when they jumped right into, "But more importantly, these numbers..." These facts were merely regurgitated, with little thought, little discernment needed. Socrates related to this in Phaedrus: "...[writing] will introduce a forgetfulness into the soul of those who

learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own...." (Plato 79).

Written speeches and facts do not truly persuade unless they are molded within and are truly examined by their speaker, and unless they cause the listener to investigate the issue for himself or herself and to begin to formulate his or her own opinion. Only one or two speakers in favor of the ordinance displayed this. Observers in the crowd could physically see the bored and tired looks fade away and curiosity spread on to the faces of the council members. These speakers appeared to pull convictions from within, from what they actually knew and had examined. Then, they carefully and thoughtfully placed a few concrete facts in their speech to appeal to the academic side of the audience. They also spoke with no prepared or written notes in order to attempt to appeal to those opposed who came with neither speeches nor prepared presentations. They seemed to offer just a little for every person there. Or did they?

"By putting aside shallow stereotypes, sensationalist connotations, and other divisive forms of behavior, one can learn to meet each and every person in civic friendship..."

Without really speaking to them and meeting them on their level, that is hard to determine, but examining their tactics further seems to reveal a possible appeal to the sometimes cold and impersonal reason rather than a persuasive appeal to the inner self. It was difficult to discern, though, whether they were using true rhetoric, but when the issue is decided upon by the council, one will know if their efforts were "rhetorical successes" or not.

The mannerisms of the opposing sides were incredibly interesting as well, for body language and appearance often make their own rhetoric. For example, in Phaedrus, Socrates covered his face in an effort to hide his facial expressions, for he knew they would convey the fact that his true feelings on the subject matter being discussed were opposite to what he was about to express though vocal rhetoric (Plato 16). Those opposed to the ordinance were unorganized and came just as they were — in "street" clothes. It gave a sort of sense of genuineness, but it also conveyed a sense of a lack of respect. Both attitudes concerning attire are valid, so they needed to have considered both in regard to their audience before attending. What decides or determines the proper attire though? What outlines the "right" behavior for a particular event with certain people? Is it worthwhile to discuss physical rhetoric together with vocal rhetoric?

It is important to mention physical rhetoric, however, because it does relate to this discussion of vocal rhetoric. Those in favor of the ordinance came to the hearing well dressed and with protest buttons. There was a sharp contrast between what could be called the "upper class intellectuals" and the "lower or middle class working folks." One could easily see the hostility between these two classes. It was almost as if it was more of a struggle of social status, or of the "rich" trampling the rights of the "poor," than about smoking. Over and over again, those opposed brought up the fact they had

no fancy buttons, no prepared speeches, just feelings from the heart. The only problem was that it didn't seem like it was all from the heart. As stated before, it was hard to discern exactly what the issue was at the hearing. The rhetoric seemed to convey confusion between two subjects — class struggle and the right to smoke/breathe clean air. The inner confusion, frustration, and the resulting hostility of the people were hard to hide, and as a result, these emotions were displayed in the rhetoric of the evening.

Overall, the rhetoric that Plato had described was mostly absent from the hearing, as it often is in many other discussions of this type going on throughout this nation. As a result of stereotypical responses and a lack of thought toward this issue, this community still remains divided. There seems to be no friendship in discussion and debate — an individual is either connected superficially to others who share their view, or is the enemy of the people who represent the other side. For the most part, neither side of a "hot" issue such as this respects or honors the rights of the opposing side. As a result, each side only speaks on a superficial level to those shallowly connected to them in purpose, and each does not attempt to sway his or her enemy. Ralph Ellison's essay, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," displayed the problem: people lack all-encompassing foresight. In this essay, Ellison presented the idea of a "little man" that is present everywhere, who has infinite knowledge of "music" and who causes the "musician" to play his best at all times. The "musician" must do this in order to accommodate the "little man's" own knowledge, in order to develop a connection, or civic friendship, with the "little man" in the audience. By putting aside shallow stereotypes, sensationalist connotations, and other divisive forms of behavior, one can learn to meet each and every person at his or her level in civic friendship, a perspective which is perfectly represented by the "little man at Chehaw Station" (Ellison 490–495). What is amazing is finding that these individual levels are not all that different from each other. That is hard to see and even harder to accept, so those skilled in rhetoric have to take large steps, willfully become the "lepers of society," and refuse to be identified with a side, such as for or against the smoking ban. But is that possible? Is it possible to refrain from choosing a side in an attempt to help others see the unity? Is it even possible to create any type of unity when there is such a variety of ways to examine an issue? If all achieved the perspective of the "little man at Chehaw Station," would all be united?

The fact of the matter is this: the civic friendship inspired by the "little man at Chehaw Station," is a manner of thinking about others that has the potential to unite individuals of all different backgrounds and to reduce combative divisiveness. If one looks deeper, he or she will find that there is the potential for civic friendship amidst divisiveness. Unfortunately, this community does not realize all the ways through which everyone is connected to everyone else, and it does not realize that if everyone would take the perspective of the "little man at Chehaw Station," then each and every person would be on the same level in thought and action. Some may be "lower class" slaves in the arena and others "upper class" knights, but all are warriors, not in a combative battle against each other, but in the same struggle together to develop unity and civic friendship against the divisiveness of society. Once that level of equality and unity is realized, everyone will be able to talk to and relate to each other through true rhetoric, every-

one will truly care about and respect each other and the uniqueness of ideas, and this community will be able to come to a decision about the St. Joseph County Smoking Ordinance. Then this community will be able to bring about justice and peace in this issue because this community will have learned true friendship and real rhetoric.

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Researched
ARGUMENTS

ANDREW BALSLEY

A native of Roscoe, Illinois, Andrew Balsley now lives in the formidable walls of Keenan Hall. Aside from watching his favorite J.J. Abrams television shows, he also enjoys late night smoothies at Reckers and working at his hometown apple orchard. Now beginning his life as an accounting major, he hopes to work in the Chicago area later in life.

When first beginning at Our Lady's University, Andrew was the most concerned with his writing skills, but by the end of his FYC course, with constant help from his instructor, he was much more confident in his abilities. His Unit 1 essay focused on how the media implants a tangible "edginess" in the public through its flood of violent images. For his Unit 2 paper he then decided to focus on how as a result of the "War in Iraq" Muslims have often become the centerpieces of these violent images. Finally for his Unit 3 paper, Andrew decided to examine how some of his favorite television programs are even guilty of promoting the violent Muslim image.

Muslims
IN SUBURBIA?

Andrew Balsley

Researched Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Margaret Uttke

The scene begins with a white minivan pulling up the driveway of a blue two-story house, typical of any American suburb. The side doors slide open and two children in matching soccer uniforms scurry out excitedly after just winning their first game. The mother and father follow with pride on their faces and greet the next-door neighbors across the white picket fence before entering the house. The family then gathers around the table for a quiet roast chicken dinner the mother just took out of the oven. It is the epitome of a stereotypical ending to a normal day in the suburbs. After hearing this story, what picture comes to mind of these people? Is it your typical middle-class, white American family? How would you react if I instead told you the family was actually Muslim?

This concept of "Muslims in suburbia" may be difficult to grasp because television has rarely portrayed them in such a peaceful setting. Ever since the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, television has generally portrayed Muslims as violent extremists who hate America. After examining shows such as <u>Alias</u>, <u>NCIS</u>, <u>The West Wing</u>, and <u>24</u>, this stereotyping of Muslims becomes surprisingly apparent, and the one-sided portrayals they include have in turn caused us to unjustly believe that all Muslims are evil. While some critics believe these stereotypes can actually be beneficial to society, I argue that they are damaging to the lives of all Muslims. Damon Lindelof, executive producer of ABC's hit series <u>Lost</u> would argue, however, that efforts are in fact being made to reverse this harmful stereotype. In his show, he portrays a Muslim not as a terrorist, but as a hero; nonetheless, this is only a slight improvement on the violent Muslim stereotype that is prevalent across television. If these one-sided portrayals of Muslims as violent extremists are left unchecked, Muslims, and others resembling them in physical appearance, will be denied true freedom while continuing to be victimized by American society through racial profiling and vicious hate crimes.

Recent events, such as the 9/11 attacks, have brought this violent portrayal of Muslims to the forefront of television, and Muslims are being associated with terrorism and other forms of violence now more than ever. Our news reports consist of very one-di-

mensional portrayals of Muslims as violent fanatics, and usually when we see a report on them, it is because there was another suicide bombing in Iraq or another attack on American soldiers. Rarely do we see the news depicting them as star athletes or role models. These portrayals are so negative that the word "terrorism" has actually become synonymous with the Middle East, a predominantly Islamic area, and, as a result, Muslims are often equated with violence. American University Professor Akbar Ahmed declares that the media's portrayals of Muslims promote an "Islam equals terrorism" image. He claims that this image is so powerful that "popular culture makes the equation without thinking about it" (73). Brown University professor Robert Scholes explains how powerful video images are in his essay "On Reading a Video Text," arguing that the audience of a video text "feels a sense of pleasure for merely understanding this image and thereby demonstrating its membership in a cultural community" (464). By connecting these two thoughts, we see that the audience effortlessly makes the connection between Muslims and violence because by understanding the "Islam equals terrorism" image, people feel more welcomed into society. Author R.M. expands this

> *"Ever since the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, television has portrayed Muslims as violent extremists who hate America."*

argument, claiming that this image is effective because of fear: "Muslims have been reduced to film clips of fist-shaking extremists....Mug shots of bearded men staring flatly off Page 1 after the [1993] World Trade Center bombing leave a greater impression, say, than the Indian civil engineer who lives down the street" (12). The image of the suicide bombers is more ingrained in our minds because it poses more of a threat to us than the civil engineer. Although R.M. was referring to the bombing twelve years ago, his ideas are still applicable to the 9/11 attacks today.

Before the smoke had even cleared from the wreckage, the news was already flooding us with images of the Islamic extremist Osama Bin Laden to the point where the whole nation knew who he was by the end of the week. Author Deni Elliot describes the resurgence of the "Islam equals terrorism" images after the 9/11 attacks, stating, "Published images of the suicide bombers who carried out the attacks blur into a generic mug shot of a man of Middle Eastern ancestry" (52). These film clips continue to portray Muslims as "fist-shaking extremists," but now the images of Muslims and terrorists are being blended together, with terrorists easily distinguishable by their Muslim garbs. Elliot continues, "Osama bin Laden is portrayed as the face of evil on 'Wanted, Dead, or Alive' posters, but his turban and other-than-Anglo features identify him most easily" (52). Though the news was focusing its reports on bin Laden, it in turn created the "Islam equals terrorism" image by blurring the image of the terrorists into a generic profile of Muslim men.

These images of Muslims have poisoned the rest of television, and multiple shows merely play off the perceptions of Muslims that the news has already instilled in us. Scholes refers to this as "cultural reinforcement," which he describes as "the process through which video texts confirm viewers in their ideological positions and reassure them as to their membership in a collective cultural body" (464). In other words, after

the nightly news creates the initial "Islam equals terrorism" image, the repetition of this image throughout the rest of television serves to confirm the audience's original belief that Muslims are in fact violent. These images are so prevalent on television that Ahmed claims Hollywood is actually at *war* with Islam (73). After the broadcasting of numerous shows depicting Muslims as violent individuals acting "in the name of Allah," Arab-American film critic Jack Shaheen investigated this issue in more detail and found that the shows The West Wing and JAG are some of the biggest culprits of portraying Muslims unjustly. He describes the pilot of The West Wing in which Syrians are depicted as terrorists even though they have never been involved in any such actions. Then he examines an episode of JAG where "the marines cheer after they defeat the Arab terrorists" (Shaheen 28). Through these images, television confirms the news' stereotype and reinforces the "Islam equals terrorism" image.

After reading Shaheen's work, I wanted to examine in detail how television actually portrays Muslims and whether or not television truly promotes Ahmed's "Islam equals terrorism." I decided to do a content analysis and study one show from each of the major television networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC) to determine how Muslims have been portrayed specifically since the 9/11 attacks. My research consisted of reading the online episode summaries for each of the shows and noting how Muslims were used in each one. I specifically examined the shows Alias (ABC), NCIS (CBS), The West Wing (NBC), and 24 (FOX) and found all four guilty of reinforcing the "Islam equals terrorism" image. The first show I will discuss is ABC's Alias, which revolves around the life of Sydney Bristow, an undercover CIA agent who must travel the globe fighting criminal organizations, while still maintaining her own personal life. In little over three seasons, this show has utilized three distinct methods to reinforce the "Islam equals terrorism" image at least six different times. The first method is using villains with names stereotypically associated with Islam. For example, in the 2002 episode "Trust Me," a man named "Mohammed" (the principal prophet of Islam) is one of the primary criminals (2:2).[1] Next, Alias uses terrorists defined under Islamic culture groups, as in the 2003 episode "Firebomb" when a Pashtun (Islamic group in Afghanistan and Pakistan) warlord is depicted incinerating the people inside a church so he can kill his wife (2:16).

In the last two years, the show has also used a less obvious means of conveying the "Islam equals terrorism" image. Instead of specifically using Muslim villains, this last method instead places terrorists in cities commonly associated with Islam, thereby associating their terrorist activity and violence with the Muslim people in the city. For example, in the 2005 episode "Ice," terrorists are seen selling biological weapons to Damascus (4:4), and in "The Shed" we see scientists working on other biological weapons in Istanbul (5:3), both of which are primarily Islamic cities. Even though Muslims are not directly involved in these examples, they convey to the audience that Muslims are harboring terrorists and promoting their actions. Whether it is by equat-

[1] *I will be using the following citation system for Alias, NCIS, The West Wing, and Lost: (Season #:Episode #). The numbering system can be used to locate the episode descriptions on their respectable websites, or in the case of Lost, on the DVD set.*

ing Muslim names, Muslim groups, or even Muslim cities with violence, <u>Alias</u> is guilty of reinforcing our culture's stereotype that Muslims are violent extremists through these three different tactics.

These portrayals of the "Islam equals terrorism" image continue across television as we examine CBS's <u>NCIS</u>. This show focuses on the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (<u>NCIS</u>), the government agency that investigates all crimes involving Navy and Marine Corps personnel. Like <u>Alias</u>, it also portrays the violent Islamic stereotype, but only through one method. In the short time of the show's existence, <u>NCIS</u> has used an Arab terrorist named Ari Haswari as a recurring character who constantly attacks the NCIS team. He appears twice in the first season (2003–2004), first in "Bête Noire," where he takes the NCIS team hostage (1:16), and then again in "Reveille," where he plans to attacks the President, while kidnapping another member of the NCIS team (1:23). Ari then returns at the end of the second season (2004–2005) in "Twilight" to capture the leader of the NCIS team, but instead he kills someone else (2:13). Because Ari is only one person, his character cannot possibly be thought to represent all Muslims; however, his multiple appearances on the show serve to firmly establish him as a terrorist to the audience. Since the audience identifies him with his Islamic background, he then becomes another one of Elliot's "blurred images" of a terrorist, while reinforcing the audience's belief that "Islam equals terrorism."

The next show I found guilty of promoting the "Islam equals terrorism" image is NBC's political drama <u>The West Wing</u>, which revolves around the inner-workings of the White House. In its last four seasons, <u>The West Wing</u> has used two primary methods to associate Islam with terrorist activities over fifteen times. The first method is associating terrorism with Islamic countries just as "Alias" did with Islamic cities. For example, in the 2002 episode "Enemies Foreign and Domestic" the predominantly Islamic country Iran is depicted constructing nuclear weapons; meanwhile, fanatic police force Saudi Arabian schoolgirls to be burned alive (62).[2] As the season progresses, "The West Wing" departs from this method and starts using Muslims as actual terrorists. In "Commencement" Islamic terrorists escape prison and kidnap the President's daughter (87). Then in the 2003 episode "7A WF 83429" the same terrorists bomb a theater in Turkey, killing 80 people (89). Later that season, in "Abu el Barat," a group of Muslims capture and jail Christian relief workers located in Sudan (97). There are at least ten other episodes that include other forms of Islamic fanaticism, but it is already obvious that this show's portrayals of Muslims confirm the "Islam equals terrorism" image. Out of the four shows examined, however, this was still the most difficult to examine, because its episode descriptions become surprisingly vague when they involve Muslims. The show plays off of the "Islam equals terrorism" image, while also trying to deny its existence. It appears that the writers recognize this stereotyping is unjust, but they still use this "cultural reinforcement" because they know it will be effective in grabbing its viewers' attention.

[2] For <u>The West Wing</u> I will use the following citation system: (Episode #). Again, this numbering scheme can be used to locate the episode descriptions on the online episode guide.

24, on the other hand, is more overt with its portrayal of the "Islam equals terrorism" image. The second season of the show (2002-2003) does not hide the fact that it revolves around a Middle Eastern terrorist group named "Second Wave" planning on exploding a nuclear bomb in Los Angeles, and during the season, Congress actually removes the President from office because he refuses to declare war on three Middle Eastern countries also suspected of being involved in the bombing. Congress's actions to punish three entire nations for the actions of a few terrorists echo the "Islam equals terrorism" image and today's idea that all Muslims should be punished for the acts of a few extremists. The fourth season (2005) is actually worse than season two in that it specifically uses a "Muslim" terrorist group as opposed to a "Middle Eastern" group. This time, the enemy is in fact a Muslim terrorist cell in the U.S. with plans of melting down nuclear power plants, assassinating the President by shooting down Air Force One, and stealing a nuclear weapon. Shaheen would find this to be the epitome of all the "stereotypes which unfairly show [Muslims] as a global menace, producers of biological weapons, [and] zealots who issue fatwas or burn Uncle Sam in effigy" (23). In fact, Shaheen could add Alias, NCIS, The West Wing, and 24 to his list of television shows guilty of portraying Muslims as violent extremists and reinforcing the "Islam equals terrorism" image.

If Shaheen were to review ABC's hit-drama Lost, however, he would probably see it as a huge improvement on the last four shows. The show is about forty-seven survivors of a plane crash on an unknown island in the Pacific and how they adapt while struggling to survive. British actor Naveen Andrews plays one of the principal characters named Sayid, but what sets him apart from the other survivors is that he is Muslim. Unlike most television dramas, he is not depicted as a violent radical, and it is even more shocking to discover that he is a *hero* on the show. Throughout the course of the drama, many characters rely on him for radio communications and leadership. In addition, we learn through flash backs that he has a romantic history (1:9), and on the island he falls in love with one of the other survivors, Shannon. When creating the show, Damon Lindelof, co-creator/executive producer of the show, said he wanted "American audiences to bond with an Arab character by virtue of not writing him as a [stereotypical] Arab [character] but as a human…making audiences potentially question their own ethnic/religious stereotypes" (qtd. in Twair 45). Unlike most producers, Lindelof actually made the effort to go outside the box and portray a Muslim as a normal human being who struggles with emotions of love and hate instead of merely stereotyping him as the typical terrorist trying to destroy America.

At the same time, however, Lindelof was still not able to break all ties with the "Islam equals terrorism" image. The key detail I omitted about Sayid is that he was a member of the Iraqi Republican Guard previous to crashing on the island. The peaceful portrayal of Islam in Lost is shattered by this one little detail: Sayid, like most other Muslims on television, has a violent history. Through flashbacks of his character we learn that he was an interrogator for the Republican Guard and ruthlessly tortured people for information (1:9). In addition, while on the island he tortures Sawyer, the least trustworthy of the survivors, for information by shoving sharp bamboo rods up

his fingernails (1:8). Though before it seemed his character was a slight improvement to television, his violent back-story undermines his peaceful appearance and reveals his true identity as just another typical, violent Muslim on television. Shaheen would likely find this show guilty of the same crimes as the other four shows, just to a lesser degree. Even with his character Sayid, Lindelof was still not able to escape the "Islam equals terrorism" stereotype set in place by the rest of the television community.

Some critics argue that these stereotypes can actually be positive, and even beneficial, to society. The creation of one stereotype can often shift prejudices away from other victims of racial profiling. Loyola Law School Professor Robert Chang states, "Extreme exclusion directed against one outgroup sometimes creates opportunities for other outgroups to become incorporated as more fully American" (358). Chang illustrates this point, arguing that while the events of Pearl Harbor and World War II caused many Japanese citizens to be discriminated against in America, many Chinese people, who were previously victims of the same prejudices and hate crimes, were actually embraced into American society. This positive attitude even influenced Congress to pass a law permitting Chinese residents to become naturalized citizens (360). In the same fashion, Chang explains that this recent bombardment of the "Islam equals terrorism" image has shifted the attention away from African Americans and onto Muslims (361). Author James W. Brown agrees with Chang, claiming that "after 9/11, African Americans [can] take a little breather" (67). In this way, the "Islam equals terrorism" image has in turn benefited African Americans by decreasing their amount of racial profiling and shifting it to Muslims. While this does help African Americans, it is still debatable whether or not this is truly a positive result since Muslims are still subjected to prejudice.

> *"In addition to affecting Muslims, the problems set forth by these stereotypes also end up injuring all those who merely resemble Muslims, including those would do not even come from Islamic countries."*

When this attention is diverted away from African Americans, it is not just Muslims who are victimized. In addition to affecting Muslims, the problems set forth by these stereotypes also end up injuring all those who merely resemble Muslims, including those would do not even come from Islamic countries. These people are then subjected to new prejudices and hatred, whereas before they were embraced into American society. Therefore, even though the "Islam equals terrorism" image may shift the attention away from the outgroup of African Americans, it ends up excluding more outgroups than just Muslims on the grounds of physical appearance. According to Brown, this misguided perception has caused Sikhs, Indians, Greeks, and anyone else with a similar skin tone to be grouped under this image (67). This is apparent when we learn actor Naveen Andrews (Sayid) is actually of *Indian* descent, not Arab, but as Brown says, Andrews is casted as a Muslim based on his appearance. Paul Haggis reinforces this point in his 2004 film <u>Crash</u>, in which he portrays a Persian family being persecuted because everyone mistakenly perceives them to be Muslims. When the father tries to buy a gun to defend himself, the storeowner refuses him and tells him to "plan

the jihad on his own time." Later in the movie, the family's store is broken into, and the vandals write "no rag heads" after they destroy the whole store (Crash). The vandals do not want any people in town that they perceive to be Muslims, so they wreck the store in order to force them out. This family is punished out of the hatred caused by the stereotype we have for Muslims. As a result, the cultural identities of these people are ignored, and we are hindered from appreciating the backgrounds from which they came. Instead, television tricks us into labeling anyone resembling a Muslim as "the bad guy," creating an even larger outgroup to be excluded by the "Islam equals terrorism" image.

The backlash of this image hits Muslims the most drastically. It causes them to be overly conscious about their identities, and like those mistaken to be Muslims, it also prevents us from fully appreciating their culture. These images force them to always be on the defensive to persuade the rest of society that they are not the "Islamic ter-rorists" portrayed on television. Washington College professor Muqtedar Kahn furthers this claim, stating, "All their activities are motivated by [their cultural] identities and geared toward defending their faith from a perceived American assault. They rarely, if ever, get opportunities to live as American citizens endeavoring to maximize liberty, equality, and prosperity" (69). As Kahn explains, this "Islam equals terrorism" image denies American Muslims the freedoms that are owed to all of us: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. "America's prosperity and freedom attract them and, once they are here....its attitudes towards Muslims and Islam alienate them," Kahn states (69). Muslims immigrate to our country because it is the "land of opportunity," but instead they are welcomed with hostility. In the end, they are denied the "liberty and justice for all" because they are filled with fear of becoming the next victims of hate crimes and other prejudices. As television persists to blur the images of terrorists down to a generic profile of men of Middle Eastern ancestry, it continues to reinforce Ahmed's "Islam equals terrorism" image (Elliot 52).

This "blurred image" of terrorists also leads to the injustices of racial profiling. In the second episode of Lost one of the characters on the island calls Sayid the "terrorist" and accuses him of crashing the plane (1:2). Later in the season, we find out that Sayid was stopped at the airport before boarding the plane because he was suspected of suspicious activity. The authorities were quick to identify him as a terrorist because of his ethnicity. Elliot confirms this idea, saying, "When terrorists look different from the Anglo American dominant society, it is easy to label that look as evil" (52). In fact, a re-cent Gallup Poll shows that 53% of Americans believe all Arabs should have to under-go special, more intensive security checks before boarding planes in the U.S. (Gallup). Though the people interviewed may not feel so strongly as to say Arabs are actually "evil," they obviously have some fear of another 9/11 occurring if these people are not thoroughly checked at airports. Therefore, the audience is not at all surprised when Sayid is stopped because it is known that people of Arab descent are stopped at air-ports more frequently than others. The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee did a study and found that "70 cases involving more than 250 people in which per-sons perceived to Arabs have been expelled from aircraft after or during boarding on

the grounds that passengers or crew do not like the way they look" (Brown 68). As Scholes explains, this scene in Lost *confirms* our initial belief that Muslims are terrorists and *reinforces* the "Islam equals terrorism" image. Meanwhile, this is also a perfect example of an Arab being labeled as evil for not looking Anglo American, and the fact that the audience is not surprised strengthens Ahmed's original claim that we have been conditioned to make the connection between Muslims and terrorism without thinking.

It is essential, however, that we break this "conditioning." Scholes argues that we need to combat this "cultural reinforcement" because it does not accurately depict society (467), and there is no reason why all Muslims should be punished for the acts of a handful of extremists. There are two major steps to solving this problem. First, television needs to start using Muslims as heroes and protagonists in its stories and not just as villains. As Ahmed says in his essay, "there must be a conscious attempt to check the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists and psychopathic lunatics who want to blow up the Western world" (73). Rather, television needs to start utilizing Muslims as heroes in order to remove the "Islam equals terrorism" image and to help convince its audience that Muslims can be as heroic as anyone else. Sayid is a great example of Ahmed's demand being put into practice. Although he has a violent background, he is still a hero and worthy of being admired. Lost can therefore be used as a stepping-stone for how the rest of television needs to start portraying Muslims.

The second and most crucial step to fixing this stereotype is to invite Muslims into the suburbs of television. The key to fixing our "conditioning" that "Islam equals terrorism" is to completely normalize the portrayals of Muslims through a bombardment of images of Muslims in ordinary, everyday situations. There is no better way of doing this than to start showing Muslims in the suburbs, the epitome of the American middle-class society and normalcy. By removing the guns from their hands, Muslims can be portrayed as ordinary, peaceful people. No longer would they be outsiders fighting to destroy our country, but now they would be assimilated into the rest of American society, with nothing to distinguish them as anything other than average, peace-loving citizens.

At the same time it is essential that Muslims be portrayed in ways that help them maintain their true cultural identities. While they are being portrayed in the highly Americanized suburban setting, it is important that Muslims are still portrayed participating in their religious customs and other practices that make them unique so that we can truly appreciate their culture. Only then will we be able to use Scholes' concept of "cultural reinforcement" to destroy the "Islam equals terrorism" image and reinforce a new, healthier image of Muslims. If this stereotype is left unchecked, Muslims and numerous others will continue to suffer more social injustices. Only by flooding television with images of peaceful Muslims will we be able to *confirm* this new perception of Muslims: one of normalcy. By making this image commonplace across television we can *reinforce* a peaceful perception and transform Muslims into the "blurred image" of society as opposed to Elliot's "blurred image" of a terrorist.

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Author's biography

JOSEPH BASCONI

Joseph Basconi hails from Elizabethton, TN, a small town in the Southern Appalachians. While he misses bluegrass music and the mountains from time to time, he's found that St. Edward's Hall is also a pretty good place to live. Joseph enjoys running, playing basketball, and playing the fiddle and guitar. He is a sophomore studying chemical engineering.

For years, Joseph has tried to avoid Wal-Mart because of the noise, the crowds, and the company's questionable labor practices (not to mention he sometimes gets lost in Wal-Mart). Despite these reservations, he tried to approach the topic with an open mind. Joseph hopes that this research will make others aware that corporations are not always as good for us as they claim to be.

A Burden on Society:
THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAL-MART'S LOW WAGES AND BENEFITS

Joseph Basconi

Researched Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Nicole MacLaughlin

As the largest private employer in the United States, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. provides over one million Americans with a job, an income, and a place in the Wal-Mart community. Wal-Mart affects far more people than just its employees, however. Dubbed by author Nelson Lichtenstein as "the template for twenty-first century business," Wal-Mart influences the global market with its huge imports, low prices, and wages and benefits. For better or worse, the retail giant is setting trends that other businesses must follow in order to stay competitive. In recent years, Wal-Mart has drawn criticism for not paying its workers enough to be able to afford health insurance and for indirectly compressing worker compensation at its competitors. This trend is forcing underpaid workers to rely on public assistance programs, placing a strain on federal and state governments. Though Wal-Mart promotes itself as a fair and competitive employer, a closer look at the company's wages and benefits reveals they are failing both its employees and the American society that must rescue so many underpaid workers. Despite its business interests, Wal-Mart has the responsibility to improve its worker compensation so that workers can support themselves with adequate wages and benefits.

In just over fifty years, Wal-Mart has used its trademark "everyday low prices" to grow from a single store in Arkansas to the largest retail corporation in the world. However, the company compensates for these extraordinary low prices by paying its 1.3 million "associates" equally low wages and benefits. Many employees are finding it increasingly difficult to get by on their Wal-Mart incomes, leading more and more Americans to blame the retail giant for providing inadequate worker compensation. In 2004, U.S. Rep. George Miller of California and the Democratic staff of the Committee on Education and the Workforce compiled a report entitled <u>Everyday Low Wages: The Hidden Price We All Pay for Wal-Mart</u>. Miller found that in 2001, Wal-Mart associates earned an average $8.23 per hour, or $13,861 per year, while the federal poverty line was $14,630 for a family of three (4). In <u>The Betrayal of Work</u>, Beth Shulman cites an Economic Policy Institute study that found that in many parts of the country, the cost of paying for a family's basic needs was more than double the official poverty line

(27). Just surviving in today's society must be a challenge for many low-wage Wal-Mart employees in this situation. Shulman points out that low-wage workers face hardships in "some of the core areas of life" (29–44). These workers cannot afford to get sick because they do not have health insurance, and their families suffer when their incomes prevent them from making ends meet. They also lack stability and security in their lives because their jobs can be eliminated if the company fails to perform. Wal-Mart's inadequate wages make it difficult for employees to afford necessities, much less the rising costs of health insurance in today's economy.

Wal-Mart's poor benefit programs place an additional burden on its employees, a cost that U.S. companies once shouldered in order to attract and maintain a loyal and highly skilled workforce, according to a 2006 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). For families that must use much of their income to pay for everyday necessities, health insurance is a luxury that only employers can provide. Many Wal-Mart employees find it very difficult to qualify for the company-sponsored health coverage, however, and their wages are often too low to afford the program even if they are eligible. Miller reports that in 2002, the waiting time for program eligibility was six months for full time employees and two years for part-time employees, compared to an average of 1.3 months for employees of other large firms like Wal-Mart (7). Not until February 2006 did the company reduce the waiting time for part-time employees or qualify the children and spouses of part-time workers for coverage. Employees working up to 28 hours a week were considered part-time until 2002, when the company changed the criteria to up to 34 hours a week. Furthermore, Miller found that a Wal-Mart employee could pay as much as $6,400, or 45 percent of his or her annual salary, before receiving any benefits from the plan. Participants in the program bore a substantial portion of their health care costs, 42 percent for Wal-Mart workers compared to 16 percent at other large firms. As Miller describes, the company's health care program is either "unaffordable or unavailable" to many employees (7). As a result, only between 41 to 46 percent of Wal-Mart's employees participate in the program. The combination of Wal-Mart's low wages and inadequate benefits places a huge financial burden on employees and forces them to look elsewhere for help.

"Wal-Mart should stand apart from the competition not only in sales and earnings, but in its worker compensation as well."

Dr. Charles Craypo, an economics professor at the University of Notre Dame, believes that Wal-Mart's low worker compensation contributes to the "working poor" in America. For over ten years, Craypo has studied the company and its effect on society, including Wal-Mart's presence in Northern Indiana. In a personal interview, Craypo described two studies he conducted in 1989–1992 and 2001–2002, in which he looked at data provided by the local township welfare office on where welfare applicants in Northern Indiana worked and how much they were paid. Craypo found that Wal-Mart was disproportionably represented at the welfare office, as the percentage of welfare applicants from Wal-Mart was much higher than the percentage that Wal-Mart comprised of the local workforce. "I know for a fact that they contribute to the working

poor," says Craypo. "[Wal-Mart and other discount retailers] are all in that category, but Wal-Mart is probably the most offensive in that regard." More and more people are echoing the same concerns that Wal-Mart's low wages and benefits contribute to poverty in our country.

As Wal-Mart has received increased criticism over its inadequate health care policy, the company is slowly trying to win back the trust of the American public. What remains to be seen, however, is whether Wal-Mart actually plans to address the problem by improving its worker compensation, or instead just portray itself as a responsible employer without changing its policy. In response to critics, Wal-Mart often contends that its jobs are not necessarily meant to support families. In the health care section of the company-run website, walmartfacts.com, Wal-Mart asserts that many associates are students or seniors looking for retirement income or a secondary job, and that they often join Wal-Mart with existing health care benefits. Company spokeswoman Mona Williams put this more bluntly in an interview with PBS Newshour, according to wakeupwalmart.com, a website created by the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union to change the company: "More than two-thirds of our people…are not trying to support a family…that's who our jobs are designed for." Wal-Mart essentially claims that because many employees do not rely on company health insurance, it does not have to provide quality benefits for the others.

Wal-Mart may indeed employ people who are not supporting families or who have other means of health insurance, but many others do depend on the company to provide accessible and affordable benefits for them and their families. In The United States of Wal-Mart, John Dicker explains that in Georgia, nearly 10,000 children of Wal-Mart employees were enrolled in PeachCare, the state's public health insurance plan (83–89). This was more than ten times the number of any other company in the state. Clearly, a significant number of Wal-Mart workers are looking for more than just supplemental wages from their employer. Wal-Mart defends its inadequate heath care program on the basis that many employees do not need the benefits, yet according to Michael Barbaro of the New York Times, 25 percent of Wal-Mart's 1.3 million employees have no health care coverage. These approximately 325,000 people must rely on public assistance programs or go without insurance. Of the 75 percent that do have insurance, many are covered by a spouse's employer or a previous job rather than by Wal-Mart. While Wal-Mart claims that the majority of its employees do not need outstanding benefits, a considerable number — and certainly the one-third of employees with families that Mona Williams mentions — would benefit greatly if the company's health care was simply adequate.

Wal-Mart also responds to critics of its health care policy by claiming that its benefits are competitive within the retail industry, but the company only recently improved them so that they are on par with other companies. On walmartfacts.com, the company describes its health care policy, including steps taken in February 2006 to make its programs more accessible and affordable. The company significantly reduced the waiting time for part-time employees to become eligible, and it qualified spouses and

children of part-time employees for coverage. Wal-Mart says it offers insurance to all employees after a waiting period considered standard in its industry, and it promotes the attractive features and variety of its plans.

As the so-called business model of the twenty-first century, however, Wal-Mart should stand apart from the competition not only in sales and earnings, but in its worker compensation as well. Many employees do not have access to affordable health care because Wal-Mart's dedication to its workforce simply is not in line with its financial success. A 2003 <u>Wall Street Journal</u> article reported that Wal-Mart's spending on health benefits for each employee was far less than other companies (<u>wakeupwalmart.com</u>). In 2002, Wal-Mart spent an average $3,500 per employee, 27 percent less than the $4,500 spent by wholesale and retail companies, and 37 percent less than the national average of $5,600 per employee. Though Wal-Mart's rhetoric emphasizes that its people "make the difference," management seems unwilling to reward those responsible for the company's success with adequate wages and benefits (<u>walmartfacts.com</u>).

> *"Craypo describes [the communities and employees] as another type of shareholder, one that has a legitimate concern for the future of the company."*

Wal-Mart's low wages and benefits have a substantial influence not just on its own employees, but on workers at other companies and American taxpayers as well. Charles Craypo explains that large corporations like Wal-Mart are both beneficial and harmful to society. Corporations can offer consumers low prices because of their efficiency and competition with other companies. As Craypo describes, however, problems arise when this price competition is so aggressive that "[corporations] begin to compete on the basis of low labor standards…and in order to survive or profit, they look for all those vulnerable supply factors and they exploit them." As the premier "competitor" in the retail sector, Wal-Mart's worker compensation has a profound impact on the wages and benefits that other retailers provide.

By paying its workers so little, Wal-Mart gains a huge advantage over companies that offer higher wages and benefits, especially those that are unionized. John Dicker, author of <u>The United States of Wal-Mart</u>, reports that 59,000 unionized grocery store employees in California went on strike when their employers tried to increase their health care costs in 2004 (83–89). These companies were forced to charge more in order to keep up with Wal-Mart, which does not allow unions. Craypo explains, "even though Wal-Mart was very successful, it continued to drive down as much as it could, in order to really drive the stake through the heart of the major supermarket competitors." Wal-Mart's dominance in the retail sector pressures other companies to cut costs wherever they can in order to compete. Its insufficient worker compensation indirectly compresses wages and benefits at companies around the country, and sometimes endangers workers' jobs.

Wal-Mart affects society as a whole when so many of the company's employees and their families must enroll in public assistance programs, essentially at the cost of U.S. taxpayers. The inadequacy of Wal-Mart's compensation is especially evident in

Tennessee, where a quarter of the state's 37,000 Wal-Mart employees were enrolled in TennCare, a public health care program (Dicker 83–89). A Wal-Mart official claimed that the company health plan was not designed to rely on the state, "it's just the law of large numbers" (Dicker 85). Rep. Miller's committee found that on average, a single 200-employee Wal-Mart store costs taxpayers about half a million dollars a year, including costs for employees on free and reduced lunches, housing and low-income energy assistance, and tax credits and deductions. According to Miller, "Because Wal-Mart fails to pay sufficient wages, U.S. taxpayers are forced to pick up the tab. In this sense, Wal-Mart's profits are not made only on the backs of its employees — but on the [back] of every U.S. taxpayer" (9). Craypo echoes this concern, which is a theme of his research: "What Wal-Mart introduced to American retail is making others pay your operating costs…That's Sam Walton's contribution." The high cost of insuring underpaid Wal-Mart employees is draining state budgets, leading more people to question why the world's leading retailer is unable to support its workers.

On the website walmartfacts.com, the company explains that while it is working towards solutions, the exploding cost of health care in America is affecting its ability to provide coverage. Wal-Mart reports that its benefit spending has increased 15 percent per year over the past three years, while its health care spending has grown 19 percent per year in the same period. The company highlights these figures to defend its benefits programs, but nearly every American employer is dealing with the same high health care costs. The report by the Government Accountability Office finds that the cost of health insurance in the U.S. grew by 28% from 1991 to 2005, which is comparable to Wal-Mart's reported costs. Maintaining health care coverage and other benefits has become a priority among workers across the nation, and some are turning down wage increases so that they can keep their benefits. Wal-Mart has been affected considerably by this trend, but it is by no means the only company facing higher benefit costs. Furthermore, Wal-Mart reports on its company website that its net income for fiscal 2006 increased 9.4 percent to a record $11.2 billion, up from $10.3 billion in fiscal 2005 (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.). Wal-Mart may face significant health care costs, but its record earnings leave it little excuse for failing to provide adequate benefits.

On paper, it appears that Wal-Mart is quite capable of sacrificing some profits to improve the lives of its employees. While many insist that corporations like Wal-Mart are obligated to share their wealth with workers, corporate executives often listen to the concerns of their financial backers instead. There are no simple answers to the question that is at the center of debate over Wal-Mart's wages and benefits: To whom is the corporation ultimately responsible, the shareholders or the employees? Craypo explains that within American corporate capitalism, the corporation is legally and traditionally responsible to the shareholders. Decades ago, it was considered the employer's responsibility to provide reasonable wages, quality health care and retirement benefits, and a decent standard of living to its workers. Craypo finds that this concern for the worker is absent in today's economy, as many employers believe that "the job of the corporation is to produce things, and do it cheaply, and you shouldn't ask anything beyond that." Further, corporations often let the market determine the

benefits they pay employees, which drives benefits down when companies must cut costs to remain competitive in the market.

The modern corporation and the individual worker are working towards very different things; the corporation aspires for greater profits and market-share while many workers simply are trying to pay monthly bills on time. Craypo believes that Wal-Mart recognizes its duties to the shareholders rather than its duties to employees: "[CEO] Lee Scott says the exact same thing that Walton used to say, which is 'our job is to provide low prices. And make money and reinvest it, and build more stores. That's our job and we do that.'" Modern corporations are not in business for the worker's sake, but they should show more concern and responsibility to the people and communities who have stakes in them. Craypo describes these people as another type of shareholder, one that has a legitimate concern for the future of the company:

> Who has more stake in an automobile company around Detroit than somebody who lives in the community — Detroit, Flint, Dearborn — all their lives, and their parents and they have worked in an auto plant; who has more of a stake in whether that company stays there, that person in that community or somebody who bought a thousand shares a half hour ago? ...I'm certainly not ruling out the shareholders, but the justified role of the shareholders should be taken into account as opposed to others.

"Craypo takes this a step further, arguing that when the workforce, the foundation of our economy, suffers, so does the nation's productivity."

As corporations have grown increasingly powerful and wealthy, they have forgotten their responsibilities to the American people, the foundation of their success. Americans rely on corporations for jobs and economic growth, but these companies are equally dependant upon the individuals who produce and consume their goods and services. Unfortunately, there is no such equality in the distribution of corporations' profits. Even when companies report record earnings, workers see little improvement in their wages, because the competition for greater profits and market-share drives their employers to funnel the profits back into the business.

Depending upon one's role in the corporation or one's economic views, companies like Wal-Mart may or may not be obligated to pay quality wages and benefits. However, Wal-Mart does have the responsibility to be a beneficial and productive part of society by providing sufficient compensation to keep workers off of public assistance. A strong indicator of whether Wal-Mart is doing its job as a fair employer is the extent to which its employees are dependant upon these welfare programs. Today, the company costs U.S. taxpayers a huge amount in public assistance costs, not including the intangible costs to society that stem from poverty and wage compression. To ensure that Wal-Mart and other corporations are beneficial to society rather than burdensome, our country must create and enforce a standard for the minimal responsibilities that employers have to their workers.

If Wal-Mart's low wages and benefits indeed contribute to the working poor in America, the company is creating other problems that could gradually undermine the economy and hurt our society. Craypo believes that an underpaid and underprivileged working class is detrimental to our nation's productivity:

> To be productive, the working force, not just wage earners, they have to be healthy, they have to be educated, they have to have reasonably stable family lives, they have to have a fairly secure standard of living. As you keep driving those things down in the interest of low prices, you're undermining your productive system. So the low prices which are Wal-Mart's positive contribution would be fine if all we did is consume. But we also have to produce.

Beth Shulman argues in The Betrayal of Work that low-wage earners face hardships in some of the core areas of life: health, family, stability, security. Craypo takes this a step further, arguing that when the workforce, the foundation of our economy, suffers, so does the nation's productivity. While Wal-Mart's trademark "everyday low prices" help many American families financially, the social costs of Wal-Mart's insufficient worker compensation outweigh the benefits of its low prices. Wal-Mart cannot be a viable member of society if its profits come at the expense of over one million underpaid American workers, countless U.S. taxpayers who fund public assistance programs, and the health of our economy.

As Wal-Mart's burden on our society grows, a number of concerned Americans are insisting that the retailer take steps to improve its compensation. However, modern corporations are very adept at maintaining an image of responsibility while they cut costs at the expense of employees and society. Craypo mentions several ways companies can minimize labor costs and still protect their images. Because so few employers negotiate with unions in today's economy, corporations frequently are able to reduce benefits unilaterally, consulting no one. They tell the public that they are outstanding employers with quality benefits, even if this is far from the truth. Companies also try to convince workers that they have competitive pay and benefits, using "non-monetary feelings of 'I'm a member of the team, I'm part of a great company…'" to keep employees happy. Finally, they sometimes send these messages to the government to protect themselves from legal trouble.

Wal-Mart uses these strategies to promote itself as a competitive employer that is committed to improving its compensation, but some statements made by company executives and workers cast serious doubts on the sincerity of the company's claims. Wakeupwalmart.com quotes company CEO Lee Scott in a speech from April 5, 2005: "In some of our states, the public program may actually be a better value — with relatively high income limits to qualify, and low premiums." This stance is unacceptable for a company of Wal-Mart's stature, and many employees are growing increasingly dissatisfied with their pay and benefits. "Wal-Mart's using the system," an employee testifies in the anti-Wal-Mart film, Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price. "It's pretty bad when they're telling employees that programs such as healthy kids and food stamps and Section A housing are available, because we're not paying you enough money." A recent finding by the New York Times suggests Wal-Mart may value its profits over its

people. As reported in a February 2006 article, Scott is quite forward when asked by a manager on a private company website why "the largest company on the planet cannot offer some type of medical retirement benefits":

> Quite honestly, this environment isn't for everyone. There are some people who would say, 'I'm sorry, but you should take the risk and take billions of dollars out of earnings and put this in retiree health benefits and let's see what happens to the company.' If you feel this way, then you as a manger should look for a company where you can do those kinds of things.

As long as Wal-Mart continues to allow federal programs to support its underpaid workers and deems employee benefits too great a risk to profits, any "improvements" in its health care plans should be met with skepticism. Real changes will be evident when Wal-Mart employees do not have to depend on public assistance, but have access to affordable company benefits.

To address the burden that Wal-Mart employees are placing on public assistance programs, some states are trying to impose legislation that will force Wal-Mart to increase its wages and benefits. According to Dicker, in 2004 California lawmakers tried to create a ballot measure that would require businesses with more than 200 employees to pay 80 percent of workers' health care costs (83–87). Wal-Mart poured thousands of dollars into a campaign to oppose the measure, and it never passed. Maryland recently passed a law targeted at Wal-Mart that requires employers with 10,000 or more workers in the state to spend at least 8 percent of their payrolls on health insurance, or else pay the difference into a state Medicaid fund (walmartfacts.com).

"Craypo predicts that it also will take unrelenting public exposure for Wal-Mart to improve its worker compensation."

Both lawmakers and the American public must pressure Wal-Mart if the company is to improve its employment practices. Even then, change within a corporation of Wal-Mart's stature does not come easily, and experts disagree on the extent to which government should help employers with the rising costs of benefits. According to one panelist on the GAO report who favors government intervention, "such benefits amount to a social good, something that supports the well-being and overall productivity of society." Yet others are confident that market competition will force out those businesses that cannot attract the workers that will benefit from their compensation plans. Craypo, for one, believes it is appropriate for lawmakers to make Wal-Mart improve, "because the market isn't going to make employers do it. The market right now deprives individual workers of bargaining power." More often than not, workers suffer when the market determines their fates and companies are free to cut wages and benefits to gain a competitive advantage. Craypo predicts that it also will take unrelenting public exposure for Wal-Mart to improve its worker compensation. He adds that Wal-Mart should not be singled out by legislation or the public's criticism, though the company "has become the poster-boy for bad behavior, and you can't say it isn't deserved." Despite these factors, Craypo emphasizes that changing a corporation like Wal-Mart is difficult because "you'd be

asking Wal-Mart to be something it isn't." Still, recent legislation shows there is hope for changing the modern corporation, even a company as powerful as Wal-Mart. If the company is to improve, people must continue to remind Wal-Mart of its obligations to society — its workers, their families, economic productivity, American communities — as well as its duties to shareholders.

Wal-Mart's low wages and benefits are harming its 1.3 million employees and creating serious problems for our society. Wal-Mart fails to recognize its responsibilities as a corporate giant that influences so many other companies, and a member of American society whose duty it is to contribute positively to the country. If we continue to allow Wal-Mart to fail its workers with inadequate compensation and to place a burden on our public assistance programs, other companies will adopt Wal-Mart's irresponsible practices, and the working poor and the productivity of our economy will suffer. In coming years, America's citizens and lawmakers must actively work to change the company so that workers can live without poverty and support themselves without relying on public assistance. Our nation must decide to what extent companies like Wal-Mart are responsible for providing for their employees, and create and enforce a standard that ensures our corporations are beneficial to society. Wal-Mart itself would likely benefit from improving its worker compensation, as a positive perception among employees and customers would only help the company. More importantly, however, it is the company's civic duty to provide adequate wages and benefits that will improve the lives of its employees and not hurt the productivity of our economy. As the model for the twenty-first century business and a highly influential member of society, Wal-Mart has the responsibility to support its employees with sufficient worker compensation.

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Author's
biography

ANDREW FONTANAROSA

Hailing from Youngstown, Ohio, Andrew Fontanarosa, a graduate of Austintown Fitch High School, is currently a sophomore Classics major residing in Keenan Hall. While he had always enjoyed writing, he was unsure of what to expect in a college writing course. Any uncertainties he had, however, were soon forgotten as he discovered his FYC course to be an enjoyable and enlightening experience.

The inspiration for his essay stemmed from a memorable discussion with his senior English teacher Jenny Leugers, on what she termed "the alliterative genius of Eminem." Realizing, however, that it was impossible to write a framed argument on only grammatical ingenuity, Andrew set about finding a suitable angle to his essay. After several rewrites, he settled on Eminem's noticeable skill in tapping into what he labels the lack of a white cultural identity, a topic he hopes most readers will at least find thought-provoking, regardless of whether they agree with it.

He owes a debt of gratitude to his instructor, Professor Margaret Uttke, for her continued encouragement throughout the writing process in addition to her careful and comprehensive critique. He would also like to thank Mrs. Leugers and Heather Carcelli, his junior English teacher, for introducing him to the methods of research writing as well as the general cultivation of his writing ability.

Filling the Void:
EMINEM AND THE LACK OF A
WHITE CULTURAL IDENTITY

Andrew Fontanarosa

Framed Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Margaret Uttke

"See the problem is, I speak to suburban kids."

— Marshall Mathers, AKA Eminem, "White America"

Talented, hateful, mesmerizing, perverse, captivating, bigoted, fatherly, misogynistic, genius, disturbing — Eminem has been deemed many things by both those who defend him and those who oppose him. One term both sides would label him, however, is successful. Since breaking onto the scene in 1999, he has become the best-selling rap artist of all time, and what makes his success all the more remarkable is that Eminem, white, has achieved his status in an almost entirely black medium. This popularity has been widely attributed to the large following he enjoys among white suburban youth. Various rationales have been put forth to explain suburban white youth's affinity for Eminem (and numerous reasons to subdue that affinity), but most conclusions are in the vein of peripheral generalizations — Eminem is white, so white kids like him. Yet Eminem represents far more than that. He is not just a controversial musical sensation; instead, Eminem must be viewed as the catalyst for a cultural interrogation. The reality is, in today's world, white youth lack a cultural identity. To fill that identity void, white youth look to assimilate other cultural identities, and often that search ends at the hip-hop culture. The dilemma for white youth with hip-hop, however, is its connotation with black culture. Eminem, for many white youth, has become the solution to that dilemma, and they gravitate towards him not just because he's white or because of his outrageousness, but because they long for an identity. A lack of identity results in a lack of confidence and an apathetic attitude about a person's position in the world, and there is a generation of suburban white youth growing up exactly like that. By placing the blame squarely with Eminem, society only hinders any efforts that could be made to fix the true problem of a non-existent white cultural identity.

In the video for the song "White America," Eminem portrays his fan base as a mass of indeterminable white faces, an image that pinpoints the first factor for suburban

white youth's non-existent cultural identity, the concept of "whiteness." European homogenization, a process by which those of European ancestry are grouped into one all encompassing term "white," has resulted in white youth being unable to identify with the culture and tradition of their varied ethnic backgrounds. The author Karyn D. McKinney explains the prevailing attitude of today's white youth regarding their whiteness in a chapter entitled "Being Born in the U.S. to White Parents is Almost Boring: Whiteness as a Meaningless Identity" (75). McKinney, surveying the feelings of white youth towards their white identity, highlights one respondent, Ned, who states "the only way I can think of describing my whiteness is to say I am not black or Indian or whatever else" (97). In my own research, a focus group composed of three males and three females, all college age and all who considered themselves white, I encountered the same type of feelings. Like Ned, most of my respondents could only give a vague description of their identity; in fact, of the six, only one, "Allison," identifying with her grandfather's Basque heritage, could offer some semblance of a cultural identity. Yet, despite her assertion of Basque affinity, Allison still said, if asked, she would identify herself as white. The rest of group simply implied they did not possess a cultural identity; they were just "white." Ned's account along with my research findings illustrate the homogenization that has occurred in people of European descent. They

> "*Eminem must be viewed as the catalyst for a cultural interrogation.*"

are not Irish-American or Italian-American or anything else — as, Mary, one of my focus group respondents said "you're just everything else." Like in the case of Allison, undoubtedly not all white youth lack a strong cultural identity, but this does not end the argument, white youth with a strong cultural identity only serve to show the actual importance of possessing a cultural identity. Allison, easily the most dominant personality in the group, was also the only one who felt she had some type of cultural identity, her Basque lineage. European heritage, like that of Allison's Basque tradition, has a rich and varied history, but because of white homogenization, most youth of European ancestry can never culturally identify with an ethnic heritage in the same way Allison does; they are simply a mass of indeterminable white faces.

Another recurring image in Eminem's "White America" video, two utterly average looking white youth named "Eric" and "Erica," illustrate the second factor that, along with European homogenization, contributes to white youth's non-existent cultural identity, the sameness of the suburbs. Largely white, the suburbs are typically considered home to the largest faction of Eminem's fan base, full of "Erics" and "Ericas." With the same houses, the same cars, the same families, and pretty much the same people, youth of the suburbs are surrounded by sameness (a quality not particularly conducive to a strong identity). Eminem's Eric and Erica represent what the author Crispin Sartwell calls the "blandness" of white identity (44). White youth, because of European homogenization, do not have an innate cultural identity and the sameness of the suburbs compounds that effect; first they're white, then on top of that they're average and bland. In the "White America" video, Eric and Erica, because they are fans of Eminem, are shown to be a personification of suburban America's worst fears. If, however, Eric and Erica scare suburban America, then the comment made by Allison

near the end of my focus group's discussion should send it into a panicked terror. She stated, "I think the mall is the cultural symbol of white people." While at first that remark might be interpreted as trivial, the actual implications of that statement are enormous. Allison defines whiteness as an impersonal, materialistic, institution of uniformity. Forget about Eric and Erica just being bland; they might as well be robots with wallets. Even more alarming (if actually possible) was that no one in my focus group attempted to argue with her; several even nodded their heads in agreement. In effect, they were essentially consenting that yes, at best their identity was one of condoned conformity.

The effect of European homogenization compounded by suburban sameness results in a non-existent cultural identity driving white youth to assimilate other cultural identities in attempt to fill the void. Allison explicitly stated that it was her "personal theory that because we don't have a white identity…we like things that have culture." Contrary to white youth, children in other cultures, for better or worse, learn of their cultural identity very early in life. Allison identifying the difference between whites and minorities called it a "sense of history that unifies them." Allison believed that because white youth do not have this sense of history, they gravitate towards an identity like hip-hop to fulfill their cultural craving. Matt, another member of my focus group, questioned Allison's assessment, however, because he believed that just like whiteness is the homogenization of European heritage, so is blackness the homogenization of diverse African heritage. Whereas Matt might consider Allison's belief an explainable overstatement, McKinney would certainly argue Allison's opinion to be an impulsive generalization and emblematic of her "cultural envy" counterargument (105). Calling it the "pinnacle of white privilege," McKinney implies that whites assimilate other cultures in an attempt to take what they, like Allison, view minorities holding an advantage in, a strong cultural identity (105). While not advocating an argument of white supremacy, McKinney is stating the truth, that because of continuing prejudices and influence as the majority, whites still hold much of the power in today's society. One thing whites do not possess, however, is the strong cultural identity of minority races, and that says McKinney is the reason why whites attempt to assimilate other cultural identities, to obtain more power. Within the frame of white youth, however, McKinney's contention loses much of its potency. Perhaps if we were discussing middle-aged white men — in today's society the conventional power holders — as the faction assimilating hip-hop, then McKinney's contention could be viewed with more validity. Yet middle-aged white men are not the ones who have made Eminem the best selling rap artist of all time; that distinction lies with white youth, a division of society with very little power in comparison. As difficult as it would be to fathom middle-aged white men across America lining up for Eminem's next album, even more implausible would be white youth's affinity for hip-hop coming as the result of a racially charged power struggle. In the case of white youth, what is entirely more likely and more reasonable is that they, as Allison suggested, are merely searching for an identity.

That search for many white youth ended with hip-hop. Firmly entrenched in today's popular culture, hip-hop is appealing as an identity, because as William Upski Wimsatt,

a noted hip-hop commentator says, "sporting their rap gear and attitude serves to disguise white kids'… underdeveloped identities" (19). As my focus group pointed out, hip-hop has many attributes associated with culture — a mode of fashion, music, art (in the form of graffiti), dance styles, status symbols ("bling" jewelry, car accessories), and even a way to talk — that fulfill many youth desired elements of identity. For white youth, however, there is one drawback, hip-hop's connotation as a "black culture" (Kitwana 18). Because its message has always been thought to come from the inner city viewpoint, the stereotypical poverty stricken, gang ridden, drug infested "black ghetto," there is a "blackness" association with hip-hop that white youth find difficult to relate to. In Eminem, though, they found their connection to hip-hop. He is, as Karyn McKinney states in her book Being White, the "exception to the rule," a white rapper succeeding, and in fact, rising above all others in a black dominated medium (92). Suburban kids wanted to be a part of hip-hop culture, but hip-hop was "black," so when Eminem, a *white* rapper came along, they immediately latched on.

> *"Rap, because of Eminem, was no longer confined to the inner city "black ghetto"; he became, to the delight of suburban white youth everywhere, their way to elude hip-hop's association with blackness."*

As a member of my focus group, Dan, termed it, Eminem was "the intermediary," the way around the problematic blackness connotation. Interestingly, my focus group suggested that what Eminem raps about, as they referred to them, "legitimate issues," also factored into Eminem's connection with white youth. In the "White America" video, scenes of school violence, illicit drug use, and suicide were the "legitimate issues," problems my focus group viewed as pertinent to daily suburban life. Eminem, already had broken one hip-hop stereotype simply by being white, but, by rapping about issues white suburban youth relate too, he also was able to bridge the "black ghetto" stereotype. Rap, because of Eminem, was no longer confined to the inner city "black ghetto"; he became, to the delight of suburban white youth everywhere, their way to elude hip-hop's association with blackness.

Some may question, "But why does it have to be hip-hop?" "Why not something like, for example, country?" Country music, like hip-hop, is obviously well ingrained culturally — the music is popular, its stars have crossed over into popular entertainment and through its role in the marketing of pro football, it has seen an increased presence in athletics. Better yet, unlike hip-hop's blackness connotations, country presents no cultural barriers. Perhaps, the most obvious disparity between hip-hop and country (or any other musical culture for that matter) is typified by Matt's statement: "Uh…maybe when they start putting country on MTV." MTV, the unofficial purveyor of what's cool in popular music, affirms what Wimsatt calls the aura of "coolness" that surrounds hip-hop (17). Country, however, is often seen as uncool by the youth culture, and, as any observer of youth culture can attest, youth always want to do what is cool. Another relevant factor that explains suburban white youth's choice of hip-hop is the long-standing notion of teenage rebellion. Hip-hop, as Kitwana believes is the continuation of "the voice of American youth rebellion" (28). Country, alternatively, is not seen as a rebellious medium; parents fret about their children listening to hip-hop, but it is very likely most parents would

have no problem allowing their son or daughter to listen to country. And, considering country's greater popularity among older demographics, it is quite possible, parents, being fans of country themselves, might even encourage their children to listen to country (perhaps explaining country's perceived uncoolness because frankly, what kid wants to be like their parents?). Like Matt's earlier remark, the members of my focus group were blunt in their assessment of why suburban white youth choose hip-hop over country. The uniform reaction was essentially "country sounds old," "you can't dance to country like you can to hip-hop," and "country just isn't cool." This is not to say that all white youth choose hip-hop over country, however, because those from rural areas or small towns might find country extremely appealing. In fact, it can be argued that country is an extension of a rural or small town identity, and as such, youth from those areas would find country more alluring than hip-hop. Suburban youth, like the members of my focus group, however, come from an area not linked with any specific culture, and therefore, they are much more inclined to choose hip-hop, a culture they perceive as cool and rebellious, over country, which they see as old and boring.

Earlier, it was stated Eminem is popular because he is white and because he raps about issues that suburban youth can relate to; however, his popularity does depend on more than just that. If all a successful white rapper needs is his skin color and relevant lyrics, then why is Eminem the only one who's popular? Above all else, what it comes down to is credibility. Kitwana believes "[t]hat Eminem [being] first embraced by Black hip-hop kids is in large part what allowed Eminem's rise up the ranks" (153). Eminem has the "street credibility" that is for the most part generally limited to black rappers. An example that comes to mind is the case of Vanilla Ice. As soon as he lost the perceived genuineness of his street background, his career was lost as well. It is quite possible had Eminem not been accepted by the black hip-hop community, he may not have sold many albums at all, (and perhaps reserved his spot next to Vanilla Ice in the pantheon of great white rappers). One key aspect my focus group identified as helping to achieve Eminem's credibility was his visible relationship with Dr. Dre, a factor Eminem himself alludes to in "White America" rapping "and kids flipped...when they knew I was produced by Dre." Dre, a respected and immensely popular black rapper, by virtue of his roles as Eminem's mentor, producer, and musical contributor, extended an indication of black acceptance of Eminem, the same type of acceptance Eminem projects in his semi-biopic film 8 Mile (Quinn 187). Eminem, in the role of Jimmy "Rabbit," is shown scene after scene as a white man against a black populated backdrop. The plot of the movie centers on what is called "battling," when two rappers fight each other by using words. In the opening scene, Rabbit, the only white rapper in the movie to ever battle, flees from a booing black crowd; however, in the film's defining moment, Rabbit defeats several black rappers and becomes the rap battle champion. As the film closes, the all black crowd chants 313, the area code for the black hood that includes Rabbit's home. This reminds the film's audience — namely young white suburbanites — that Eminem is first and foremost white like them, but that he is also very much a true and credible member of the hip-hop world, that he is as Dan, a focus group respondent, says "[white youth's] connection to rap music."

Conceivably more important than Eminem's own credibility is the credibility he bestows upon his white audience. In today's world, white youth, especially males, who dress and act in the hip-hop manner are often referred to as "wigger," a play on a word whose negative history is reworked with a positive connotation by black rappers. This is directly counter to the aim of white youth; they assimilate the hip-hop culture in an effort to fill an identity void, but being called a wigger implies they have a fake identity. White youth desperately try not to be a fake, not to be a wigger, not to be Vanilla Ice; and in the way they see it, the way around that perception is Eminem. As a fan of Eminem, white youth gain, in their minds, the same type of credibility he possesses; they are not a wigger because they are just like Eminem. The author Crispin Sartwell, in disagreement with this sentiment, calls Eminem an "uber-wigger" and "easily the most famous wigger [to] have ever lived" presenting him as someone whose identity is more a concoction of societal stereotypes than of actual truth (41, 44). No one in my focus group agreed, however, and they were adamant in defending their position.

"We have a generation of white youth growing up feeling as if they have no identity, a generation who will grow up without self confidence and with listless attitudes throughout their lives."

My focus group believed Eminem to be a true representation of a white boy from the "black ghetto," that the persona Eminem presents is "who he really is." They felt that if someone grew up like Eminem did, there was no issue of a fabricated identity. Allison emphatically said "that is his identity!" Sartwell contends that white youth who assimilate the hip-hop culture are always fake because his definition of hip-hop disallows any aspect of whiteness, but that is the very hurdle Eminem removes for white youth. White youth do not have to be wiggers if they are fans of Eminem because they do not view Eminem as a wigger.

On the other hand, my focus group's unwavering belief in Eminem not being a wigger might be construed as evidence for Sartwell's claim that suburban white youth who assimilate hip-hop are always wiggers, always fake, except that they just will not admit it. Sartwell called Eminem's ability to connect with white youth the "marginal status…that allows him leverage on his own people" (44–45). He believes that Eminem, in an effort to gain fame, played up his "marginal status" as a white rapper, and that his popularity resides less in credibility and more on novelty (45). To be fair, Eminem plays this "marginal status" to perfection; as Sartwell goes on to say, "he never tires of telling us, he grew up…as Detroit white trash" (45). Could then, Eminem just be an extremely well marketed artist? My focus group did admit that some of Eminem's songs, including several extremely popular ones, were superficial, what they termed "processed" rap. These songs, they admitted, did not deal with any "legitimate issues," and more notably, they also admitted these songs were also many of the ones that received large amounts of radio airtime. The huge popularity of this "processed" rap implies that Eminem's fame might have just been the byproduct of being the next well-promoted musical star — in pop star lineage, from the Backstreet Boys to Britney Spears to Eminem. A recent Ipod ad in which Eminem appeared also lends strength to Sartwell's contention. Advertising by definition is a form of marketing; by appearing in an advertisement, Eminem cer-

tainly qualifies as a marketing object. Furthermore, the fact he appeared in an ad for Ipod, a product with a recognized homogeneous status in youth culture, raises many questions about the validity of Eminem as a credible figure in the hip-hop culture. If Eminem was so credible, Sartwell might ask, would not his appearance in an advertisement for a product so deeply ingrained in the uniform conscious of youth culture be akin to selling out? Would not Eminem also be a fake? What Sartwell's argument fails in realizing is that the question is not whether Eminem is truly street credible; the question is whether *suburban white youth* see him as credible, and the answer to that question is a resounding yes. Questioning, as Sartwell does, whether the identity suburban white youth find in Eminem is real or not still does not refute the fact that they find an identity.

That white youth find their identity in Eminem might be in and of itself the biggest reason for the controversy that surrounds him. Eminem, in the song "White America," comments on the controversy by rapping "So now I'm catchin the flack from these activists when they raggin...Actin like I'm the first rapper to smack a bitch or say faggot, shit!" As Eminem points out, he is not much different from other rappers; the problem with him, as Kitwana identifies, is that he "differs in skin color" (18). Hiphop's "blackness" connotations had always impeded suburban white youth's efforts to assimilate the culture as an identity, but with Eminem's arrival on the hip-hop scene, suburban white youth found their way around the previously unassailable "black culture" association. As suburban white youth began to identify with the hip-hop culture; however, suburban white youth's parents began to question the identification. What should have been a wake up call to the lack of a white cultural identity turned into a universal condemnation of Eminem. Society saw Eminem as the enemy, a man whose popularity was detrimental to the youth of America. More detrimental, though, was the fact society's belief glosses over the true problem of a non-existent white cultural identity. We have a generation of white youth growing up feeling as if they have no identity, a generation who will grow up without self confidence and with listless attitudes throughout their lives. Instead of focusing all our energy into stopping Eminem, we should instead accept him as a talented musician who filled a void in the lives of suburban white youth across America. The fact of the matter comes down to this: suburban white youth desperately wanted an identity, and Eminem offered them one. Simply using Eminem as a scapegoat does not solve the problem, it only delays the solution. Until the lack of a white cultural identity is resolved, suburban white youth will continually look to other cultures to fill their identity void, whether parents and society like it or not.

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Author's biography

MARY GEIER

Mary Geier is thrilled to be a sophomore at Notre Dame. Originally from Marion, Indiana, she now lives in McGlinn Hall. In her free time she enjoys sampling the many different combinations of ice cream at Cold Stone Creamery. She would greatly like to thank her parents and First-Year Composition professor for their guidance and support throughout the research and writing process.

Mary decided on her research topic after recalling a road trip through Ohio, during which her car passed a giant church with a giant plaster statue of Jesus out front. Wondering how a single church could require so much space, she decided to research megachurches and their innovative style of ministry. When she began, she was unaware of how much her opinions would change. She went into the project determined to prove one thing, and instead came to an entirely different conclusion. She urges other students to try and keep an open mind when conducting their own research.

Since Mary was enrolled in the Multimedia version of First-Year Composition, she was also required to re-mediate her research from the traditional, alphabetic text printed here to the multimodal medium of the World Wide Web, where she could use words, pictures, graphics, sound, and video to extend her research. You can view the rest of Mary's work — including her original movie on megachurches which includes pictures from her megachurch visits — at http://www.nd.edu/~ccarr2/Mary's%20Half%20of%20Webpage.htm.

More Than Mega:
HOW THE MEGACHURCH IS RESTRUCTURING THE TRADITIONAL CHURCH COMMUNITY AND HOW THIS IMPACTS AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

Mary Geier

Researched Argument

Advanced Multimedia First-Year Composition

Professor Connie Snyder Mick

After the orange-vest-clad traffic directors moved aside some of the strategically placed cones and waved my cab through to the front door of Granger Community Church, I watched in awe as we approached the largest church building that I had ever seen in my life — it looked more like a high school than a church. As I made my way inside, passing several smiling and energetic families, the first thing that caught my attention was "The Connection Café," a coffee shop located on the right side of the church's spacious lobby. Fifteen to twenty people stood in line waiting to buy their morning java and muffins, while several others sat in conversation around small tables. On the other side of the lobby stood the Visitor's Center, and further back on the left was the church's bookstore. On my way across the lobby towards the auditorium, I passed the Children's Check-In, where parents were dropping off their kids for their age-specific Sunday Schools. Each child had his or her name entered into a computer, was given a freshly printed name-tag, and was "sent" downstairs to the children's area — instead of simply walking downstairs, many of the children opted to slide down one of the covered slides (McDonald's PlayPlace-esque) that led directly into their classroom. One of the first people inside the massive auditorium, I took a seat as secular artist Jason Mraz's hit song, "Wordplay," played in the background. Rows of padded chairs arranged in a slight semicircle faced a two-level stage supporting a few electric guitars and microphones. Suspended above the stage was a gigantic oval-shaped cardboard display that brightly illustrated the theme of the church's current sermon series. It read "The Family Channel" and was decorated with pictures of people in five of the most famous television families: the Bradys, the Osbornes, the Cleavers, the Cosbys, and the Simpsons. The middle-aged woman sitting next to me proudly mentioned that the recently renovated auditorium could now hold 3,000 people, as opposed to the 1,500 it held before. As people continued to take their seats, two giant projector screens on either side of the stage flashed announcements about various church activities and ministries. Long before the live music started, I knew that I had walked into a very different kind of church.

Megachurches, as churches like Granger Community Church are frequently labeled, are one of the more recent phenomena in American Christianity. They stand exempt from perhaps the greatest challenge facing the Protestant Church today: decline in membership. The Barna Research Group, a Christian research institute, collected data which showed that in 1996 overall church attendance within several Protestant denominations reached its lowest point in twenty years. Yet while many traditional denominational churches struggle to retain current members, megachurches — giant in both physical size and weekly attendance — are rapidly bringing in scores of new people. The rise of a new type of community within these churches has paralleled their rapid proliferation. Though its authenticity is questioned by many, this unique concept of community is in reality the very thing that is drawing so many through megachurch doors — it is the force essential to their growth. Megachurches foster within themselves a genuine community, marked by several key characteristics, indicative of the form that Christianity must assume in order to continue to reach a significant demographical group in coming generations.

> *"Though its authenticity is questioned by many, this unique concept of community is in reality the very thing that is drawing so many through megachurch doors — it is the force essential to their growth."*

At first glance, the label given to these churches may seem like enough to characterize their size and ministry; but in reality, it is a disingenuous misnomer. "Megachurches," oftentimes defined as churches with over 2,000 weekly attendees, started appearing in the 1980s. Although megachurches preach Protestant theology, many are nondenominational; those that are not so tend to severely downplay their denominational ties. According to John N. Vaughan, creator of the research organization Church Growth Today, the number of American megachurches has ballooned from 50 in 1980 to 880 as of May 2005. Vaughan estimates that somewhere in America, a church reaches "megachurch" status every two days (Symonds, Grow, and Cady). Merely recognizing megachurches for their exceptional size, however, would fail to do justice to their unique and "distinctive religious reality" (Thumma). According to Scott Thumma, PhD, who has contributed greatly to the scholarly understanding of the megachurch phenomenon, "the rise of hundreds of these large churches in the last several decades implies that this new pattern of congregational life has a particular resonance to and fit with changes in modern American society and culture." The innovative style of congregational life identified by Thumma manifests itself in the new community developed within the megachurch.

Before beginning my research, I was skeptical of such a large church's ability to foster a supportive atmosphere of community and, frankly, spiritual growth. In his essay "Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community," Wendell Berry describes "community" as "the commonwealth and common interests, commonly understood, of people living together in a place and wishing to continue to do so" (119–20). Although people do not technically "live" in their church, the church is a place that plays a role (the degree to which is variable) in the lives of its congregants. The church is a meeting

place where the group regularly unites for fellowship, emotional and physical support, spiritual guidance, and celebrations of life's rites of passage — from baptism to first communion to marriage. Thus, churches are voluntarily joined sub-communities that share religious and moral beliefs. Berry points out that feeling like a part of the community is fundamental for its members: "a community...has to do first of all with belonging" (147). How then, could megachurches — some so large that one may attend for years without seeing a familiar face among the congregants every Sunday — possibly provide their attendees with the presence of community, when the feeling of belonging is absolutely central to it? This question of community, or lack thereof, is critical because community among believers is almost always requisite to the development of personal spiritual growth. The act of simply sitting in church and listening to the pastor preach on Sundays is usually insufficient for encouraging significant spiritual maturity in a person.

The opinions of several religious scholars also influenced my initial skepticism. Consider the words and tone of Reverend Donald Matthews, a leading consultant on racial diversity in churches:

> Mega-churches offer themselves as the model for the perfect church. They have offered classes and courses to their less fortunate brethren as to how they, too, can become the next mega-church in their own community. They seem oblivious that their growth is due to the benefits of certain sociological conditions rather than solely due to some divine intervention and spiritual plan that anyone can learn and activate for their own church. (20)

Like Matthews, numerous scholars deem those involved in megachurch organizations to be arrogant and condescending. In addition, many skeptics draw out the similarity between the operation of megachurches and big businesses. To some, megachurches are inflicted with a sort of tunnel-vision, in which they focus solely on bringing in massive amounts of people to their services. Also, their lack of denominational ties and doctrinal teaching may seem indicative of an abandonment of the harder issues that God expects Christians to deal with. I personally believed that megachurches placed excessive emphasis on personal gratification, fostering a sort of "self-help" atmosphere. Yet as I conducted my own research, attending two megachurch services and interviewing four people devoted to their respective churches, my old assumptions changed. Megachurches *have* discovered how to create a supportive, genuine community that fosters a sense of "belonging" among its members, the primary business of community described by Berry.

Throughout this research paper, I draw from several primary and secondary sources to identify the common aspects that characterize the new megachurch community. In order to prevent overgeneralization, the focus of my primary research — interviews, website analysis, and personal observation — is limited to five different congregations: Granger Community Church (Granger, Indiana); Grace Community Church (Indianapolis, Indiana); Crossroads Community Church (Cincinnati, Ohio); Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, Illinois); and Hebron Church (Dacula, Georgia). I feel confident that when considered together, my findings from the above

five churches will present an accurate portrayal of the megachurch in America. For, according to Thumma, "most megachurches have a similar identifiable pattern and share a common set of organizational and leadership dynamics." In truth, the American megachurch is a church that embraces a new concept of community that is bringing scores of people to (and back to) Christianity.

The physical structure of megachurches embodies two major elements of the new community, one architectural and one psychological: the creation of an unthreatening atmosphere for newcomers and the development of relations between attendees. They are critical components of the "new paradigm church," a concept put forth by Donald E. Miller. According to Miller, a new paradigm church is one that takes on "stylistic and organizational elements from our postmodern culture" and "is challenging not doctrine but the medium through which the message of Christianity is articulated" (11). Miller states that all new paradigm churches are willing participants in the "restructuring" of American Christianity that is "meditating deeply felt religious experiences and doing this much more effectively than many mainline churches" (16). Megachurches embody the new paradigm model in their construction, among other ways. These large church campuses are designed to allow for easy mobility throughout the complex and to provide space for people to mill about and interact. At Granger Community Church, a church of roughly 5,000, the Connection Café serves as a place for people to "relax, recharge, and relate in [their] comfort zone, with a coffee in [their] hand" (GCCwired.com). According to Julie Smies, assistant to the communications pastor at Granger, the café was designed to encourage community among congregants. To some, such things as coffee shops or bookstores and ample horizontal space (Twitchell 82) may seem to have negligible benefit on the feeling of community in a church with thousands of members. But the truth is that the option to be anonymous provides a powerful draw for people as well. Megachurches "thrive on anonymity" because it is this feeling that makes newcomers so comfortable (Twitchell 82–3). The megachurch leaves it up to each individual to decide when and to what extent he or she will participate in the community (Smies). This allowing "people the space they need to get comfortable" (Smies) is all part of creating an unthreatening atmosphere for those new to the church, whom megachurches often term "seekers," or the "unchurched": people who have either given up on religion or who were raised with no religious background, but desire to explore Christianity. Megachurches cater to their congregants' psychological needs by providing them with the anonymity they need in order to become comfortable and, once they are comfortable, the places they need for informal interaction with others in the church body.

A significant part of providing a less intimidating atmosphere involves constructing a meeting place that is architecturally unlike the long-established church building. The sanctuary has been reformatted and renamed the "auditorium." Instead of straight rows of pews facing an altar and pulpit, rows of chairs (either flat on the ground or tiered, as in a concert hall) face a central stage — it's called an auditorium with good reason. Traditional symbols such as stained glass windows, crosses, and the wooden pulpit up front are nowhere to be seen. Of his experience at Willow Creek Community Church,

a church of 15,000–20,000 on any given weekend, James Twitchell recounts, "There are no icons, no crucified Christs, no little telltale signs of stained glass or covered dishes or polished silver or gold that one associates with Don't Touch! Be Careful! Be Quiet! Act Devout! He May Be Watching!" (93). In order to gain insight into the reasoning behind the lack of religious symbolism, I interviewed Jon Tuin, a member of Willow Creek who has been actively involved in the church for roughly twelve years. Tuin explains that religious symbols were eliminated in order to "create a neutral type [of] atmosphere where people could come and ask real questions about God and faith in Christ." The church conducted surveys in the early days of its ministry, asking people what sort of things created "barriers" to their attending church. According to Tuin, "One of the findings was that such symbols sometimes carried baggage and posed a barrier to some people." In eliminating traditional barriers, megachurches create a neutral, unthreatening atmosphere that speaks of their respect of and concern for the newcomer's feelings and religious history. Miller stresses that churches "that do not constantly 'resymbolize' their message eventually die; in contrast, groups that have the foresight to encapsulate their message in contemporary symbols and forms not only have the potential to survive, but sometimes grow at remarkable rates" (18). Clearly, the megachurch approach to architectural and decorational style is in sync with his message. Indeed, their growth rates provide strong evidence for the validity of Miller's statement. Such innovations in physical appearance are just one of the means through which megachurches restructure the traditional Christian message and create a new community that resonates with members of today's society.

Another critical way megachurches restructure American Christianity is evidenced by their distinctive style of service. It is characterized by the following elements, the combination of which creates a restructured church service key to shaping the "new community": multiple offerings for service times and venues; emotional congregational singing; the use of media, such as video, as alternate means of worship; and a distinct style of sermon.

Along with offering multiple service times, many megachurches offer multiple types of services (Hebronchurch.org and Crossroadscommunity.net). Hebron, a church of nearly 5,000, offers two purely "praise and worship services" (Hebronchurch.org). Granger Community Church offers a Thursday evening service called "New Community," for which people are asked to "Bring your Bible as we explore the Scriptures, worship through singing and celebrate Jesus" ("Brady Bunch"). As Bibles are unnecessary at the weekend services — all scripture referenced in the sermon is printed in that week's "Granger Notes," a fill-in-the-blank study guide inserted into each bulletin — the request that people bring a Bible on Thursdays indicates that this service is oriented towards those who have consciously decided to study Christianity on a deeper level. Willow Creek also offers a Wednesday night service for people who are "more committed" (Tuin). At many megachurches, the weekend services are "seeker-oriented" and rely heavily on entertainment and non-threatening sermons and scriptures to keep seekers coming back to the church. A tempting assumption to make about the typical weekend "seeker-service" is that it fails to provide the church's committed

members with the opportunity for spiritual growth. Even if this is true, megachurches remedy this issue by offering weekday services designed to promote spiritual growth and deeper contemplation of Christianity. The weekend service is valuable in that it functions as a unifying shell for the whole congregation. It is "comforting to believers and informative to the curious" (Twitchell 95). By offering services at different times and spiritual levels, megachurches cater to the daily schedules and as well as the degree of spiritual commitment of congregants.

Megachurches often offer multiple venues, which are simultaneous church services with distinct natures. Grace Community Church offers two venues on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. The largest service, called "Main," holds approximately 1,400 and is modeled along the lines of the typical megachurch service. The alternative venue, named "Sojourn," is much smaller and was designed as a place that "would allow for and even encourage elements like participation, discussion," and that was "a little more informal, a little more laid back [than Main]." It was created as a place for people who loved Grace but felt "lost in a sea of faces" at Main (Baker). Recall that anonymity *does* work in favor of megachurches in some cases, such as that of the curious newcomer who wants to come and go without any attachments or obligations, during a sort of "discovery" period. Yet, once the anonymous attendee desires to drop this status and become involved and more visible in the church, he or she may have trouble at first. The alternative venues system is one way in which megachurches lower this hurdle.

"Megachurches have discovered how to create a supportive, genuine community that fosters a sense of "belonging" among its members, the primary business of community described by Berry."

As I took my seat in Granger's auditorium ten minutes before the beginning of the 10:15 AM service, I soon felt at ease. The familiar background music, bright lighting, and air of anticipation among the others taking their seats made me curious and eager for the service to begin. The transition from mingling time to service time was signaled as the praise band took the stage and started jamming. The six or seven smiling men and women onstage constituted a diverse range of ages, from a bass player in his late twenties, to a man on the electric guitar who seemed to be in his late forties or early fifties. I was surprised to observe such a broad representation of ages. After their energetic prelude, the band led the congregation in the singing of an upbeat praise song — the experience was somewhat akin to being at a Christian music concert. I was more than slightly in awe as purple and green spotlights swung around the room and fog crept across the stage. Amidst the special effects and loud music, some people danced and swayed in front of their seats, while others lifted their hands towards the ceiling, and yet still others stood calmly in place. Worship time was clearly whatever you wanted to make it.

The typical megachurch service begins with a time of congregational singing which is clearly meant to combat one of the age-old enemies of community in the church:

formalism. In their book <u>Re-Imagining Life Together in America</u>, Catherine Nerney and Hal Taussig define formalism as "the deeply embedded tendency of Americans to experience religious life as a submission to a certain kind of mindless formality" (156). Indeed, it is this mindless formality — this sense of just "going through the motions" — that turns people away from traditional churches in the first place. Dissatisfaction with mindless formalism came to light in my interview with Brett Keppler, a twenty-four-year-old young professional who has been attending a megachurch in Cincinnati called Crossroads Community Church for two years:

> The past churches I have attended were very redundant, boring, and missed making a connection with the younger audience. Traditional hymns were sung, the same prayers/testimonials were said each week and quickly lost their meaning as soon as I was able to memorize them. I would be so brain-dead after the first 30 minutes that I didn't care to listen to the sermon.

Through his personal account Keppler, who grew up in a traditional Presbyterian church, brought to light some of the ways — through church atmosphere, congregational singing, and nature of the sermon — in which megachurches draw those disillusioned with the formalism of traditional Christianity, like himself, back into church. Compare his former experiences with this account of his first time worshipping at Crossroads: "The music was incredible[,] featuring a live band of about 8 guys[.] [T]he movie style seating in the dark 'sanctuary' made the event seem more like a show than a church." Keppler's worship experience was not unique. According to the "first systematic survey" conducted on megachurches in the United States, 75–80% use some combination of electronic keyboard, guitar, and drums during their musical worship (Dart). In addition to this contemporary style of music — more often characterized by guitars and keyboards than organs and pianos — Miller states that the typical "new paradigm church" fosters an environment of "bodily, rather than mere cognitive, participation in worship" (20). In the megachurch, the embodiment of this new paradigm counters formalism, which is characterized by a lack of movement and congregational interaction limited to responsive readings (Nerney and Taussig 157).

Mark Beeson, founding Pastor of Granger, took the stage and began his sermon — or message as it is frequently called in churches today — for the day. Beeson was smiling and kind, energetic and fun to listen to — just magnetic. But his tone turned serious when it was necessary for him to make an important point. In his message, Beeson outlined certain ways to take biblical principles and apply them to solve the practical problems faced by blended families.

As evidenced by Beeson's message, megachurches have restructured the way pastors relate to their congregation along with the type of message that they relate. Their sermons emphasize human struggles and problems instead of more abstract theological ideas and doctrinal issues. In the minds of seekers, the latter type of sermon is often associated with traditional denominational churches, despite the fact that many of these smaller churches do preach messages that resonate with today's culture. The ability of megachurches to leave their congregants with a message every Sunday wholly unlike the stereotypical "church sermon" has been a substantial cause of their

growth. Though pastors at megachurches do stick to a "traditional and conservative Christian message," they present it in a way that is "countercultural to the culture that is expressed in mainline denominations" (Matthews 30). The two fundamental techniques that characterize megachurch sermons are empowerment and practicality. These two qualities are reflected in the following adjectives Thumma uses to describe the megachurch sermon: "inspirational," "motivational," and "well-delivered;" "powerful," "practical," "down-to-earth" and "relevant." Bill Hybels, head pastor of Willow Creek, preaches messages that "reflect a nurturing, forgiving God who will help with family life, day care, job stress, recreation, and the drive home" (Twitchell 95). In her essay "Contending With a Giant: The Impact of a Megachurch on Exurban Religious Institutions," Nancy Eiesman describes the Hebron Church service as "[b]alancing conservative Baptist theology with a therapeutic personalism" (196). She notes that the church specifically gears much of its ministry towards many of the "familial and life style stresses of exurban baby boomers" (196). When asked to describe the purpose and nature of Granger's weekly sermons, Smies' simple answer, "God-centered, no matter how difficult your problems," expresses the fundamental essence of all megachurch sermons. The restructured megachurch message, empowering and practical, provides the purpose upon which the new community so unique to these large churches stands.

During his message, Beeson spoke directly to people in his audience who had "a wound in their life." Near the end of the service, he said "This [Granger] is a great place for new beginnings." The comments of the Senior Pastor at Granger provide powerful insight into the common megachurch philosophy. This philosophy is evidenced by the church's degree of denominational affiliation and its approach towards seekers.

The 50% of megachurches that claim some denominational affiliation are virtually indistinguishable from nondenominational megachurches (Thumma). According to the "first systematic survey" of U.S. megachurches, 49% of those with denominational ties said denominational leadership was "of no importance" (Dart). Thumma explains that megachurches have no need for denominational affiliation because the megachurch congregation stands alone. In forming its own identity, the megachurch's programs, services and ministries speak for themselves — these are the things that draw people into the church, not denominational influence. I propose that the trend towards nondenominationalism goes further than a simple lack of necessity; instead, megachurches choose to be nondenominational or "functionally nondenominational," in the words of Thumma, because they want to create a community in which all feel welcome and comfortable. This action is intricately linked with the lack of traditional religious symbolism and absence of the traditional church atmosphere within the megachurch — all serve to create a new type of church that is welcoming to people who are dissatisfied with, disillusioned with or just plain intimidated by the traditional church. In addition, four out of the five megachurches that I study in this paper incorporate the word "community" in their name, while none of their names include a denominational title. The fact that many megachurches integrate the word "community" into their name instead of a certain denominational title offers further evidence

that the megachurch's move away from denominationalism is meant to create a neutral, inclusive community within. The way in which megachurches name themselves speaks of these churches' deliberate restructuring of the popular view of Christianity and the church.

Perhaps the approach that megachurches take toward relating to seekers most vividly embodies the megachurch philosophy. Eiesman notes that part of Hebron's growth has stemmed from head pastor Larry Wynn's belief that the church should be a place where people will find emotional support and comfort, especially in times of trial and hardship (194). Many megachurches purposely focus on the emotional needs of their people. Tuin believes that many people drawn to Willow Creek are "looking to be relationally connected and to find purpose for life. Many…are in pain of some sort." Willow Creek provides many ministries that address this type of pain, such as one focused on divorce recovery. Additionally, megachurches are not afraid to talk about topics that often are not addressed in more traditional churches. Of the programming at Crossroads, Keppler said, "Crossroads develops their messages in hopes of having a larger impact on the more normal type of church-goer. Instead of quoting a couple bible verses then speaking for an hour on why you should be a good person, Crossroads has held series on Sex, Alcohol, Homosexuality, Drugs and other topics deemed taboo by other churches." Miller observes that pastors of new paradigm churches "believe that God is in the business of radically changing people's lives" (14). This belief is manifested in the atmosphere of anticipation and purpose found within megachurches — something exciting is happening, and everyone there can be a part of it, no matter what their story. The megachurch philosophy is one that embraces all people, and all problems, providing them with a message of hope and a therapeutic atmosphere of support and acceptance.

Ultimately, megachurches are indicative of the model churches must consider adopting if they hope to reach a significant section of our society today and in the future. Consider the words of Keppler: "My generation is built on change and experiencing different opportunities…[we] will likely work an average of 10 different jobs over a lifetime, there will be no social security when we get old, and our lives are technology driven. It's only natural that our religion would change as well." Keppler's generation has grown up feeling like part of society but still somehow detached from an intimate community at the same time. Much of this results from the pure "bigness" of modern life: people shop in huge malls, attend enormous state colleges, and go to work for giant corporations (Thumma). One day they will likely die in a large, sterile hospital. Though accustomed to this lifestyle, many desire something more: connectedness with others. One of Tuin's comments about the seekers that come to Willow Creek vividly represents this human desire: "It seems like people are looking to be relationally connected and to find purpose for life." People today crave belonging and the sense of personal security and purpose that a community fosters among its members. The megachurch is the type of church, one that fits in with the setting — with the "bigness" — of peoples' everyday lives, that is capable of providing them with tangible ways to achieve a true feeling of place.

The megachurch, while respecting the individualism of each member, gently attempts to de-emphasize the importance of individualism as the person becomes more involved in the church body. According to Berry, individualism poses a danger to the integrity and strength of a community when the individual decides to turn away from that community and instead embrace a life pursuing "self-realization, self-aggrandizement, self-interest, self-fulfillment, self-enrichment, self-promotion, and so on" (149). Once he or she is on this track, "the individual represents no fecundity, no continuity, no harmony" and assumes a life lacking in a "standard of behavior or responsibility" (Berry 149). In addition to working against the community — which is the very embodiment of mutual responsibility, teamwork, moral agreement, and accountability — a life marked by such belligerent individualism tilts precariously towards personal unhappiness and emptiness. A significant amount of people coming to megachurches have started down this path, but have realized that they do not desire such a life. The megachurch community, neutral and unthreatening, can offer those who join respite from and help out of purposeless, detrimental life paths.

Those who fall into such damaging life patterns in the first place often do so because they lack a firm religious foundation to fall back on for help. They are the young professionals of Brett Keppler's generation. They are the baby boomers struggling to come to terms with middle age. They are anyone disillusioned with Christianity and the traditional church. All of them are the seekers, the "unchurched," unaware of the hope that a traditional church has to offer. These are the people who might have spent the rest of their lives without faith — let alone a church family. But when a friend or colleague, billboard or publicized event, brings a local megachurch to their attention, they are willing to give it a try. They perceive the megachurch as an unthreatening experience that may or may not offer some release from their problems — either way, they have nothing to fear (be it conspicuousness, unfamiliar religious doctrine, or formal liturgy). After attending a megachurch once, many in this group keep coming back because the church recognizes their inherent need for community, even if they themselves cannot articulate it. The group I just described is a prevalent part of the American population. As evidenced by the success of the megachurch, it is a group that the Christian church has the power to reach. Yet, recognizing the correct methods of reaching this group is critical. The megachurch has already caught on. Now, "non-megachurch" Christian churches in America — mainline denominational and nondenominational alike — must decide how they will approach this group.

I do not propose, however, that all churches become megachurches. Attempting to do so would work against Christianity as a whole, for it would alienate the many Americans who cherish church tradition; likewise, many churchgoers are content with and comfortable in the historically established, small-to-midsized church. Instead, churches should consider evaluating themselves, using the megachurch model of outreach to seekers as a guide. For instance, if a church is struggling to bring in new people, it could compare its approach towards seekers to the approach taken by megachurches. Perhaps this assessment would yield practical, concrete ideas of how leaders of the stated church could successfully expand their ministry to modern seek-

ers. Such self-evaluation could also help churches evolve along with the people of its present community — for just as culture changes, so do people — thus increasing the resonance and impact those churches exert in the lives of their members. The megachurch model provides all churches with a useful tool against which to "measure" the relevancy of their ministries to the everyday lives of their congregants. A traditional church could select a megachurch ministry, philosophy, or idea and shape it to fit its unique body of believers, creating its own adaptation of the "restructured" megachurch atmosphere. Ultimately, seekers can find a spiritual home in megachurches and non-megachurches alike; they are not looking for a specific size of church. Instead, they seek a church with a vibrant inner community that fits the pattern of their daily lives and then provides them with a path to purpose and faith.

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Author's
biography

Paul T. Hommes

Paul Hommes is a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame. He has a keen interest in science, history, and music. During the school year, Paul will often be found in Cushing Hall navigating a Mechanical Engineering major, or hanging out with friends in a Christian community called People of Praise. During the summer and Christmas breaks, he works as lights and sound technician on the drama theatre he built in his unfinished basement. Last summer, the theatre produced <u>The Scarlet Pimpernel</u>, and rehearsals have already started for <u>Wicked</u> this summer. At Notre Dame, Paul lives in Morrissey Manor, plays piano, and sings in the Notre Dame Folk Choir. Researching this paper was an excellent opportunity for Paul to explore the intriguing issues related to the oil crisis and learn a great deal about macroeconomics and alternative energy technology.

Mother Nature vs. Mother of Invention:
A PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD'S OIL CRISIS
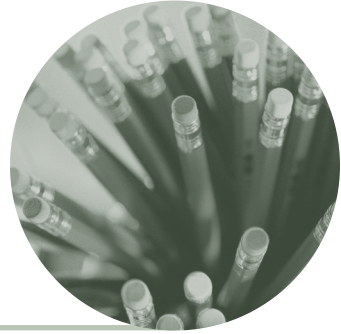
Paul T. Hommes

Researched Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Kelly Kinney

Most socially aware Americans have heard about something called the "oil crisis." Many people understand the basic idea, but what most people don't realize is that the oil crisis is an unstoppable global phenomenon that will permanently change the way we live. Most importantly, people do not know that, by many accounts, this "crisis" will occur sometime in the next three to five years. There is not much question among experts that the oil crisis will occur, but there is plenty of speculation about when it will occur and what it will be like. Our society is deeply dependent on oil to function. Almost every consumer good in America requires some form of petroleum somewhere in its production (Savinar 15). Oil also powers nearly all of our transportation industry. The factors determining the severity of the oil crisis are complex in the extreme, so making predictions about it is likewise very difficult. Because predictions are so speculative and the consequences are so important, there are widely differing opinions about when and how the crisis will occur. One important element of the crisis is the concept of "Peak Oil." According to the Association for the Study of Peak Oil&Gas or ASPO, a multi-national network of scientists, affiliated with European institutions and universities, Peak Oil is the date at which global oil production will reach its greatest ever rate and begin to decrease (ASPO). While some people believe that Peak Oil will bring a disastrous energy crisis, I would argue that Peak Oil will stimulate rapid advances in energy technology that will soften the transition from oil to alternative energy.

People have used oil since ancient times as a medicine and as a building material. However, oil did not become an important resource until the late 1800s, when the invention of the kerosene lamp brought oil consumption into people's everyday lives. When the automobile was invented, petroleum suddenly became today's valuable, sought-after, "black gold" (Hall). The oil industry has continued to expand into the sprawling. multi-billion dollar behemoth it is today. Until now, we have consumed more and more oil to fuel an explosion of cultural growth and technological development. We have ridden the wave of cheap, readily available energy and it has taken us

to great heights. The problem is, now the wave is peaking and our abundant source of energy is rapidly disappearing. Oil is not a renewable energy source, which means that there is only so much of it in the Earth. Once we run out, it could take millions of years for more to accumulate. It is a fact that we are rapidly running out of cheap, readily available oil, and that oil prices will continue to rise. This problem of running out of cheaply available oil is the definition of the oil crisis.

There is much debate about the nature of the oil crisis. People want to know when the crisis will occur and what it will be like, so they can know what to expect. The question of what it will look like is cause for endless speculation. Predictions range from the apocalyptic destruction of humanity, to a seamless transition to alternative energy sources, to the discovery of inexhaustible oil wells. Some feel that the future of energy is bright. According to the fact gathering website zFacts.com, "There is not going to be enough of a crisis. Not only will running out of oil fail to kill off several billion people as predicted (that's a relief) but it will not even raise the price of oil and gasoline enough to slow our energy growth rate..." ("Peak Oil Crisis?" 3). Most

"If the rate at which people recognize the danger and act isn't great enough, the oil crisis could have the effect of accelerating blindly into a brick wall."

people are less optimistic, but are not sure if the oil crisis is inevitable, "The earth, [the 2001 Baker Institute Report] concluded, was 'precariously close to utilizing all of its available global oil production', thereby 'raising the chances of an oil supply crisis'" (Boal et al. 47). Still others, like Matt Savinar, creator of the website, "Life After the Oil Crash," predict an inevitable catastrophic upheaval,

> Civilization as we know it is coming to an end soon. This is not the wacky proclamation of a doomsday cult...Rather, it is the scientific conclusion of the best-paid, most widely respected geologists, physicists, and investment bankers in the world. These are rational, professional, conservative individuals who are absolutely terrified by a phenomenon known as global "Peak Oil." (1)

There is much contention about the nature of the oil crisis because it is hugely complex, and involves many political, technological, social, and economic factors. Any attempt to predict the future of oil must weigh these factors and predict how they will change.

The question of when is closely related to the date of "Peak Oil." Predicting Peak Oil is critical to predicting the oil crisis. For instance, if all our oil wells mysteriously dried up tomorrow, Peak Oil would be now and the crisis would indeed be catastrophic. On the other hand, if the world turns out to contain more oil than we think, the date of Peak Oil could be pushed back twenty years, and we would probably never have a crisis. Energy technology would have time to develop some viable alternatives (PeakOil.com). Currently, demand for oil is increasing exponentially. Oil production is also increasing, but not quite as fast. This results in an increase in the price of oil. This trend was observable at the gas pumps September 2005 when prices soared to over $3 per gallon. It certainly won't kill our economy for oil prices to increase linearly, but when Peak Oil occurs, the effects will not be linear. As the consumption rate continues to

increase exponentially and the supply rate flattens out and begins to drop, the disparity will grow much more rapidly. The huge difference between supply and demand will cause prices to rise uninterrupted at an unprecedented rate. This price spike is what will affect people on the street, and cause the oil crisis (PeakOil.org). The size of the spike will determine the severity of the crisis, and the date of Peak Oil will affect the size of the spike. This is a simplistic model because of the immense complexity of the world oil market, but it is based on the fundamental economic principles of supply and demand. Nevertheless, the point remains that the date of Peak Oil is of central importance in determining the nature of the oil crisis.

The oil crisis has huge potential to be catastrophic. If handled incorrectly, or simply ignored, it could very well destroy our culture. Dr. C. Campbell, a Trustee of the Oil Depletion Analysis Centre, believes that "The scene is set for the Second Great Depression" (3). The dynamics governing the nature of the oil crisis are based on rates of change and certain arbitrary conditions. If these rates prove to be unfavorable, we will face a worse crisis. For example, if the rate at which our economy expands is not fast enough, it would increase the severity of the crisis. If trade rates, which are influenced by the political situation with the big Middle Eastern oil exporting countries, are not good, it could spell doom for the American oil economy. If the rate at which people recognize the danger and act isn't great enough, the oil crisis could have the effect of accelerating blindly into a brick wall. If the rate at which alternative energy technologies such as electric cars and efficient solar panels develop is insufficient, a relatively "dark age" of stagnant culture may result (ASPO). It is clear that if humanity sits around twiddling its metaphorical thumbs, then these rates may well be unfavorable and the oil crisis will hit us hard. Those who predict a catastrophic oil crisis usually base their claims on a pessimistic appraisal of these rates.

Those who feel that the oil crisis will have very severe effects point out the world's dependence on petroleum products and surmise that if oil becomes too expensive, people simply won't be able to afford a decent standard of living. They predict that unemployment will soar, the bottom will drop out of the economy and general hardship will descend upon the US and the world (Savinar 4). To use the analogy of Dr. C. J. Campbell, "Everyone had the equivalent of several unpaid and unfed slaves to do his work for him. These slaves are now getting old and won't work much longer. We need to find how to live without them" (5). Until now, we have exploited oil as if it was our energy slave. We have used it to haul our freight, power our homes, and do all our work for us. There is not much real argument about whether or not the world is highly dependent on oil. Oil isn't just used to power machines, it is the main ingredient to most plastics, and it is necessary for medicine, electricity, candy, rubber, and a host of synthetic chemicals. The oil crisis will also affect us by heavily impacting the world's food supplies. Worldwatch research associate and author of "Home Grown: The Case for Local Food in a Global Market" Brian Halweil is concerned about this problem.

> We are spending far more energy to get food to the table than the energy we get from eating the food. A head of lettuce grown in the Salinas Valley of California and shipped nearly 3,000 miles to Washington, D.C., requires about 36 times as much

fossil fuel energy in transport as it provides in food energy when it arrives. The farther we ship food, the more vulnerable our food system becomes. (Lazaroff 3)

Earthjustice Advocate Cat Lazaroff is of the opinion that many parts of the U.S. simply do not grow food anywhere near them. It is cheaper to grow corn in Indiana and ship it to Florida than it is to grow vegetables locally. In a worst-case scenario where people are reduced to growing all their food locally, arid regions would simply not support large populations (Lazaroff). Because dependence on oil is so ingrained in our lifestyle, even small changes in oil prices will have a large effect on our lives.

With this much at stake, it is clear that alternatives to oil must exist before oil prices shoot up, or we will face difficulties. And of course, there is the possibility that they won't exist by the time the oil crisis hits. Hydrogen is put forward as the wave of the future, but hydrogen fuel cell technology has been developing for the last 20 years, and it is still nowhere close to being a viable energy option (Hall 1). Why could we expect it to be a real alternative in the next five years? Electric power is a real alternative, but a deceptive one. Much of the country's electricity can only be generated with abundant, cheap oil, and battery technology is not anywhere near as efficient as oil in terms of weight and storage. For example, independent researcher Greg Schneider found that engineers have built a prototype electric car with the performance capabilities of a top of the line gas-powered sports car that is powered entirely by 6,800 tiny cell phone batteries. The car can be plugged into the wall to charge, and it doesn't pollute. What's the hitch? It costs $220,000 (Schneider 5). Scientists and engineers have plenty of good ideas for alternative energy sources, and they have made many of them work, but so far none of them can come anywhere close to the efficiency of oil. This deficiency has two effects: It increases the risk of a disastrous oil crisis by not providing us with options, and it reduces consumers' incentive to explore alternative energy. If a gas powered car is 50% the cost of an electric hybrid one, how many people are going to spring for the electric one based on some nebulous threat of expensive gas sometime in the unknown future? Once again, if alternative energy technology does not catch up to the power of oil before we start running out, we are going to be short on energy.

> *"Part of my reasoning for a mild oil crisis is a belief in the resilience of human nature in the face of adversity."*

The laws of physics state that to make anything move, energy must be exerted. In the modern world, almost all of the toughest moving jobs are driven by the best energy source: oil. Almost all our transportation infrastructure relies on oil. My neighbor, Russell Sullivan, former Boeing engineer, is of the opinion that without oil, all but a handful of the world's planes would be grounded. He informed me that we currently have no other financially feasible way to store energy in a plane that is potent enough to propel it through the air at speeds necessary for flight, and still be light enough to get off the ground. In terms of energy per pound, oil is vastly superior to any existing technology. We currently have no energy source that could come close to matching oil in terms of availability, cost, and power to portability ratio (Sullivan). Almost all of

our freight, air travel, civilian transport, and military infrastructure are powered exclusively by diesel oil and gasoline. If oil prices spike, people will be unable to afford a simple day trip to the state capitol. European vacations will become a pricey luxury. We will be forced to crawl where before we could run. In short, people's worlds will shrink.

To sum up, the risks involved with the oil crisis are grave. The precipice upon which we stand may well be one overlooking the destruction of our economy and the unraveling of our culture. If we lack the foresight and the expertise to overcome our dependence on oil, we may fall right along with the oil economy. If the oil economy does indeed topple our current way of life, it will be through our own failures. We will have squandered the muscle of our unpaid and unfed slaves, and not used it to secure our future.

However, all is not lost. By most accounts, there is still time before the oil crisis catches up with us. A fair guess at the date for Peak Oil is approximately 3 years from now. One must take into account the exponential increase in scientific achievement over the last 10 years. Technology tends to progress in leaps and bounds, whereas the Peak Oil problem approaches with more or less mathematical certainty. This is why energy technology will probably be the most variable factor determining the severity of the oil crisis. Partly because of its uncertain nature, energy technology could also have the biggest impact on the world's energy situation in the future. For example, James R. Maughan, General Manager, Controls and Power Electronics GE Energy argues, "Sustainable Nuclear fusion is kind of the holy grail of energy technology." We most likely will not have nuclear fusion to power our world by the time the oil crisis hits, but the possibility is there. It is that real possibility that we will, through the incentive of our lack of oil, find some breakthrough technology that fuels my optimism for the future.

There certainly is reasonable hope that energy technology, as well as other factors, will reduce the severity of the crisis. For example, we have sophisticated satellites capable of detecting oil deposits from space (Gazette-Times). People are becoming more aware and conscious of the oil dilemma, and as the cost of alternative energy decreases, are switching more readily to solar power and energy efficient systems. Engineering professor Stephen E. Silliman of the University of Notre Dame commented that energy technology will be the fastest growing and most influential scientific field of the younger generation. As oil prices go up, the market incentive to buy and develop better alternative energy sources will increase. You can buy a Toyota hybrid car powered by both gasoline and electricity for only 30% more than its conventional gasoline counterpart. All of these things give us hope for the future of energy and the oil crisis.

Of the many inventions that will be driven by the necessity of the energy crisis, one of the most important will almost certainly be more efficient solar cell technology. Solar cells are currently only about 20% efficient. As of yet, they are not profitable for use in small applications, or for short time spans. However, when the price of electricity goes

up, the application of solar panels in a residential setting will be very attractive. The sudden increase in interest will drive research to bring the cost down and efficiency up. This, in turn will increase consumer interest, and before too long, each neighborhood will produce most of its electricity locally in an efficient, clean, renewable way. All that stands between this futuristic scenario and reality is competition from the oil economy, a minor scientific advance, and the market incentive to start the process rolling. It would take a major technological leap for solar power to take over from oil for transportation, but it is certainly a realistic goal for residential electricity.

An example of people incorporating energy conservation into their lives would be a Notre Dame professor and her husband who built an energy efficient home in Michigan. They used a variety of energy conservation technologies to minimize their energy consumption and their negative impact on the environment. They insulated their home effectively against unwanted heat exchange and added a geothermal heat exchange system to help heat and cool their house as needed. They also retrofitted their house for solar panels so that when solar panel efficiency increases it will be easy to install them. These energy efficiency measures already keep their energy bill low and will help enormously when natural gas and electricity prices go up. If every homebuilder had the foresight of this couple, perhaps there would be no oil crisis. Towards this end, the government is trying to encourage these conservation strategies by offering significant tax incentives for building houses with energy efficient systems (Interview A).

> *"The threat posed by the oil crisis is, I think, to our comfort and our convenience, not our health or happiness."*

Most people agree that the world is too deeply dependant on oil not to feel the effects of Peak Oil and the oil crisis. However, I predict that the crisis will be manageable. I would argue that there will be a window of time, possibly a year, when the price of oil will increase significantly, but not too sharply. I feel that this window of time where oil prices are stimulatingly high, but not prohibitively high, will be of critical importance to the severity of the oil crisis. During this window, the market incentive to swiftly develop and market alternative energy will be great, and the price of oil will not be too great of a hindrance to the development and spread of that technology. I would argue that there will be moderate hardship and slight turmoil, but since necessity is the mother of invention, it will drive innovation and change for a more energy efficient way of life.

To illustrate this prediction, consider the following scenario: Imagine that over the course of a year, gas prices rise steadily from $3 a gallon to $15 a gallon. Average consumers would notice this increase and feel its effects on their wallets. It would simply not be cost effective to buy a new gasoline powered car once the additional cost of gas was factored in. They would probably need to switch to electric cars to afford the commute to work. Electricity may be more expensive than it is now, but it will most likely be much cheaper than gasoline. They would have had to adjust their lifestyles to significantly reduce their dependence on oil. They probably would have felt some

economic hardship that year from weaning themselves of petroleum products, but they certainly would have survived.

Part of my reasoning for a mild oil crisis is a belief in the resilience of human nature in the face of adversity. People could survive temporarily without cheap oil, and in case of a natural disaster or sudden oil shortage, the US is on its way to storing 1 billion barrels of oil in a strategic oil reserve "just in case" (Fossil Energy Office). Most of the U.S. has its basic needs taken care of. Even if the crisis did turn out to be catastrophic, humanity would swiftly find ways to adapt and survive. After all, necessity is the mother of invention. The threat posed by the oil crisis is, I think, to our comfort and our convenience, not our health or happiness. We shall have to give up our wasteful habits like shipping food all over the country unnecessarily and driving SUVs. Our society has a huge amount of economic and technological momentum. It is my belief that that momentum will be sufficient to bridge the gap between the oil crisis and the advent of alternative energy technologies.

The most important factor in mitigating the harm inflicted by the oil crisis will certainly be people's awareness of the situation and their willingness to make small personal sacrifices and prudent choices about energy conservation. Everyone should be aware that the age of SUVs and the entire oil economy is drawing to a close and, according to my research, in all probability will be over in the next 10 years. I would love to be proven correct in my prediction that the age of oil power will pass without disaster because our society realized the danger and found another energy source capable of providing our society with the power it needs to thrive. Our society has been granted an enormous leg up with its development by the exploitation of fossil fuel. We have reached great heights riding on its muscle. As we start to run out, we must be extremely careful how we use the last of it, so we maintain our level of achievement. Unfortunately, our relationship with oil has been sordid. Riddled with political strife, wars, greed, and oppression, our tainted relationship with our energy slaves has mirrored our tainted historical relationship with human slavery. Oil has definitely become a mixed blessing. I for one will not be particularly sad to see the dirty, smelly, noisy age of oil retire in favor of clean, renewable electricity and hydrogen technology. As the next decade rolls around, it may find our cities humming with clean electric and hydrogen power.

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Author's
biography

Bob Kessler

Formerly of Northbrook, Illinois, Bob Kessler is a sophomore currently living in O'Neill Hall. He came to school at Notre Dame hoping to see a Football National Championship but has strong concerns over the 2006 team's secondary. Although his paper criticizes Wal-Mart, he has no problems with shopping there and finds their prices to be very reasonable. Bob plans to major in political science with the hope of someday changing the world.

Bob would like to thank all of his interviewees, who were very cooperative and helpful with their input, especially those at the Mishawaka Wal-Mart. He would also like to thank his professor and classmates for their help with his writing process and thank his parents for their support.

The Closing of an Open-Door: WAL-MART'S COMMUNICATION CRISIS

Bob Kessler

Researched Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Nicole MacLaughlin

In recent years, Wal-Mart executives have been criticized for not allowing their workers to unionize and for treating employees unfairly because of it. To many people these union practices seem to be "un-American," but Wal-Mart's actions have surprisingly stayed within the limits of the law and have actually infiltrated the American business culture. Although Sam Walton started these antiunion policies, he also used an open-door policy to foster communication with his workers which limited their desire for a union. Currently, the open-door policy is Wal-Mart's answer to criticisms about their union policies, but this is no longer plausible in the massive company that Wal-Mart has become because it no longer creates a means of communication between workers. Open communication between workers and executives is imperative to company practices because without it, workers have no way to protect their own rights, and as a result, they could be subject to poor working conditions. Therefore, the company needs to adopt a more neutral position regarding worker organization so that workers can create a better means of communication, and so they can set an example for other corporations to follow.

When Sam Walton was in charge of the company, unions were not necessary as a means of communication because the open-door policy that he implemented gave them an adequate vehicle for voicing their concerns to management. The open-door policy created an environment where employees could go to their managers and tell them something was wrong. In his book, The Wal-Mart Decade, business writer Robert Slater talks about Walton's view of the open-door policy by writing, "he felt he had to make the open-door policy work, because if he was going to fly around the country and tell the employees that he was their partner, he had to at least listen to their complaints" (129). Walton felt that this open-door policy would help the company run more efficiently by creating a better means of communication that gave the common workers a feeling of importance. The open-door policy did not just afford the employees access to their managers in a time of need; it also meant that employees and managers actually had direct access to Walton himself through his store visits. In

their in-depth history of Walton's rise to power, <u>Wal-Mart: A History of Sam Walton's Retail Phenomenon</u>, authors Sandra Vance and Roy Scott describe these visits: "He was firmly convinced that it was essential for him and the other executives to spend several days a week visiting the stores [. . .] Indeed, many good ideas first came to the attention of senior management during those store visits" (78). Vance and Scott describe the open-door policy at work. Walton and other executives went to the individual stores and were able to hear the complaints the employees had, opening up communication between the hourly workers and executives. Because the executives listened to what employees wanted, they could better help them, while also helping the company. Yale University historian Bethany Moreton talks about an example of this in her essay, "It Came from Bentonville: The Agrarian Origins of Wal-Mart Culture": "The company could win an employee's bedrock loyalty by accommodating her hours to her children's school day — a perk few parents would take for granted in any field" (80). Communication between the workers and the executives made this possible, proving that labor unions were unnecessary at that time as a means for communication.

> *"The current executives of Wal-Mart do not feel that their reputation is still based in the company, and therefore do not take the extra steps that Walton did to make the open-door policy work."*

When Walton was in charge of the company, he needed the open door policy to be successful because his personal reputation was cemented into the company. Moreton explains, "The identification of Wal-Mart with Sam Walton allowed his personal reputation to stand for the company's; Walton very publicly cultivated company policies that stressed transparent procedural ethics" (76). Walton put his personal reputation on the line by making it go hand-in-hand with Wal-Mart's. If people looked at Wal-Mart as a bad guy, they would look at Walton as a bad guy. However, Walton knew that discount stores like his were successful only because they could control the unfixed wages that they paid their workers (Adams 217), and he remained able to pay these wages because he had gained the "bedrock loyalty" of many employees. The open-door policy was what originally allowed for the communication between workers and executives that created the loyalty between them. If Walton had not orchestrated the open-door policy as he did, his employees would not have felt that loyalty to him, and they might have been compelled to orchestrate larger labor movements within the company.

Since the death of Sam Walton, Wal-Mart has expanded to become the largest company in the world and the open-door policy has become less effective at helping workers, managers, and executives communicate. The current executives of Wal-Mart do not feel that their reputation is still based in the company, and they therefore do not take the extra steps that Walton did to make the open-door policy work. Of course Wal-Mart's executives insist that the policy still does work; as former executive Don Soderquist wrote, "Over the years, we have resolved many problems that we never would have even been aware of if one of our associates hadn't used the Open Door. I personally spent many hours responding to phone calls and letters from associates

with whom I would never have had contact if not for this corporate commitment and discipline." (62) However, under closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that the size of the company and the lack of initiative among executives to make it work have made it much more difficult for executives to communicate with workers through the open-door policy. As Slater (who is not a Wal-Mart critic) said in his book, "just trying to find someone more senior than your own manager (against whom you had the complaint) might not have been that easy, finding that senior persons' name and getting the complaint to the person took time and effort and required some courage" (129). A Wal-Mart employee of 13 years, whom I will refer to by the pseudonym Jane Smith, confirmed Slater's view in a personal interview with me by saying, "A lot [of employees] don't feel like the open-door policy is done fairly locally. A lot of people are scared to go to management [. . .] they are scared that they will get fired" (Smith). The open-door policy cannot possibly be effective if hourly workers are afraid to talk to their managers. The workers are afraid because it is such a big company, management can always replace them with another employee. Employees may have felt more secure talking to Sam because he showed that he cared about his employees by going out of his way to visit the stores. With Sam Walton no longer making his store visits, it has become increasingly difficult for employees to overcome this fear and try to change things for the better.

Even though the open-door policy no longer works, the Wal-Mart executives continue to hide behind it. Slater wrote about how current Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott suggested that the open-door policy was still at work: "when an employee sent a package that arrived at the CEO's home on a Sunday; it contained a letter and photos that showed evidence of his store's stating that certain items were on sale in violation of Wal-Mart's policy" (130). Scott used this as an example of how the open-door policy still worked. However, the fact that the employee had to go through all the trouble to find Scott's address and send him pictures shows just how the executives are no longer making themselves accessible to the employees like Walton did. The fact that the employee had to do all the work shows that there is no longer an acceptable means of direct communication between the workers and the executives. Because of the deterioration of the open-door policy and the fact that people are locally afraid to go to management, a workers organization should be allowed by Wal-Mart executives so as to create a better, and more direct, means of communication.

Not only do Wal-Mart executives counter criticisms by claiming the open-door policy still works, the executives go so far as to try and convince local managers that the policy actually does work. The company's propaganda makes its managers into loyal employees who will defend the company no matter what. The assistant manager of the same store where Smith worked said in an interview, "We have a complete open-door policy [pause] there is no, [pause] there is a chain of command, but quite honestly any hourly associate can talk to anybody they'd like to within the company" (Horn). In saying this, the assistant manager essentially proved that the open-door policy does not work through his lack of awareness of the employees' fear Smith described. When asked about the open-door policy, another hourly worker said, "I don't think people

utilize it enough" (Hatfield). He did not outright say that people were afraid of using it, but in saying that people did not use it, he essentially supported Smith's claim that people are fearful of getting fired. This becomes increasingly troubling because the employees at Wal-Mart seem to need a better way to communicate with management and executives. When asked if people in the store feel that they are fairly treated, Smith responded by saying, "Right now, right now morale in the store is very poor." She explained this by saying, "I think the managers in the store don't have proper training, and they aren't able to communicate with the workers in the store" (Smith). Smith seems to believe that the managers are not properly performing their jobs and are unable to communicate with their own employees. While managers may express their belief in the open-door policy, some may find it difficult to practice this system in the way Sam Walton would have liked. This seemed evident when the assistant manager said, "There is nothing for the hourly to fear, they have every kind of recourse. If they are duly wronged, they have every kind of recourse to right the action" (Horn). Managers seem unaware, however, that employees are afraid to take advantage of the open-door policy, rendering it ineffective.

Even though Wal-Mart's open-door policy is no longer effective at creating a means for the employees and executives to communicate with each other, the company still continues to use its antiunion policies at the cost of their employees. In his book, The United States of Wal-Mart, business critic John Dicker criticizes many of Wal-Mart's business practices. He writes about Jacksonville meat cutters (working at Wal-Mart) who attempted to unionize in February of 2000 by writing, "Seventy-two-year old Sidney Smith also voted yes [for union representation]; he got axed for eating a pre-weighed banana on the checkout line" (90). The tragedy is that this is legal. Fr. Mark Thesing, a Professor of Business Ethics at The University of Notre Dame says, "If you want something really scandalous look at the concept of employment at will, which basically means that Wal-Mart can fire anybody for any reason at any time as long as it's not an illegal reason" (Thesing). Nonsense firings like these not only demonstrated to the other meat cutters that the executives had no interest in allowing a union, but also showed how communication had broken down between workers and executives in the period following the death of Sam Walton. The executives clearly showed that they had no interest in allowing any part of the company to unionize even though the workers clearly needed a new way to communicate with the executives. In this way, they showed that they would go to great lengths to keep unions out of Wal-Mart.

The hourly employees not only fear going through the open-door with a complaint, but they also have fear of creating an organization that will replace the open-door. When asked about unionization, Smith said, "Management told us we don't want to go union; they said that we would lose our voice with the open-door policy. They don't want us to think independently." Threats such as these by the corporate executives foster the fear that employees will lose their ability to voice their concerns with management even though they actually lost their voice long ago. This fear of losing their voices has actually made many of the hourly employees' antiunion. When asked what hourly workers think about unions, a Wal-Mart employee said, "I think that most of the

hourly workers here are definitely anti-union" (Hatfield). It appears that because the company has threatened its workers with antiunion rhetoric, many of the employees actually believe that a union would be bad for them. Wal-Mart further prevents unionization of its stores by simply not recognizing the unions, as Dicker wrote in his criticism, "The only Wal-Mart store to unionize successfully was in Ontario, Canada [. . .] But the fledgling union was broken by the company's flat-out refusal to recognize the contract" (92). As Wal-Mart continues to profit off of their refusal to unionize, their employees are suffering from a lack of communication with executives and no remaining open-doors through which to change things.

As Wal-Mart continues to crush any attempts at unionization, they use shrewd tactics to convince their managers that they are doing the right thing, while staying within the laws of the United States. Wal-Mart's managers have been trained to hire people who do not know about labor laws. This is evident by Hatfield, the other hourly employee I interviewed, who said, "I have never been a member of a labor union, so I don't really know what kind of benefits it would give us" (Hatfield). It is possible that Wal-Mart hires people like him because of his lack of experience with labor unions. This idea was echoed by a Wal-Mart co-manager who, according to Dicker, "was instructed by her district manager not to hire anyone with union experience" (94). Furthermore, it is interesting that two of the Wal-Mart employees that I spoke with who appeared to be antiunion, or uninformed about unions, were also working their way through the ranks at Wal-Mart. Hatfield said that he had been told he would make a good manager, and said he was going to go through training, and Horn told me, "[I was] hourly stocking shelves, and I'll probably be the co-manager of the new store on the south side [. . .] I have no formal education, you know I'm a high school graduate, and I respect the fact that Wal-Mart gives those opportunities to anybody that applies themselves" (Horn). Both of these men feel like they owe part of what they have to Wal-Mart, and they are in fact loyal to Wal-Mart because of it. The company continues to gain the bedrock loyalty of employees, like they did under Sam Walton, only now they are not using communication; they are using promotions (or at least the promise of promotions).

Furthermore, Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott has created a means of communication with the managers of stores so that they can work together to prevent unions. He uses a private web site called "Lee's Garage" to convince these managers, whose loyalty he already has, that the policies they are implementing are the just things to do. In turn those managers truly feel the policies they implement are fair so that when dealing with hourly workers they spread the ideas to their workers who may later become managers. According to The New York Times, Scott said on his website,

> "[. . .] In the United Food and Commercial Workers, we have an adversary that would like to stop Wal-Mart from growing [. . .] And it is probably in its best interest that we don't grow. That way its members' employers can continue to charge extremely high prices for food and tolerate poor service. . ." (qtd. in Greenhouse and Barbaro C4).

This article gave the public rare insight into the instruction that Scott gives his managers and how he uses his rhetoric to convince managers that company policy is just. He talks about how the union wants Wal-Mart to stop growing, but neglects to mention the fact that the union is, according to its web site, "about workers helping workers achieve better wages, better benefits, and safer working conditions" (ufcw.org). It seems that the only communication that is occurring between executives and people working in the stores is Scott telling store managers how to prevent workers from unionizing and keeping these workers from achieving that fair level of communication.

Wal-Mart's union policies not only affect its own employees, but the size of the company has caused a ripple effect. Workers in other American companies are feeling Wal-Mart's effects as well. In a piece for the New York Review of Books, critic Simon Head wrote, "If Wal-Mart had been a union company and its employees had the same wages and benefits as other California store employees, Safeway and Albertsons could not have used Wal-Mart's planned entry into the California market as an excuse to beat down employee wages and benefits" (87–88). Head refers to a strike that occurred in California grocery stores where the stores had to lower wages and benefits so that they could compete with the new Wal-Mart Supercenters that were being built in the state. In his criticism of Wal-Mart, Head says that their policies caused competitors to lower their standards so that they could remain competitive with Wal-Mart. CEO Lee Scott would argue that this is something that relatively few workers must sacrifice for the greater good of the consumers (Impact 7). Some theories of business ethics would even support Scott's policies. Fr. Thesing said, "So, from an ethical standpoint, Wal-Mart is working from the perspective of 'Our job is to be a good business and to return to our shareholders the largest profit we can' . . . is it ethical? According to the conventional view of corporate social responsibility [yes]" (Thesing). Thesing went on to name other theories of business ethics that did not subscribe to Scott's, but it is important to note that Wal-Mart's practices are considered to be ethical by some who are focused on their role as a corporation. Therefore, even though Wal-Mart's union polices are so far reaching that they are adversely affecting the workers of other stores that are already unionized, they are still considered by some to be ethical.

Because of Wal-Mart's prominence in the nation, its treatment of unions has contributed to antiunion policies becoming a part of the new American business culture. In a recent episode of the primetime television show The Office, a corporate executive gets angry with the regional manager of a company because his warehouse workers want to form a union and better their low wages and poor working conditions. The executive proceeds to go into the warehouse and tell the workers that if they try to unionize, they will all lose their jobs ("Boys and Girls" 2006). The scene is clearly a social critique of companies like Wal-Mart and the antiunion policies that have spread across the country. The corporate executive in the show acted almost the same way that CEO Lee Scott does in instructing his regional managers about unions. The fact that the largest employer in the nation does not allow unions has made the antiunion idea a part of the new American business culture evidencing that Wal-Mart's prac-

tices have been far more wide ranging than anyone would expect. In his book, <u>One Market Under God</u>, writer and social critic Thomas Frank talks about this phenomenon: "While it was true that unions had been rolled back so comprehensively that economic democracy basically ceased to exist, *Fast Company*, along with an entire industry of social thinkers, energetically assured Americans that they had nothing to fear" (219). Frank argues that democracy ceased to exist in the workplace because of antiunion ideas that had spread throughout America. This statement was reinforced by Smith when she said, "[Although] all the people think they need better representation . . . They are scared that they will get fired. A lot of these people need the money, and they can't afford to lose the job" (Smith). The fear that Smith talks about is exactly what Frank is talking about. People at Wal-Mart, as well as at other companies, do have something to fear even though companies like Wal-Mart claim that an open door policy exists. Wal-Mart claims that the open-door policy works, when in reality hourly workers are afraid to speak up and communicate. Wal-Mart's policies therefore not only affect its employees, but they have had an extraordinary effect on the American business culture.

Although Wal-Mart executives (and their loyal managers) would disagree, the open-door policy has clearly failed since the death of Sam Walton. Because of this, Wal-Mart should cease its antiunion policies and at the very least adopt a neutral attitude towards unions and allow them if the employees want them. The employees need a better way to communicate with the executives of the company since the open-door policy no longer works. If the hourly employees lack an ample means for communication and are afraid to talk to management (like some currently are), problems about working conditions go unaddressed. Although some employees, such as Smith, feel that a union would not help the situation, many agree that something needs to be done. Smith said, "not a union, no, but I think that an organization, one formed by the people in the store would be better." Even if the employees do not want an actual union, Wal-Mart executives should allow for a type of organization like the one Smith talked about so that the open-door policy can function properly and employees can communicate with managers and executives. Furthermore, Wal-Mart's antiunion policies have caused problems in other companies that would be lessened if Wal-Mart's workers were allowed to create this workers "grassroots organization" as Smith described it. She made sure to emphasize the grassroots idea and to distinguish this organization from a union because a union would be centrally organized from people who might be unfamiliar with Wal-Mart. The organization she envisions would be run by the hourly workers at Wal-Mart, not a larger union that already exists. This type of grassroots organization could secure a direct conduit from the hourly employees to the executives because the views of the organization would reflect the views of the hourly worker on the whole, and the executives would be forced to listen even through closed doors. If the executives refused to listen, the workers would already have an organization in place that could facilitate a strike. It is at least one employee's opinion that this type of organization would work better than a union, and I agree with this opinion. In the early days of the company, Sam Walton made the open door policy work by visiting the stores and talking to lower level employees because his

personal reputation was at stake. Today, the company has become too big for any executive to do what Sam used to do, and the executives no longer care to do that. By crushing attempts at unionization, Wal-Mart executives have not only hurt their workers, they have also helped foster the new antiunion business culture in America today. These are problems that can only be resolved if Wal-Mart allows its workers to create some sort of organization that would alleviate the communication problems and once again give workers a voice.

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biography

MICHAEL PETRONGOLO

Michael Petrongolo was born and raised in New Jersey. This Keough Hall resident is presently a mechanical engineering major. Even though he is an engineering major, Michael still appreciates art and how it can speak to people powerfully. He was particularly struck by the abundance of political cartoons around the time of September 11th. With this in mind, he decided to explore the world of political cartoons within emotionally distressed lands, particularly postcolonial ones, in order to better understand the benefits of applying art to politics.

Political Cartoons
WITHIN POSTCOLONIAL LANDS

Michael Petrongolo

Researched Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Anna Boyagoda

Although their works were published more than twenty years apart, both Christie Davies and Egon Larsen discuss the effects and uses of political humor during periods of turmoil. These two authors agree that political humor can yield positive effects during these unstable situations but also that it cannot win a war. However, the similarities in their beliefs are greatly outweighed by the differences primarily because Larsen looks at the issue from the vantage point of oppressed people while Davies does so from that of nations. In spite of this, when analyzed in the postcolonial context of the American Revolution, their views complement one another. Their ideas are reconciled because the patriots are in rebellion and in many ways assume the role of the "governing body." When cultivating a revolution, this "governing body" needs to unify all people behind the cause. To achieve the goal of unity, the "governing body" can and has effectively used political cartoons as a "strategy in war" within postcolonial lands such as Ireland (Davies 395).

In his book, Wit as a Weapon, Egon Larsen discusses the use of jokes, primarily verbal ones, and the positive effect they have on the oppressed people who use them. He says that jokes arise when people are placed in oppressive situations. Larsen's exact words are "their [jokes'] common denominator is that they pass from mouth to mouth among the 'silent majority', the people who have been deprived of legitimate means of expression. Thus jokes assume the role of the *vox populi*..." (2). According to Larsen, jokes are more than simple entertainment; they are an assessment of what an oppressed people, like those of postcolonial nations, truly think. It is therefore fair to say that oppressed people are united through their jokes. Larsen also argues, via Sigmund Freud, that "humour is not resigned, it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also the pleasure principle, which is able to assert itself here against the unkindness of the real circumstances" (qtd. in Larsen 3). By stating this, Larsen recognizes that these jokes, this "vox populi," help the people maintain their sanity. In other words, they use humor as both a coping and unifying mechanism.

However, Larsen is not idealistic in his statements about jokes and their power. He attempts to ground himself by acknowledging that "jokes may not be able to topple a dictatorial regime" (Larsen 3). After ceding this point and thus reaffirming his good sense, Larsen presents another important facet of political humor and a reason for its success: "the oppressors have no defence against it. If they try to fight back they appear only more ridiculous" (Larsen 3). In other words, if an occupying and domineering force acknowledges an apparently ridiculous and insignificant claim, it is giving it credibility. In doing this, the imperial force would appear foolish to the world around it.

On the other side of the conversation is Christie Davies. In the first paragraph of "Humour is not a Strategy in War," Christie Davies writes, "Humour can be and is used locally in war-time, sometimes with some success, to maintain morale and to promote patriotic aims and goals with some success, but to describe it as a strategy is to use a quite inappropriate metaphor" (395). She furthers her claim on the basis of an implied, yet key, argument: humor lacks the ability to be a viable weapon in war and therefore cannot rise to the more encompassing title of "strategy." Davies then attempts to prove this argument, and thus her claim, through several contentions.

Similar actions performed by common people were a movement by the "governing body." As a result, whether realized or not, collective action of our Founding Fathers in the interest of achieving a certain goal was in and of itself "strategy."

The first of these contentions is that humor cannot be controlled by an establishment because it is too free and elusive to keep boxed in by a nation. Davies acknowledges that humor often helps further the goals of a nation in regards to war, but she argues that this is not because it is used as a "strategy." In other words, humor serves its own goals, the goals of its artists, and sometimes these goals happen to coincide with those of furthering a war effort. It is important to realize that this statement is congruous with Larsen's argument: humor is used by the oppressed people. By acknowledging this fact, each author's argument is given a greater amount of credibility, and it is seen that the difference between their conclusions is the result of unique approaches to the issue. Larsen addresses the issue from the vantage point of the oppressed while Davies does so from that of nations.

 Secondly, Davies makes the charge that humor is ineffective when dealing with many large-scale events: "jokes are like pea-shooters — effective against individuals but ineffective as a means of achieving political change or military victory. They are of little importance to the strategist" (399). Her third point is a two-pronged attack on the success humor and political cartoons have in getting a message across. She first states, "the playful may well distract from the serious rather than reinforce it" (Davies 396). Then, the next paragraph follows this statement by presenting the argument that humor and cartoons lead to misinterpretations, and therefore their very purpose sometimes becomes questionable. These are both very valid points to take into consideration for many times they may be true. However, when political humor and cartoons are used properly and fulfill their potential, this is avoided.

In his book, Larsen is consistent with Davies' argument when he recognizes that force outweighs humor and quotes Karl Marx: "the weapon of criticism…cannot replace the criticism by weapon" (qtd. in Larsen 50). However, Larsen does not completely dismiss the use of humor as an important weapon, or even strategy, in war. He leaves things a little more open ended than does Davies. As a result of this closed-structure, Davies' argument is very provocative, but does not seem to hold up in every situation. This is the case when it is matched up against the political cartoons from the period of the American Revolution, in particular Benjamin Franklin's "Join, or Die" and Paul Revere's "Boston Massacre."

Unlike some of the oppressed people which Larsen discusses in his book, the American colonists managed to voice their opinion in ways besides word of mouth. One such alternative was political cartoons. Davies would claim that the use of political cartoons was not a coordinated strategy. It simply happened that the goal of a few coincided with patriotic ideals. However, is it not reasonable to suggest that even though these cartoons were not commissioned by a higher authority, their purpose was instrumental to organizing the war effort? The colonists had to unify in cause before they could go out and fight side-by-side. This indispensable piece of the puzzle had to be laid before a war could be waged. Also, in this case, the case of a rebellion, the colonists were their authority. They were the ones choosing to or not choosing to fight. They were not subject to rulers making the decision, they were the rulers. Therefore, in a sense, similar actions performed by common people were a movement by the "governing body." As a result, whether realized or not, collective action of our Founding Fathers in the interest of achieving a certain goal was in and of itself "strategy."

In his book, The Political Cartoon, Charles Press lays out what he calls the "three elements of political cartoons." They are the "picture of reality," "moral message," and "mood of civility: imagery and artistry" (Press 63; 65; 70), all of which are extremely important in understanding how the political cartoons by Franklin and Revere managed to be used as "strategy in war." The three elements come together like a well oiled-machine in the cartoons by Franklin and Revere (respectively pictured below), and through them, these two members of the "governing body" are able to "speak" to the colonists.

In his <u>The Political Cartoon</u>, Charles Press states, "Cartoonists claim to be peddling truth. What they portray may be an imaginary situation in allegory or a figure greatly distorted by caricature, but to the artists this is the essence of what is actually happening. They are faithful to reality rather than merely painting the surface features or what is literally to be seen" (Press 63). This is the platform from which both Revere and Franklin delved into the political scene. They felt what they were saying was the truth hidden within their postcolonial environment and that it needed to be "heard" by all of the colonists. Their passion, for what they felt was the underlying truth of the time, comes to life in their rebellious art. It is the same passion which drove these men to risk their lives for their future country. This intrinsic passion is seen most clearly in their work when examining the other two elements of political cartoons.

By means of treating an issue close to the hearts of people, simple pictures and messages are transformed into heartfelt depictions of a situation. When an experience which tears at the heart is addressed, the audience is no longer able to look at the cartoons from a distance; it is, instead, drawn into communion with the imagery.

The second element, the "moral message," is interlinked with the first. With the platform of truth, the artists are able to make comments about the postcolonial world around them. For example, Paul Revere is able to comment on the moral atrocities of the British from his perception of what is true. Since Revere believes his drawing to portray the truth, the essence of what happened, his message is simple: this disunity is not acceptable; something must be done. Another way of looking at this aspect is that all forms of political cartoons are just that, political. By being so, they attempt to shape people's beliefs; they try to impart "truth" to their audiences. They attempt to get their message out.

The first two elements of political cartoons can also apply to revolutionary literature, but the third, that of "imagery and artistry," cannot. It is a political cartoon's defining characteristic. What is drawn and how it is drawn brings to life the artist's message. Both Franklin's and Revere's drawings demonstrate this, just in different ways. Franklin's cartoon is as simple and straightforward as drawing can be; it simply puts a metaphor into picture form. However, as a picture, it has the ability to be painted in the minds of those who see it. This is one cartoon the colonists would not forget. In a slightly different context, if Franklin's message was not placed in this form, would it have been remembered as readily as it is by people even today?

For these reasons, cartoons, like those by Revere and Franklin, served the patriots greatly as a voice and a means of uniting the colonists against Britain. They were more than simply pieces of humor and art. They were propaganda; they were a "weapon." The cartoons, along with literary pieces, aided in achieving the number one goal of the "governing body": unity. In other words, the cartoons worked to mold the "vobes populorum" (voices of peoples) into what Larsen calls the "vox populi" (the voice of the people). Therefore, in being a "weapon" against disunity the cartoons were also "strategy" used in uniting.

Yet, Davies then would most likely make the charge that cartoons, like Franklin's and Revere's, actually had little affect on colonial unity. That is, at best, they were ineffective "strategy." However, there is sufficient reason to believe that they were able to greatly contribute towards the rallying of colonists. If nothing else, they had to add fuel to the debate, throw wood on the fire. By doing this, they drew people into the ongoing revolutionary debate. The benefit of them being illustrations is that, unlike literature, they did not only target the educated. On the contrary, they could be "read" by everyone. In other words, these pictures helped keep the revolutionary fire growing by keeping the issues surrounding the period alive and well. However, the beauty behind the ability of these two cartoons to rally people comes to full light when they are examined through the lens of Kenneth Burke's <u>Attitudes toward History</u>.

In Chapter Two of Part One, Burke lays out "poetic categories," two of which are of particular importance, comedy and burlesque. Since political cartoons, like literature, attempt to make a statement, these terms can be reapplied to the language of art. Burke states that a primary characteristic of comedy is that it paints people not as malicious but mistaken. In other words, comedy points out the mistakes of others and by doing so encourages the people to correct their ways. Another motif of comedy is "dwarfing the situation," or more simply, oversimplifying the problem (Burke 43). Therefore, by using comedy, an artist is able to steer his/her audience towards a specific solution which is portrayed as quite obvious.

This is the frame in which Ben Franklin tried to unify the colonies. His cartoon, although not particularly humorous, attempts to point out the error in the ways of the colonies. During the Revolutionary Period, there was a superstition that if the pieces of a cut-up snake were placed together the snake would come back to life; Franklin capitalized on this (Press 52). In his cartoon, he is attempting to have "the snake" revitalized by unifying the pieces which are representative of the individual colonies. This is, no doubt, an oversimplification of the problems surrounding the time and does not address obstacles or issues which are intertwined with the Revolution or unification. It only says that the pieces simply need to be joined together. However, the picture along with the caption, "Join, or Die," does make an explicit assessment of the situation and, by no means, was meant to be taken lightly. In fact, the image was so engaging that it was utilized by other patriots following in Franklin's footsteps.

On the contrary, burlesque cartoons, like that of Paul Revere's, went about pushing for unity in an altogether different way. Burke states, "the writer of burlesque makes no attempt to get inside the psyche of his victim. Instead, he is content to select the externals of behavior, driving them to a 'logical conclusion' that becomes their 'reduction to absurdity'" (Burke 54). More succinctly, the artist paints the subject of his artwork in a bad light. This is Revere's path of attack. The audience of Revere's etching is the colonists, but the subject of it is imperial Britain and her soldiers. He portrays the soldiers as a firing squad shooting the colonists even though historical scholars can tell you that is not the way things happened; the events of the Boston Massacre were much less structured than as portrayed in the etching. Nonetheless, Revere paints the

British as undeniably evil. He shows that they need to be forced out of the colonies. They have no right to do what they are doing. In other words, Paul Revere is attempting to unify the colonists on the basis of Britain's evil actions and the moral obligation of the colonies to respond to those actions.

These two types of cartoons work hand in hand. The comedic ones give the colonists instruction while the burlesque ones feed the fire. Placed together in the correct balance, these cartoons have the ability to create a unified atmosphere full of desire for change. They have the ability to produce an electrified environment ripe for revolution.

However, even with all of these things going for it, the political cartoon is not a constant force to be confronted in the present age. On the contrary, there seems to be only little pockets of revitalization when this hibernating art form wakes. Since revitalization requires a spark to ignite it, there must be a specific catalyst which triggers these periods of pictorial importance. There must be a common denominator. This unifying thread is frequently emotional distress of a community. When placed in an atmosphere of emotional distress, the imagery provided by the cartoons is all the more striking and intriguing. By means of treating an issue close to the hearts of people, simple pictures and messages are transformed into heartfelt depictions of a situation. When an experience which tears at the heart is addressed, the audience is no longer able to look at the cartoons from a distance; it is, instead, drawn into communion with the imagery. This is the reason why illustrations exist in the postcolonial setting even in the modern age. One only needs to look to Ireland.

The past hundred years or so of Ireland's history have been characterized by much emotion and violence between the Catholics and Protestants and the Irish and English. As a result of this high tension and ongoing struggle, there has been the constant call for unity. Just as in the American Revolution, in order to be successful in the pursuit of a cause, there must be a solid base of activists. Some people may be quick to question, and rightly so, the perpetual appeal for unity in Ireland because, at specific times, Ireland was in a very real sense at war with itself. However, even during these times of civil war there was an attempt at unity; the goal was to unify each of the factions. Therefore, since Ireland's misgivings with British rule began, there has been a summons by the "governing body" to unify in one shape or another. This ceaseless need for unity in Ireland provided an atmosphere in which the political cartoon could be truly cultivated.

John F. O'Hea's "It Is Done!" (pictured above) exemplifies this concept. Printed in November 1867, it was an attempt to unify the Irish population against Britain on the basis of British conduct. The specific incident it addresses is the executing of the Manchester Martyrs. Since the image was printed only about a week after the event actually took place and with the subtext "Manchester, November 23, 1867," there would have been no mistaking what it stood for. In other words, O'Hea's "picture of reality" was in a prime position to connect with his audience.

The imagery in "It Is Done!" is explicit in depicting the "act." Right away one can see the malice in the face of the caricature of Britain, which lacks any kind of remorse for the deed. The message is clear: Britain is heartless. In the picture, one also sees a girl weeping. The sorrow she endures because of the loss is quite evident. It was a heart-wrenching event. Placed together, these two images polarize each other: the girl is all the more pure and innocent while the creature representing imperial Britain is all the more despised. It is also clear that because the representation of Britain is in the forefront of the drawing that is what O'Hea wants his audience to focus on. The purpose of the girl is to bring to life memories and stir up emotion. Then, in this state of mind, O'Hea wishes for his audience to turn its attention towards the "murderer" and become filled with disgust. In other words, the imagery used by O'Hea is meant to appeal to the emotions in Ireland, and from this platform, he wishes to make a case for his "moral message," unity against Britain.

Through its "modus operandi," O'Hea's cartoon echoes the method in which Paul Revere "spoke" to his audience nearly a hundred years prior. O'Hea simply reapplies the burlesque style to fit his own needs. The Manchester Martyrs were not brutally stabbed to death but rather hanged (Payne). However, O'Hea draws the illustration in accord with his "picture of reality," painting Britain as undeniably evil and thereby appealing to the moral obligation of the Irish not to accept the atrocities. As a result, his cartoon speaks to the emotions of his audience and causes Britain's actions to be "reduc[ed] to absurdity." From O'Hea's point of view, it is necessary and only logical for Ireland to take action as one.

Another aspect which O'Hea's cartoon has in common with one of the American cartoons is a caption. Like Franklin's caption, "It Is Done!" is short and to the point yet adds much to the picture. These three words, written by O'Hea, provide the frame in which the illustration is to be viewed. The terse phrase effectively spells out the gravity of the situation in black and white. There is no grey area. Britain has crossed a line which it cannot turn back from, and something must be done. Ireland must unite.

Outside of the emotional realms like those of postcolonial nations such as Ireland, the political cartoon has become a rare method of commentary. It is being replaced ever increasingly by literature, television shows, and radio broadcasts. It seems as if political cartoons are getting squeezed out, as the world becomes smaller because of technology. However, it is my belief that as a result of the political cartoon's use of imagery and ability to capture the essence of emotion, "governing bodies" will wish to call upon it during times of national disaster and emotional distress. In her "Public

Tragedy and the Arts," Sandra Bertman eloquently expresses this in the context of all art when she says, "We need the arts to help us cope and to find our way back to belief in humanity. They arm us with specific and practical strategies relevant to young and old whatever their background, culture, or beliefs. They ask the soulful and spiritual questions, offer answers and call us to action — resistance, protest, witness, and prayer" (215). Art is a great tool; it would be a great tragedy if we forget how to use it.

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Author's biography

MARIA PHAM

Maria Pham is a sophomore from Michigan and calls two towns her home. She has lived in Holland (the town in Michigan, not the country, as she may lead you to believe for brief seconds) and in a suburb of Detroit (truthfully on 8 Mile, although much west on the road Eminem's movie is titled after). Now, she also considers Paquerilla West her home, where she is the dorm photographer. She perhaps resides in the Hesburgh Library as well, considering she is a Biological Sciences major, who also hopes to double minor in Anthropology and Peace Studies. She has always wondered about crimes and the pain humans can inflict upon fellow humans and how such behavior is possible. The topic of human trafficking is a rather ugly one; therefore, people tend to shy away from discussing such matters. Yet these horrendous activities are the ones she believes the world needs to care about and eliminate.

Combating HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Maria Pham

Researched Argument

First-Year Composition—Community-Based Learning

Professor Ed Kelly

Slavery still exists to this day, even in the United States. It may not be the slavery that the U.S. Civil War ended well over a century and a half ago, but it is still considered slavery. Imagine being stuck in an unexpected world, threatened and beaten, forced into situations beyond imagination, and alone and afraid without anyone to turn to. Hopes of moving out of poverty and an economically depressed country to a new environment filled with opportunities and a better life are shattered. Instead, circumstances are worst than before and a way out does not exist. Thousands of people each year find themselves in such a situation. Under false pretenses, they discover hope until reality enters and their new horrendous lives are revealed.

Human trafficking is an illegal trade in human beings resulting in a modern-day form of slavery. Traffickers transport people against their will or trick them for the purpose of sexual or labor exploitation. As the current third largest criminal industry in the world, human trafficking continues to grow — faster than any other illegal activity. Projections show that human trafficking will become the most profitable global industry in the near future. Even though the trafficking of humans is not a new occurrence, it has grown tremendously in the past few decades (Corrin 177). Human trafficking is a pressing matter of human rights, and action needs to be taken for prevention. We must determine the best way for governments to prevent human trafficking. Although many governments have been addressing the problem of human trafficking and enacting policies to persecute those behind the crime, not enough action has taken place. While efforts have been made and governmental policies have proven somewhat effective in combating human trafficking, I believe that governments should fund more research on the topic, revise current policies to better combat the matter of human trafficking, focus on eliminating the demand for trafficked people, and do more to raise awareness of the problem.

Why should we care about the trafficking of humans? Why should we focus on this matter when numerous other problems exist that may affect us more directly? A likely misconception persists that human trafficking only occurs in third world countries, a

great distance from us. In actuality, the United States is a destination for a large number of victims of human trafficking. Annually, "some 18,000–20,000 trafficked persons" enter the United States (Stoecker et al. 24). Research by the Human Rights Center of the University of California, Berkley and the Free the Slaves organization of Washington D.C. found that "forced labor is prevalent in five sectors of the U.S. economy: prostitution and sex services (46%), domestic service (27%), agriculture (10%), sweatshop/factory (5%), and restaurant and hotel work (4%)" (Bales et al. 48). Furthermore, human trafficking of U.S. citizens happens as well. We should not allow such appalling activity nor should we harbor this criminal industry in the United States or anywhere else. People look towards the United States as a place for a new start at a better life. If they enter this country and have their hopes destroyed because they find themselves forced into a sweatshop, prostitution, or domestic servitude, a tragedy has occurred.

"As a pressing matter of human rights, human trafficking deserves more attention and effort to end the problem. It is our duty as human beings to help our fellow human beings, especially the innocent forced into inhumane situations."

We must participate in the fight against this trade in human beings that brings misery to the innocent. As a pressing matter of human rights, human trafficking deserves more attention and effort to end the problem. It is our duty as human beings to help our fellow human beings, especially the innocent forced into inhumane situations.

Despite the numerous laws passed almost throughout the entire world making the trafficking of humans illegal, this criminal activity continues to grow, become more widespread, and affect an increased number of people. This occurs because the millions of dollars criminal organizations collect in profit fuels the growth of human trafficking. The trafficking of humans involves high profit and low risk. People caught trafficking receive punishments equivalent to those of lesser crimes. Such advantageous qualities of the trafficking industry attract people to this illicit business. Additionally, "recent changes in the [economies of the world]… have brought about an increase in human trafficking and an introduction of trafficking from new 'source' countries" (Orlova 14). For example, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, chaos erupted and a considerable number of people faced poverty and limited economic opportunities (Orlova 15). Such post-conflict or natural disaster regions emerge as prime target areas for traffickers to search for victims. An estimation on the "number of women and children deceived, recruited, transported from their homes, and sold into slavery throughout the world is 800,000 to 900,000 per year" (Stoecker et al. 13).

Human trafficking is a violation of human rights of the worst kind. Exploiting and hurting the most vulnerable of society is heinous. Three different categories of people exist in the human trafficking system: those trafficked, the traffickers, and the recipients of the trafficked victims. Both the people who do the trafficking and those who exploit the trafficked individuals are appalling. Traffickers take advantage of economic, social, and political disorder that have created susceptible populations of women

and children. They entice their victims with false promises of good jobs and better lives. Once they have their victims, they take away their victims' personal identification, travel documents, and anything that could aid in escape. Then they deliver them to those who want trafficked victims and force them into brutal and inhuman working and living conditions. Traffickers and exploiters take away the basic rights of their victims; the victims do not consent to being traded, for they find themselves forced, tricked, or lured by false promises. Governments must do more to prevent this gross violation of human rights that occurs through human trafficking.

First, the government should fund research on the characteristics of the demand of human trafficking. Thorough research on trafficking should be a national priority. Questions that have yet to be fully answered are: What is the description of the trafficker or client? Which is more widespread in the United States, sexual exploitation of the trafficked victims, domestic servitude, or forced labor? It has been determined that poverty is not the single factor causing the increase or prevalence of human trafficking. Studies need to occur to identify more factors that cause this problem. Also, governments and organizations lack dependable information on the health status of those who survived forced labor in the United States. Research should be conducted to "identify the precise health and medical consequences of forced labor: the nature of the problems and their durations, the best practices to identify and administer services to survivors, and the level of recovery to be expected following treatment" (Bales et al. 106). Four aspects of human trafficking require more research: countries of origin, passage, and destination, who is trafficked, who is doing the trafficking, and why trafficking is occurring — what fuels the system. More research on human trafficking is a necessity; as Jahic and Finckenauer indicate in their article "Representations and Misrepresentations of Human Trafficking," "when it comes to trafficking, numbers are scarce...there is more unknown than known about this phenomenon" (27).

One of the reasons the physical trafficking of humans occurs without much difficulty relates to the conditions of borders. Permeable borders make the trafficking of people possible. In the book <u>Human Traffic and Transnational Crime: Eurasian and American Perspectives</u>, Sally Stoecker identifies the border problem as a way for traffickers to easily transport their victims. She points out that "the pace and rate of movement of people today is so rapid and so vast that borders cannot be adequately monitored and literally invite the trafficking of persons" (21). She views tightening the borders as a solution to this problem that facilitates human trafficking. Stoecker believes that "the whole notion of 'borders' is becoming obsolete in this era of global markets, increased tourism, and labor mobility"; thus she argues for "improvements … in transportation and navigational technologies capable of monitoring the movement of labor and capital," for she feels that "administrative requirements and physical inspections of cargo are outdated" (22). She contends that determining better methods of inspecting and controlling movement of labor and capital needs to occur. I agree that it is necessary to better inspect incoming and outgoing labor and capital. However, I do not think it is possible in reality to make sure each and every ship/container/truck passes through an intense examination. Not enough time exists to thoroughly inspect everything that

passes through the borders. Professor Carolyn Nordstrom, an anthropology professor at the University of Notre Dame who traveled throughout the world following global flows of trafficking, feels strongly about the futility of increased border and port inspections. She asserts that:

> Virtually no ship is checked [at ports, which are major entrances to countries]. You just don't; there just isn't enough time...You can't open more than a couple of containers [of the hundreds transported on ships] a day. [The traffickers] are outfitting containers with toilets and air conditioners and carrying lots of people, and they will probably never get caught. If [border inspectors] catch one that day, how many others have gone through? They will never catch them all, because they can't, they can't open all [of the containers] up. (Personal Interview).

Time is very limited, and impatience seems commonplace. The potential for a complete inspection of goods and labor entering and leaving countries does not seem plausible. Improving border inspections is an action that should be taken, but I believe it should receive consideration in addition to other methods to combat human trafficking.

The article "Hidden Slaves Forced Labor in the United States," written by researchers Bales, Fletcher, and Stover, contains recommendations on what the U.S. government can do to combat forced labor. The authors argue for the U.S. government to "improve the institutional capacity of law enforcement personnel at local, state, and federal level to respond to forced labor and trafficking" (106). This calls for increased training in identification, investigation, and persecution of those trafficking people and forcing people into horrible working conditions. I feel that it is a good idea to not only increase the number of the law enforcement officers, but also educate them in identifying and responding to situations of forced labor and human trafficking. Ensuring a high availability of law enforcement officers to act when cases of forced labor and human trafficking are brought to their attention is crucial. It does not seem feasible for the police to go to every business and try to determine if illegal forced labor or human trafficking is occurring. There are just too many businesses and industrial plants and not enough law enforcement personnel or time. As Professor Nordstrom pointed out, "If you can't open all the containers [on ships arriving at international ports], you can't go through every business site and agricultural place and make sure nothing illegal is happening" (Personal Interview). On paper, the idea of increasing the law enforcement personnel sounds reasonable, but it may just not be very realistic. I do not believe that we should completely ignore this idea, but I do not think that we should make this our main focus.

In recent times, more policies and laws have been established by the U.S. government and the governments of other countries around the world with the goal of reducing human trafficking. The United Nations passed its "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons" in 2000, which many nations began to adopt and sign. This international set of rules protects the victims and makes human trafficking a crime on an international level. This protocol defines the term "trafficking in persons" and identifies the forms of human trafficking and violations of human rights. As more

and more countries sign this U.N. protocol, human trafficking characteristics, its victims, and the consequences for those conducting the trafficking are agreed upon. The United States has made progress in the battle against human trafficking, for it passed an anti-trafficking legislation, the "Trafficking Victim Protection Act of 2000" (TVPA). Beatrice Siman Zakhari, author of a section in Human Traffic and Transnational Crime: Eurasian and American Perspectives, discusses the impact of the United States' Act and its influence in some specific cases prosecuted under the Act. The United States' TVPA on human trafficking punishes the "full range of offences involved in human trafficking and gives victims access to shelters, counseling, and medical care" (131). Before, traffickers could escape the consequences of their horrendous illegal activity on lesser charges, but now with a clear identification of human trafficking as a gross violation of human rights by the TVPA, traffickers receive the harsher penalties that they deserve. The Act distinguishes between the traffickers and the victims of the trafficking, thus providing protection to the victims and creating a feeling of safety and reassurance for those trafficked. Zakhari states that since the Act was only recently passed, uncertainty exists on "how the TVPA will affect trafficking in persons to the United States and whether it will inhibit traffickers from entering the United States" (144). Many people may argue that the policies show a step in the right direction and, like any idea on paper, take time to show their effects in the real world. They may believe that nothing else needs to be done at the moment on addressing the matter of human trafficking, for we should just give the policies a chance to work and prove themselves capable of preventing the trafficking of humans. I agree with this viewpoint; policies require patience and time, but policies on paper are a long way from solving a real life problem. Additionally, the world and the victims of human trafficking do not have the time to wait around to see if this policy actually works. More action needs to occur immediately in the direction of preventing human trafficking.

The demand for trafficked people needs to be explored and ways to eliminate this demand should be a primary focus of governments. Some people may argue that the way to successfully combat human trafficking is to look at the root causes and the source of trafficking. Digging to the very bottom and pinpointing what promotes the trafficking of humans and why this occurs should be the first focus of governments as they work to solve the problem. I agree that governments need as much information as possible on the causes and flow of human trafficking to better understand the whole picture of this issue, but it may just be too difficult to determine ways to combat human trafficking from that angle. It would take a long time to determine the root causes and then figure out how to address those causes. Instead, governments should figure out how to remove the demand for trafficking. Professor Nordstrom emphasizes that "drying up the industry is the solution" for we need to "get rid of the people who use the trafficked people" (Personal Interview). She views the traffickers as those who just want to make money, who will go to any means to make money, and quite possibly are not actually the most despicable ones. Professor Nordstrom believes that if the traffickers felt they could make the same amount of money doing another activity other than trafficking humans, they would. She states that "the traffickers, if they're not making any money, will go elsewhere" (Personal Interview). Therefore, the solution to

human trafficking should be focused on taking away the demand. If the demand for trafficked individuals no longer exists, then the traffickers will no longer view trafficking as a high profit industry and will no longer search for vulnerable people to traffic. Economics, supply and demand, plays a major role in the system of human trafficking. If the demand for trafficked people can be taken away, then the supply of trafficked people would also decrease, perhaps entirely. In order to do away with the demand, governments should better inform the public of the disturbing facts of human trafficking and those who exploit the trafficked victims and insist on the end of those who use the trafficked people.

Ultimately, the most effective way to solve human trafficking is through public awareness and outrage. Governments should focus more on raising awareness of the issue of human trafficking. The trafficking of humans is a global issue that many are aware of but tends to be pushed to the back of people's minds. More needs to be done to ensure that the public grasps the significance of this problem and its prevalence. An awareness-raising campaign about human trafficking and forced labor in the United States needs to be started. Private citizens should be well informed about not only the occurrence of human trafficking and forced labor in the world and the U.S., but they should also gain knowledge on how to identify possible victims and characteristics of forced labor situations. There has been evidence of private citizens reporting cases of forced labor; thus, if more information on human trafficking and forced labor are brought to the attention of private citizens, perhaps more victims will be identified (Bates et al. 50). As a major problem in society, the trafficking of humans needs to receive full acknowledgment. The public needs information and it needs to be outraged. The U.S. government needs to create that outrage in its citizens and throughout the world by spreading information about human trafficking. The horrifying, disturbing, and unbelievable facts of this crime against humanity must be revealed. Upon such a revelation, the public will ideally feel such outrage that they demand change, demand a remedy. Professor Nordstrom believes in the power of moral outrage and views it as the most effective means for ending human trafficking. Public outrage is the only way for change to occur and this has been proven throughout history. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement would not have occurred and brought about the changes it had without public outrage. The injustice and prejudice in the U.S. before the Civil Rights Movement finally reached the entire public's awareness in such a way that change came about and the government took notice and took steps in the right direction towards equality and fair treatment of the people of the United States. Some people may argue that too much public outrage could lead to huge movements, similar to the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War protests, which result, in part, in destruction, chaos, and citizen deaths. True, movements stemming from moral outrage about human trafficking may have some adverse effects and lead to discomfort in society, but that discomfort can spark the changes that must take place to prevent this atrocious crime against humanity.

"The trafficking of humans is a global issue that many are aware of but tends to be pushed to the back of people's minds. More needs to be done to ensure that the public grasps the significance of this problem and its prevalence."

We need to acknowledge the reality of human trafficking and identify it with real people, not just as an issue to be pushed to the side since it does not seem to affect us. The problem of human trafficking is real. The victims of human trafficking are real. The lack of current effective action on combating human trafficking is real. Through more research on the problem of human trafficking, revising current policies, focusing on taking away the demand for trafficked people, and raising more awareness to create outrage about this illegal activity, governments can best prevent human trafficking. Steps in the right direction on the path of human trafficking prevention have been occurring but more needs to happen. We should not feel content with the current situation, for much room for improvement exists. Governments may make the laws that greatly affect nations, but we, as the people, have the ability to influence the governments and bring about change. If we do not come together and demand the end of human trafficking, if we do not find it morally troubling that the horrendous crime of human trafficking occurs, if we do not feel emotion and a sense of duty towards our fellow human beings, then we may just as well be the heinous people who traffic others and those who exploit them with the view of trafficking victims as commodities.

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Author's biography

MICHAEL SULLIVAN

Michael Sullivan, who currently lives in New York, is no stranger to the Midwest as he lived in Columbus, Indiana for the first nine years of his life. Michael graduated from Our Lady of Lourdes High School in Poughkeepsie, New York, and he would like to thank his teachers there. Michael can often be found watching his favorite shows on television, especially CSI, classic 90s shows, and New York Mets baseball. He is majoring in biology at Notre Dame and plans to pursue a career in medicine.

Michael originally found the revision process in FYC to be tedious and unnecessary, but he finally realized that it is an imperative component of the writing process. He thanks his FYC professor and family for reading this essay many times. Michael chose to write about the genocide in Rwanda because he feels that it is too large an event to receive hardly any attention and media coverage. The conflicts in Rwanda, Darfur, Sudan need to be discussed, and action must be taken.

Postcolonial Crises:
RWANDA AND THE
NECESSITY TO RESPOND
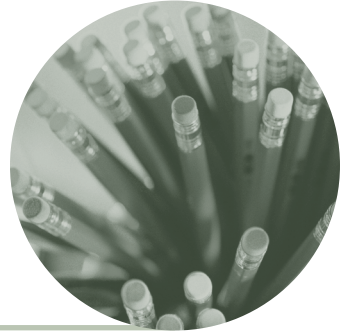
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Researched Argument

First-Year Composition

Professor Anna Boyagoda

The number of conflicts in postcolonial nations frequently increases once the process of decolonization has occurred. First World aid, both military and financial, is needed if these conflicts are going to be contained, but a lingering racism and attitudes of superiority frequently prevent this aid. In this essay, I will use "postcolonial nations" to refer only to those postcolonial nations which Western and advanced nations view as inferior, often due to race and culture.[1] Although the root of many problems is concentrated in the postcolonial country itself, the effects of the conflicts stretch around the world. Despite this fact, the postcolonial nation is often seen as inferior and not worthy of being assisted; the significance of these conflicts in postcolonial nations is therefore low to Western nations. Often these postcolonial dilemmas arise from arguments between natives that occur when the "mother country" leaves the region, as was the case in Rwanda. The postcolonial African nation of Rwanda was the site of a mass genocide during the 1990s, stemming from conflicts between the native Hutu and Tutsi which date back to the mid-twentieth century. The mass murders in Rwanda sparked a temporary effort among other nations to assist Rwanda in its rebuilding efforts, showing the postcolonial nation of Rwanda that it would not be isolated from the rest of the world; however, this short-term help will not and has not permanently cured the struggling nation's problems. Unfortunately, Western nations will be negatively affected in major ways when there is a need for response and aid is not given.

The country of Rwanda was first colonized by Germany during the first World War and later ruled by Belgium until the nation received its independence in 1962. The Belgians favored the Tutsi minority in Rwanda over the Hutu majority, which comprised approximately eighty-five percent of the population. However, once the Tutsis led the struggle for independence, Belgium switched its support to the Hutus. According to John and Carol Berry in their book Genocide in Rwanda, the West "imposed European racial stereotypes, supporting the Tutsis to the detriment of the Hutus, and then shift-

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[1] I do not wish to use the term "third-world country" because even some third-world countries are helped financially, militarily, and are monitored closely by Western nations.

ing the blame for colonial oppression to the Tutsis, and leaving them to their fate" (Berry 6). Up until this point, the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda had lived in reasonable harmony. As the "divide and rule" strategy began to take more of an effect, the hate between the Hutu and Tutsi intensified, resulting in many mass killings over the next several decades (Jones). On April 6, 1994, Rwanda President Habyarimana's plane was shot down by a missile while approaching the Kigali airport. Although the responsibility for this tragedy has never been confirmed, the result has been. Over the next two weeks, an estimated 250,000 Rwandans were slaughtered. The mass genocide ended on July 18, 1994, after the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) defeated the forces at Kigali. The Rwandan government approximated in 2002 that 1,074,017 people, or one-seventh of Rwanda's population, were murdered from 1990–1994. Rwanda is still dealing extensively with the monumental effects of the genocide (Jones).

Many people in Rwanda are still extremely bitter over the response from the international community during and immediately after the genocide, which they rightly believe was inadequate. This sense of hostility towards the United Nations and Secretary-General Kofi Annan was written about in many articles. On a visit to Rwanda in May 1998, Nicholas Kotch reports that, "Annan was given a public dressing down by Rwanda's foreign minister, roasted by national assembly politicians, boycotted by the country's rulers and snubbed by survivors of a 1994 genocide he has said he tried in vain to prevent." This shows that the authority of Rwanda is looking towards other nations and expecting them to help solve their problems instead of merely keeping the conflicts confined to Rwanda. In the article "Debts to Humanity," it states that African countries believe "they should be financially compensated for the damage done by 400 years of slavery and colonialism." This is according to a paper written to the delegates at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism. Africa is obviously looking for help from Western nations which have the means to do so.

Unfortunately, Western nations frequently exhibit a racist attitude when dealing with worldwide conflicts since preference is given to one nation over another when appropriating aid. Why do so many Westerners know about the recent genocide in Bosnia but little or nothing regarding the mass genocide in Rwanda or the problems in the Sudan? Why did Western nations temporarily help Rwanda but do nothing to prevent or stop the genocide? Again, the answer is because the Western nations react to these conflicts in a racist manner. Bosnia is a part of Europe and is populated by Caucasians. Rwanda and the Sudan are neither European nor white. A similar argument can be made for why the United States is currently in Iraq and not in the Sudan or Rwanda. The United States must be thinking that helping the people in Iraq or that the resources in Iraq are more important than the postcolonial nation of Rwanda. In the article "Chronicles of Death Foretold," Michela Wrong writes:

> All this is because no one in authority really wants to hear what the foot soldiers have to say; no one is interested in their warnings about a continent [Africa] with minimal economic and political clout. It takes a lot to attract the attention of a lumbering brontosaurus [Western nation]…which prefers to deal with one foreign policy at a time, and when the dinosaur finally notices, it grumbles, 'Why didn't you warn me earlier'?"

The best explanation for Wrong's observation is that the West feels justified in ignoring these postcolonial regions for the same reasons that it felt justified in occupying them in the first place: they are inferior. Wrong would agree with the "Debts to Humanity" article because both are saying that Western nations do not feel the need to respond or compensate for past events. The only way to overcome this response is for the West to realize that it is just as important to respond extensively to postcolonial nations' problems as it is to respond to struggling nations of the same race or those deemed to be more important. Wrong insists, "It is sheer western indifference that ensures Africa retains its capacity to gobsmack."

If one were to create a survey which asked the participants to answer questions about events which occurred in Rwanda during the 1990s, the results would likely show that most people are in fact indifferent toward this subject. This ignorance is staggering when the magnitude of the Rwanda conflict is considered. The events in Rwanda over the past several decades are a microcosm of the Holocaust during World War II. According to Philip Gourevitch, "the dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust" (3). By comparing the magnitude of the Rwanda genocide with the low number of people who know the details of the genocide, it can be deduced that often the events in a postcolonial nation are overlooked by other countries. This may stem from the popular feeling that, "I have a hard enough time worrying about my own problems. Is it necessary that I care about events which do not directly affect me?" For example, if an average American was asked, "Who was responsible for the events of September 11th?", the most likely response would be a confident, "Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorist network." If an average American was asked, "Who was responsible for the mass genocide in Rwanda during the 1990s?," the most likely response would be, "I do not know." This ignorance will certainly not help the West in the future, an idea which was presented in a recent lecture.

The lecture was entitled "Post-Genocide Transitional Justice: The Process of Cambodia in Dialogue with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda," and the presenter is a visiting fellow at the University of Notre Dame Kroc Institute who has worked extensively in each of these countries. The presenter wished to remain anonymous and have a pseudonym used if I decided to use some information from the lecture and discussion; therefore, I will simply refer to the presenter as Mr. Joe Smith. Smith discussed how "all justice systems are imperfect because they cannot deal with genocide, which is beyond the realms of the criminal justice system." For this reason, Smith mentioned the importance of Western nations to respond to the conflicts in these nations, especially Rwanda, in order to help form a worldwide standard for dealing with genocide or to prevent genocide in the first place. Smith's extensive work in Cambodia and Rwanda gives him firsthand knowledge of these areas. What are Smith's motives and why does Smith feel the need to research and discuss the post-genocide problems of Rwanda? He knows how monumental these conflicts are and the implications which they have on the world. Smith is trying to spread ideas and knowledge about how to respond to postcolonial conflicts so that they do not negatively affect the world. Smith would

most likely agree with Michela Wrong because both seem to feel that Western nations have been given too much time to respond when they should have acted during the height of the killings in 1994.

On the other hand, one of the reasons a person may believe that the events in a post-colonial nation do not personally affect him or her is because they are not ordinarily exposed to the strife of members of those nations. Sometimes the distance between a postcolonial nation and another nation is a reason for the lack of influence which postcolonial conflicts have on the other nation. Frequently someone is able to grasp an issue better if there is a personal connection between that issue and the individual. If a person were to live near a Rwandan refugee who has shared her customs and survival story with others, then that person would be more inclined to feel concern over the monumental conflict. However, not every person has the ability to directly contact or see the life-changing effects of conflicts in postcolonial nations.

The conflicts in Rwanda can be clearly imagined by reading any of the millions of first-hand accounts of the genocide written by survivors, soldiers, tourists, or journalists. These personal stories provide evidence that the events in postcolonial nations have global consequences. In the article "The Journalist as God" from the New Statesman, author John Kampfner explains the horrific events in Rwanda and how they still affect him a decade later just as much. Kampfner, a journalist, writes, "For years I tried to avoid thinking about Rwanda…but that trip affected me badly. I had not expected emaciated mothers to expend their last drop of energy thrusting their babies into my arms." These extremely powerful words show that anyone who has witnessed the mass genocide is still greatly affected by it. The haunting memories cannot be erased and the survivors' stories still evoke sympathy from any audience. Kampfner further goes on to write, "After a while, I gave up trying to help. I wanted out. I had been there [Rwanda] longer than most. I got out via a relief flight to Zimbabwe." Many journalists and other Rwandans felt the same way and migrated to other African and European countries, showing that these Rwandan conflicts were not isolated. The genocide is not an event which is only known or felt by Rwandans; it is an example to the entire world that civil feuding can lead to mass murders and chaos which cannot be solved overnight.

Lindsey Hilsum of the New Statesman offers an account similar to Kampfner's. Hilsum writes,

> It's six years since I've been back. Most of the time, I push the memories away — the hacked bodies, the desperate friends begging me to save them from the mob, my impotent despair — but now I must face it again…People in London often ask whether I was frightened in Baghdad during the war last year — to which the answer is that nothing in this world could be as terrifying as those days in Rwanda.

Anyone who visited the country of Rwanda during the mid-1990s saw the despair and hatred which existed in the nation. It should not take only a Rwandan to understand what was going on in Rwanda. Journalists or U.N. soldiers or people of surrounding nations should realize that the mass genocide would have epic proportions, and it

did with the murders of almost one million people. Why do these journalists choose to write such sad and graphic accounts? They do this in order to raise awareness in Western nations regarding the major consequences of postcolonial conflicts, especially in Rwanda. Even though postcolonial nations may be thousands of miles away, the events in these places garner a response just as if the event was occurring in a person's backyard. Journalists are trying to convince fellow citizens and people back home in Western nations that these postcolonial countries, and the people who inhabit them, are worth the time, money, and labor used to help rebuild.

One reason which may cause Western people to feel concern over the events in a postcolonial nation is because he or she may believe that they are being threatened. In today's world, bombings, terrorist attacks, and mass killings in other countries are often the cause of concern for many people in secure nations; therefore, the mass genocide in Rwanda has caused concern for many people. For this reason, some people say that it is too dangerous for the West to meddle in other people's business. When a nation's government is not willing to become entangled in the problems of a postcolonial nation, it is highly unlikely that the citizens of that government will feel a deep concern over those problems. This way of thinking may again be caused by the feelings that Western nations have major problems to deal with themselves. On the other hand, would it not be more logical to even try and attempt to stop the violence instead of just letting it happen? The answer is yes, a response is necessary. Another belief from opponents is that becoming involved in these postcolonial problems is often a large financial commitment which many countries are not able to pledge; therefore, this choice is more of a necessary choice for them as an individual nation than a debatable choice because it is impossible to give someone something which you do not have.

While some opposing views are possibly valid, it is still obvious that the conflicts in a postcolonial nation are not only confined to that nation and that they necessitate a wholehearted response. One of the main arguments is that many of those affected in postcolonial nations often migrate to other countries or try to assimilate themselves into the everyday life of another country when quick replies are not enacted. The conflict in Rwanda was so horrific that hundreds of thousands of Rwandans became refugees in surrounding African nations. Allen Hertzke, author of the article "The Shame of Darfur," reported that the number of dead in Sudan, because of the war, is impossible to calculate because "so many of the internally displaced people forage the countryside or huddle in remote camps." When so many people are displaced into other countries, it is necessary for the countries to adapt to the huge influx of people. These adaptations may be building more shelters, providing food for refugees, or creating more jobs. The necessary changes are often drastic in proportion.

Moreover, besides the innocent refugees who migrate into other regions are the criminals who are trying to go into hiding. Author Gerard Prunier raises this point in The Rwanda Crisis. The idea is how the people who were supremely responsible for the genocide have fled Rwanda in order to escape a trial or punishment. The people

mostly responsible for the genocide who fled from Rwanda may cause problems in other countries. Hertzke offers a contemporary conflict which can be easily related to the situation in Rwanda. Earlier this year in Sudan, the rebel groups of southern Sudan signed a peace accord with the Islamic authority in Khartoum, ending the country's bloodiest civil war. Hertzke then reports, "But the triumph was muted, for the Sudanese government in Khartoum has now turned its attention from the southern part of the country to the western, undertaking massive ethnic cleansing in the region known as Darfur. And so far, neither America's religious community nor its government has acted" (First Things). The criminals and corrupt leaders are spreading violence throughout their own countries and beyond their own borders without being stopped by Western nations. According to the article, "Killers Next Door," Hutu guerrillas from Rwanda with genocidal intentions are now causing problems within the borders of Congo. Rwanda's government is upset with the United Nations for not intervening or urging the Congolese government to intervene against these rebels. The spreading of violence has a domino effect as the West is now struggling to find solutions and come to terms with these postcolonial problems. For these reasons, it is necessary for Western nations to both monitor the ongoing events in postcolonial nations and respond to them intelligently and quickly.

An increase in violence anywhere results in the breeding of terrorism and disruption in the security of international travel. Migration patterns are disrupted to both Western nations and other postcolonial nations, and the worldwide economy is negatively affected because of this. In his article, "Reflections on International Migration and its Future," Demetrios Papademetriou reports:

> Yet, for a process [migration] that is as old as mankind, crucial to human progress, and as deeply implicated in the rise and decline of organized political entities as few other large social phenomena, hardly any societies seem to be able to manage international migration effectively and to systemic advantage.

Papademetriou is stating how the process of migration, which has existed since the beginning of the human race, is still not adequately dealt with. How would the West be able to deal with millions of refugees, let alone traumatized refugees? With all of these problems resulting from ignorance of postcolonial conflicts, it is necessary for Western nations to respond accordingly and efficiently to these situations. The theory that ignorance is bliss would not apply in these circumstances. Ignoring or not being able to respond to a problem will not make that problem go away. Although a country's reason to not involve itself in a postcolonial nation's affairs may be internally justified, it will not exclude that country from the conflicts which remain; postcolonial conflicts will affect all nations, even if the choice is made not to become involved in these conflicts, so why not respond in some way?

The countries which are now the homes of criminals and refugees are often the nations which are looked to for help by postcolonial nations. After the genocide in Rwanda, many countries pledged to help Rwanda rebuild from their massive crisis. Unfortunately, this was only for a short period of time and frequently these pledges

were not met. Smith discussed how the country of Rwanda is still dealing with the trials of thousands of people in local courts known as Gacaca Courts. For the most part, Rwandans are dealing with the effects of the genocide on their own, which is clearly not working because the problems persist. Smith's lecture was also attended by a woman who had just gotten back from Rwanda the day before. The woman remarked on how the people of Rwanda are still struggling mightily with the effects of the genocide because only now are some of the problems being revealed. To name only one of these problems, orphaned children are now teenagers struggling to survive with no family or other people willing to help them because they have their own problems. Would this be a major issue if Western nations decided to respond quickly and adequately? He also discussed the problems of the Gacaca Courts because many Rwandans lie in the courts just to avoid punishment. This has major implications for other countries because guilty people are being found innocent constantly. Where are these criminals going? They are going to Western nations in large numbers and disrupting them, because major influxes of people often breed violence and terrorism.

Conflicts in postcolonial nations have played a paramount role in world politics for the last several centuries. However, these conflicts do not only affect one postcolonial nation. The mass genocide in Rwanda during the 1990s is just one example of a postcolonial conflict between natives which was caused, ironically, by other countries acting as colonial powers. Everyday on news networks, we see stories about the war in Iraq but we never see any news regarding the post-genocide conflicts in Rwanda, when really these postcolonial conflicts have worldwide effects. The fact that Americans, or other Westerners, rarely see news regarding Rwanda is hurting us now and will continue to do so in the future because it promotes the same ignorance that led to the genocide in the first place. Maybe this is a call to the media to try and put more coverage of postcolonial African conflicts on everyday television so that it will rally support for a mass response by Western nations. Would so many people have fled Rwanda if the way of life was bettered immediately due to a quick response? The people of poor postcolonial nations are not forgotten peoples and their struggles are felt by individuals around the world. Let us hope Western nations will realize that indifference to postcolonial conflicts will absolutely lead to Western conflicts. As Isaac Asimov said, "If knowledge can create problems, it is not through ignorance that we can solve them."

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McPartlin
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Author's
b i o g r a p h y

ALANA STELTON

Alana Stelton is from Abilene, Texas and is currently pursuing a double major in English and Philosophy. She is active in Lyons Hall government, Circle K, and The Juggler. She also tutors at the Writing Center.

Since high school, Alana has been fascinated by the impossible task faced by authors to express concepts that remain elusive because of the inherent inadequacies of language. While studying French literature under Dr. Catherine Perry, Alana was struck by how often authors use silence as a form of expression for the ultimately inexpressible. In her paper, Alana examines the frustrating gap between the Apollonian and the Dionysian as well as the role of silence in three French novels.

Encounters with Silence:
RECONCILING WORDS WITH THE FORMLESS DIONYSIAN IN THE WORKS OF NOTHOMB, MAKINE, AND DURAS

Alana Stelton

McPartlin Award First Place Winer

Rebels, Vagrants, and Outsiders in French Literature and Film

Professor Catherine Perry

Writers are faced with the task of wrapping words around the amorphous experience of the ungraspable, inexpressible self. The unformulated essence of consciousness exists prior to language, but it is subjected to the constructs of words, which can only describe it incompletely. The limitless realm of consciousness is Dionysian in its refusal of form, yet it must be described with Apollonian terminology. The space between what is meant and what is expressible can be a source of frustration for speakers and writers. Obsessed with and driven by words, writers are simultaneously attracted to the possibility of expression and tormented by its inadequacies. In the novels Fear and Trembling, Dreams of My Russian Summers, and The Lover, authors Amélie Nothomb, Andreï Makine, and Marguerite Duras express their frustration with words through narrators who also experience difficulties with communication. In The Lover, Marguerite Duras must use writing to describe the narrator's psychological processes. Finding that unbending words like "love" and "hate" can betray the formless self, the narrator chooses silence over incomplete meanings. In Amélie Nothomb's Fear and Trembling, the narrator tries to reach a cultural understanding with her Japanese supervisor while fighting a verbal war. The two women are torn between languages, and, unable to find an overlapping area of understanding, they choose silence. In Dreams of My Russian Summers, Andreï Makine's narrator must find a new language to articulate the realm of imagination. He feels frustrated because the most essential ideas and images remain beyond the limits of words. In all three novels, it is where the possibility of linguistic expression ends that silence begins.

In the 1999 novel Fear and Trembling, a young Belgian achieves her dream of working for a Japanese corporation in 1990 Japan. The dream sours when a verbal battle for honor ensues between Amélie and her boss Fubuki Mori. Amélie's difficulties with language begin as soon as she enters the Yumimoto Corporation. On her first day, she is so hypnotized by the view through a bay window that she fails to introduce herself to the receptionist. When Mister Saito asks her why she did not announce her pres-

ence, she cannot answer. She remembers, "I couldn't think of anything to say. I bowed my head and shoulders, realizing that in just ten minutes, and without having spoken a single word, I had made a bad impression" (Nothomb 2). Amélie's silence continues as she is introduced to "hordes of people" whose names she promptly forgets (2). Choosing silence, she remains within herself, unable to form connections with her colleagues. Appropriately, the uncommunicative Amélie's first task is to write a letter "accepting an invitation on [Saito's] behalf from someone named Adam Johnson" (3). Despite multiple efforts and numerous "permutations of grammatical categories," she fails to find the words that will please Mr. Saito, and she is dismissed from the task (4–5).

Amélie's difficulties with expression are humorously emphasized again when she is ordered to pretend that she cannot speak Japanese. While serving tea to twenty delegates from another company, Amélie uses flawless Japanese phrases and mannerisms. She is "dumbfounded" when Saito yells at her for her behavior hours later: "How could our business partners have any feeling of trust in the presence of a white girl who understood their language? From now on you will no longer speak Japanese" (11). Previously reproached for her silence, and now ordered to stop speaking, the narrator is lost in an unintelligible list of social directives. Amélie, hired partly because of her skills in Japanese, is also stripped of the opportunity to become eventually a translator for Yumimoto. The narrator's "inability" to speak Japanese while in Japan is alienating and indicates future communication problems.

> *"Obsessed with and driven by words, writers are simultaneously attracted to the possibility of expression and tormented by its inadequacies."*

When she meets her supervisor Fubuki Mori, Amélie feels that her connection to Mori as "daughters of Kansai" will help her finally to be understood (16). Mori, Amélie's "only hope," serves as a cultural translator who explains the power structure to the narrator (15). Reassured that she is not alone, Amélie has "a great feeling of inner peace. [She is] a colleague of Fubuki Mori" (16). Unfortunately, her hope leaves her when Mori denounces her to the vice-president out of fear that the young Belgian will eventually usurp her power. Amélie resolves to discuss the denouncement with Mori. She has not given up her hope in words. After all, "if you *don't* talk there's no chance of working out the problem" (35). Mister Tenshi warns her, "If you *do* talk, there's a serious chance you'll make things worse" (35). Tenshi's warning goes unheeded, and Amélie's confrontation with Mori ends just as badly as her previous attempts at communication. Gradually, a war of words disguised in coolly measured speech begins between the two women, and Mori becomes Amélie's tormentor.

Amélie is not alone in her failure to understand and be understood. Mori also struggles to find an effective mode of communication. In the study "Re-examining Linguistic Power: Strategic Use of Directives by Professional Japanese Women in Positions of Authority and Leadership," Shoji Takano explains the difficulties that professional Japanese women face in the workplace. Women feel the need to "speak with assertion and forcefulness in order to establish authority in the workplace" (634). This

assertive mode of speech runs contrary, however, to the traditional "prescribed 'social personality'" that characterizes women as "being 'modest' in behavior and opinions and 'polite and gentle to others' in social interactions" (634). Japanese women must reconcile the need for assertive behavior in the workplace with their traditional social roles as gentle, reserved females. They may also face "stigmatization [for adopting] non-feminine ways of speaking" (634). Mori is caught between the two conflicting modes of expression. Though she fiercely defends her professional standing from perceived attacks, she also feels pressure to conform to gender norms. Nothomb outlines the social directives for Japanese women to marry and raise children. In this context, women with careers are seen as rebels. She writes, "The instant you turn twenty-five, you will realize that you are not married, and you will be ashamed. You will exchange your eccentric clothes for a tidy little blazer, white tights, and grotesque pumps. [...] You will feel relief when someone — a husband or an employer — wants anything to do with you" (69). The 29-year-old Mori is "ashamed of being a spinster" (75). She has fulfilled all of the social prescriptions for women, except the instruction to marry. The narrator relates, "I watched the way she behaved in the presence of an unmarried man. [...] She would suddenly become so studiously sweet that it almost veered toward aggression. [...] Her voice became so tender it sounded like a sob. I called this 'Miss Mori's nuptial display'" (75). Amélie notices that after a bachelor departs, it takes Mori "less than a second to switch from simpering to stony coldness" (77). Mori has realized professional success that few Japanese women achieve (74). Still, she struggles to find a language to express herself both socially and professionally. Mori is caught between the worlds of custom and business, and she cannot find a mode of speech that can adequately express her situation. Forced to use words that have been incompletely formed by others, she finds her own voice silenced because of her unique role as a professionally successful Japanese woman.

When Amélie's contract comes to an end, she decides to resign. She engages in one last verbal battle when she gives Mori her formal resignation. Knowing that the conversations take her tormentor to "unforeseen heights of ecstasy," Amélie selects phrases that will make Mori feel that she has "won" the conversation (120). Perhaps Amélie realizes that Mori is trapped in a system that leaves women linguistically handicapped. Only in her arguments with the Belgian can Mori triumph and gain momentary pleasure. On her last day of work, Amélie says goodbye to a few of her co-workers but chooses not to say goodbye to Mori. In the end, the women who share the destruction of words find solace in silence. Amélie confesses, "I felt no rancor towards her. It was my self-respect that forced me not to say good-bye" (131). The silence between the two women persists until the publication of Amélie's first novel. Mori sends her a note which simply reads, "Congratulations" (132). Amélie admits that "the letter [brings her] great happiness" (132). Mori acknowledges Amélie's professional success in a single word. While co-workers at Yumimoto, the proud women constantly deride one another in their quests for honor, so the congratulatory admission contains significant meaning for Amélie. In the end, verbal speech does not lead to a mutual understanding between the two women. Amélie finds happiness in the written concession, but a constructive dialogue is never established between the two. Amélie is unable to

speak the cultural language of the Japanese workplace, and Fubuki Mori is unable to reconcile the socially prescribed linguistic role of women with the vocabulary of Yumimoto. Language betrays both women with its inability to express multiple cultural expectations and individuality simultaneously.

Published in 1995, <u>Dreams of My Russian Summers</u> traces the life of a man from childhood into adulthood as he comes to understand his existence as a Frenchman, Russian, and writer. The narrator feels that the experiences related in his grandmother's stories contain elements of magic. He struggles to find the words that will give motion to the realm of memories and make the past come vividly alive. Even as a child, the narrator struggles to explain and capture the essence of experiences. Looking at photographs of Russian relatives, he notes the repetitive presence of a remarkable smile that is achieved when the women pronounce the French words "petite pomme":

> I guessed that this very singular smile represented a strange little victory for each of the women: yes, a fleeting revenge for disappointed hopes, for the coarseness of men, for the rareness of beautiful and true things in this world. Had I known how to say it at the time I would have called this way of smiling "femininity"…But my language was too concrete in those days. (Makine 3)

"When words are wrapped around the inexpressible self, meaning is lost between the amorphous Dionysian and the rigid Apollonian constructs of language."

In particular, the narrator is intrigued by a series of photographs taken over many years of his grandmother, Charlotte Norbertovna. A Frenchwoman living in Russia, Charlotte teaches "the others the words ["petite pomme"] that bestowed beauty" (4). With stories and a suitcase full of old memories, she enthralls the young narrator. Charlotte creates within him a language that his mother calls his "grandmaternal tongue" (4). Fascinated by the world she creates with words, the narrator seeks every opportunity to listen to stories from a France that seems built upon magic. If he could only learn to speak the language of his grandmother, perhaps he could enter a world that transcends the miserable reality of communist Russia. He tries to eliminate the barriers between himself and the world of her stories by getting close to his grandmother, to invade her experience and learn the language of the "petite pomme."

Intriguingly, the language that the narrator and his sister discover within Charlotte is often silence. He remembers, "Not daring to break her silence, we cast furtive glances at her from time to time: was she going to share a new and even more secret confidence with us? […] Little by little we abandoned ourselves to this silence" (11–12). Finally speaking the language of dreams, the language of silence, the narrator is lifted out of his existence and transported into the realm of imagination where he discovers a beautiful "ghost city" (12). Within the city from Charlotte's memories, silence remains. The narrator describes, "It was the winter of 1910. […] The Seine had turned into a real sea. The people of Paris traveled round by boat. The streets were like rivers; the squares, like great lakes. And what astonished me most was the silence" (12). Beyond words, without sound, the "misty Atlantis" comes alive for the narrator, a city alive in images and described perfectly, silently by the limitless imagination.

The Atlantis of the narrator's childhood is destroyed when he begins to study history. The magic of exotic images is replaced by concrete dates and facts, and something is lost in the transfer. He recalls, "I longed for this medley of dates, names, events, and characters to recast itself into the stuff of a hitherto unseen life, to crystallize into a fundamentally new world" (116). The narrator begins to believe that Charlotte has nothing left to teach him (115). She stops telling stories, and the two begin to engage in common conversation. Gone is the mystical realm of childhood. Makine writes, "From then onward we talked but said nothing. Coming between us we could see the screen that is formed by those smooth words, those echoes of the everyday we give voice to; the verbal liquid with which we feel obliged, without knowing why, to fill the silence" (120). While the narrator and his grandmother once abandoned themselves to wordlessness and were transported to the ghost city of memories, they now deny the silence with idle chatter. He comes to realize that people speak in order to avoid the pregnant silence. The narrator explains, "They are intoxicated by this vocal gruel that ensnares every object and every being" (121). Language can suffocate the imagination because it smothers all that it attempts to describe. Charlotte's memories contain a necessary element of silence in order to allow imagination to survive. Her stories are not grounded in historical facts; they take flight in the mind. The narrator realizes, "The unsayable! It was mysteriously linked, I now understood, to the essential. The essential was unsayable. Incommunicable. And everything in this world that tortured me with its silent beauty, everything that needed no words, seemed to me essential. The unsayable was essential" (121). Like the narrators of The Lover and Fear and Trembling, the narrator finds that words have failed him with their Apollonian solidity.

However, words seem to be the only means for the narrator to enter Charlotte's world. Words, though imperfect, are necessary to the life of the imagination. He decides to discover a new language, a "language of amazement" that will encompass the richness of experience and give life to dreams (194). The narrator relates:

> I walked beside her in silence. I sensed that "Kukushka" would henceforth be the first word in our new language. The new language that would say the unsayable. [...] For the first time in my life the silence of the last moments before the train pulled out did not become embarrassing. [...] Charlotte was silent. Catching my eye, she smiled softly. We had no need of words. (133)

The narrator does not lose faith that a language exists in which it is possible to express all things inexpressible. In his mind, he begins to entertain the idea that "one could express this language in writing" (194). With his newfound hope, he continues the search for a way to express his understanding. He recalls, "When I thought of Charlotte, her presence in these drowsy streets had the reality, discreet and spontaneous, of life itself. What I still had to find were the words to tell it with" (241). By exploring the difficulties of expression and the value of silence, the narrator finally finds the language that conveys the "unsayable," and he records it within the pages of Dreams of My Russian Summers. Able to use writing to express the essence of life, the narrator is transformed into the author, Andreï Makine.

In the 1984 novel <u>The Lover</u> by Marguerite Duras, an "already old" female narrator looks back on her experiences as a fifteen-year-old living in Indochina in the 1930s (3). Her reflections relate her affair with a wealthy Chinese lover, her relationship with her dysfunctional family, and her early desire to become a writer. Through confession and the recollection of memories, the narrator hopes to resolve her conflicted feelings and sort out the images of her past. However, she acknowledges the difficulty in using words to glean meaning from experience. She explains, "I've written a good deal about the members of my family, but then they were still alive, my mother and my brothers. And I skirted around them, skirted around all these things without really tackling them" (Duras 7). The narrator expresses the belief that in life, no particular moment occupies a special place. Life is not built around a central plot; there is no climactic moment around which a story can be built to produce an ultimately cathartic resolution. She maintains, "The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not exist. There's never any center to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it's not true, there was no one" (8). To the narrator, writing must allow life to exist as an amorphous entity.

"Even if paper was not meant to capture the idea, even if ink was never intended to contain the infinite space of the self, writers do not abandon the possibility of expression."

Constraining life with words in order to tell a story reduces writing to mere propaganda. She argues, "Sometimes I realize that if writing isn't, all things, all contraries confounded, a quest for vanity and void, it's nothing. That if it's not, each time, all things confounded into one through some inexpressible essence, then writing is nothing but advertisement" (8). Advertisements reveal only select aspects of an idea or object. They make the mediocre seem beautiful as they downplay the unattractive. If moments from a life are distilled and reduced into one storyline with a clear-cut ending, then writing serves as a cosmetic tool that manipulates certain moments into a narrative that muffles the complexity of life. Writing loses its value and becomes "nothing." Instead, the narrator reveals everything that comes to mind. She does not try to order her thoughts chronologically. Because she realizes that writing can be "all contraries confounded," she is free of the need to uncover one, single meaning. The narrator remarks, "I can see that all options are open now, that there seem to be no more barriers, that writing seems at a loss for somewhere to hide, to be written, to be read" (8). She releases herself from the constraint of resolving her conflicted emotions. She acknowledges that it is possible to feel both love and hate towards her mother without reconciling the two into a single entity that would diminish her feelings. Furthermore, she recognizes that she does not completely understand her relationship with her family. She does not force herself to draw conclusions. Duras writes:

> I still can't understand however hard I try. [...] It's the area on whose brink silence begins. What happens there is silence, the slow travail of my whole life. I'm still [...] as far away from the mystery now as I was then. I've never written, though I thought I wrote, never loved, though I thought I loved, never done anything but wait outside the closed door. (25)

The narrator has recourse to silence. Finding that words are not enough for a "whole life," that they are unable to open "the closed door," she frequently chooses silence over words that can at best provide incomplete meanings.

Marcelle Marini comments that Duras's writing is filled with repetitions, artistic use of spacing, and abrupt breaks in thought (qtd. in Selous 12). Her disruptive style "cannot be read according to pre-established codes" (12). Through a rebellion of style, Duras provokes readers to abandon traditional modes of thought and understanding. The result is an "effect of silence" in which the reader is free to "create new meanings" (12). Marini explains how the silence through stylistic disorder frees Duras:

> For Marguerite Duras, writing means first of all creating silence and emptiness. Doing away with ready-made patterns of language, the fixed moulds of a story in which she can only take borrowed rôles. Silencing the cacophony of voices which come from all around to take her over, perpetually talking away inside her, and often in her place; the vast, anonymous voice which inhabits her and which she inhabits. Ridding herself of these forms that surge over her, invading her, the better to contain her. (12)

Stylistic chaos is not the only source of silence in The Lover. Throughout the novel, the narrator's voice is frequently silent. In descriptions of her relationship with the Chinese lover, "silence" is repeated multiple times. For example, Duras writes, "[He] says he loves her madly, says it very softly. Then is silent. She doesn't answer. [...] She says nothing. Suddenly, all at once, she knows, knows that he doesn't understand her, that he never will, that he lacks the power to understand such perverseness" (37). While the lover freely proclaims his love for the narrator, she is not willing to bind herself to the word. Duras continues, "He says he's lonely, horribly lonely because of this love he feels for her. She says she's lonely too. She doesn't say why" (37). Defining her emotions simply as unqualified love would be a disservice to both the narrator and the lover because it would be an exercise in "propaganda." Ultimately, "she tells him she doesn't want him to talk, what she wants is for him to do as he usually does with the women he brings to his flat. She begs him to do that" (38). Weary of the lover's words that fail to acknowledge the formless mixture of "all things," the narrator chooses silence. Instead of speaking, she expresses herself through sensual interaction, a form of communication that is beyond words.

The novels Fear and Trembling, Dreams of My Russian Summers, and The Lover acknowledge the inability of words to convey meanings held within the unlimited scope of consciousness. When words are wrapped around the inexpressible self, meaning is lost between the amorphous Dionysian and the rigid Apollonian constructs of language. The writer's intent slips by in the space between mind and ink. Even if paper was not meant to capture the idea, even if ink was never intended to contain the infinite space of the self, writers do not abandon the possibility of expression. By giving room for silence in text, the writer gives the reader's mind an opportunity to enter the realm of imagination and uncover the meaning that escapes the page through incomplete expressions and violated truths.

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Author's
biography

GAVIN MCDOWELL

Gavin McDowell lives in Indianapolis, Indiana. He graduated from Cathedral High School in 2004. He has a major in Theology and a minor in Medieval Studies. His essay began as an exploration of Gawain's character throughout all of Arthurian literature. He found the gradual degradation of Gawain's character appalling and decided to blame Chretien for starting the trend.

Double Indignity: TWO TALES IN CHRETIEN DE TROYES'S <u>PERCEVAL</u>

Gavin McDowell

McPartlin Award Second Place Winner

Grail: Once and Future Quest

Professor Kathleen Biddick

"And the boy told the story you've been hearing. To tell it again would be stupid and boring. Who wants a twice-told tale?"

— Chretien de Troyes, <u>Perceval</u>, ll. 1381–1383.

If any tale deserves a second telling, it is the story of the grail. The grail quest has been the source of much speculation, beginning with the <u>Perceval</u>, the first grail romance. The Perceval is also the last, longest, and most unusual of Chretien de Troyes's Arthurian romances. The poem is peculiar for two reasons. First, Chretien died before completing it. Second, the poem has not one main character, but two, and they are mostly independent of each other. Midway through the poem, Chretien abandons Perceval and follows Gawain, whose adventures dominate the poem until its inconclusive conclusion. However, Gawain's adventures resemble Perceval's, which stirs thoughts that perhaps the poem is its own twice-told tale.

Why does Gawain put on his armor at the same time that Perceval takes his off? No one can answer the question because Chretien took his narrative intentions to the grave. The dual narratives of the quest of Perceval and the quest of Gawain have enough parallels in structure, character, and theme to suggest that the two stories are intended to be analogous. They are more than analogous, however. Gawain's adventures both recall the events of Perceval's quest and expand upon them. The events are analogous, but the contexts are different. Whereas Perceval's quest shows a boy rising to the romantic standards of knighthood, Gawain's quest shows an established idealized knight falling into decadence. The two narratives are so intertwined that the serious issues in Gawain's narrative undermine idealistic elements of Perceval's adventures, including the quest for the grail. Chretien undoes Perceval's narrative by recasting the story with Gawain as Perceval's foil. Chretien introduces the grail quest

theme only to subvert it with this second character; his purpose is to parody the romance genre.

By definition, a parody must imitate, and the overall structure of the quests of Perceval and Gawain are similar, with many direct parallels. For instance, Perceval's story begins when he meets a group of knights; Gawain's story begins when he meets Perceval, a new knight. When Perceval leaves home, Chretien writes, "his mother wept as he sat in his saddle."[1] Likewise, when Gawain leaves King Arthur's court and starts on his journey, "no lady was able to hold back an outflow of sorrow."[2] Perceval encounters a Haughty Knight; Gawain encounters a haughty lady. Perceval fights a Red Knight to obtain his armor; Gawain fights a squire with red hair to obtain a nag. Both knights champion girls who have endured abuse, and both knights come to the aid of ladies whose knights have suffered mortal blows. The most significant parallel is the similarity between Perceval's quest for the grail and Gawain's quest for the lance. The degree to which these episodes resemble each other varies, but the large number of corresponding episodes suggests intentional parallelism.

"The dual narratives of the quest of Perceval and the quest of Gawain have enough parallels in structure, character, and theme to suggest that the two stories are intended to be analogous."

A parody must both imitate and reinterpret. Thus, in the quests of Gawain and Perceval the two knights respond differently in similar situations to reveal disparities in their characters. A good example is Perceval's tutelage under Gornemant de Goort, which has a vague parallel to Gawain's meeting with the boatman near Castle Champguin. Both characters orient the knights in their new environments. Perceval, the new knight, needs Gornemant de Goort to train him in the ways of knighthood. Likewise, Gawain, the stranger in a strange land, needs the boatman to explain the landscape to him, particularly the mysterious Castle Champguin. Perceval's reaction to his tutor is one of gratitude and respect. Of Perceval, Gornemant says, "You promised you'd take my advice and do whatever I said you should do. You did, my friend, you did."[3] Perceval's obedience is a sign of a willingness to change. However, when Gawain decides to visit Castle Champguin, even after the boatman describes the deadly machinations guarding it, the boatman cries, "Oh no, sir! In the name of God, that's foolish: don't to it."[4] To which Gawain replies: "Good host…don't take me for a shiftless, faithless coward! May God give me up for lost if I listen to such advice!"[5] In Gawain's case, his disobedience shows a certain stubbornness, a refusal to change. Thus, Gawain and Perceval, thought connected by this parallel incident, appear in different lights.

The different presentations of Perceval and Gawain in parallel incidents reveal the fundamental difference between the two knights — their ability to change. Perceval, as demonstrated in the episode with Gornemant, is capable of change. For example, at the beginning of the poem, Perceval is not merely dull, but self-interested to the point of apathy. When King Arthur explains the crisis with the Red Knight to Perceval, Chretien writes, "The king's story couldn't have meant less to the boy, and the queen's

sorrow and shame meant exactly as much."[6] Perceval's eventual confrontation with the knight, in fact, results from his selfish desire to obtain the knight's armor. He has not yet learned to understand the needs of others. Long before Gawain takes over the story, Perceval moves from apathy to empathy, such as when he encounters the Haughty Knight's lady a second time: "Her complexion discolored and pale, she filled Perceval with pity."[7] Perceval's pity drives him to find out why the lady is in such a wretched condition, and the following duel with the Haughty Knight allows Perceval to correct an earlier error. In short, Perceval is a dynamic character, one that can change, and needs to change to fit his portrait of idealized knighthood.

Gawain, however, never changes, making him Perceval's foil. If Gawain is Perceval's foil, it seems strange for Chretien to present Gawain as a knight who is already ideal. Perceval seems conscious of Gawain's chivalric perfections when he first meets him. "Good sir," he says, "I've heard you mightily praised, in many places, and deeply desired that you and I might be friends, unless the idea displeases you."[8] Gawain's role in the poem is to remain static, to act as the standard to which other knights aspire. Chretien acknowledges Gawain's status in this passage, but then, in Gawain's actual adventures, Chretien attributes many sordid characteristics to the supposedly impeccable knight. The increasing status of Perceval only exacerbates Gawain's faults. Unfortunately, since Gawain can never change, he must remain an imperfect knight, though a perfect foil for the dynamic Perceval.

Gawain begins his work as Perceval's foil through the deconstruction of Perceval's romantic idealism, which Gawain recasts in a cynical light through his fractured relationship with women. For example, though Perceval and Gawain are both courteous to women, Perceval's one relationship represents idealized romantic love, while Gawain's many relationships are ones of violence. Perceval's one and only love is Lady Blanchefleur. When goose blood touches the snow and forms the color of her complexion, Perceval cannot help but stop and admire the sight. "The more he looked," Chretien writes, "the happier he grew, seeing once again the exact color of her beautiful face."[9] Perceval must think of her often for something as inconsequential as a few drops of blood to conjure images of his beloved. Furthermore, his attachment to her must border on obsession if he can remember the exact color of her face. In contrast, Gawain's love affairs with the lady of Escavalon and the haughty girl are short-lived, and both lead him to frequent, violent conflicts with others. Chretien also reveals that Gawain has a different approach to love, one far less romantic than reflecting on the appearance of one's beloved in nature. When he first meets her, Gawain has the following exchange with the haughty girl:

> "And my intention?" "Was to steal me
> Away and carry me off,
> Draped on your horse's neck."
> "Exactly, young lady, exactly!"[10]

What Gawain describes is tantamount to rape. Perceval, though he has many follies, is not this low. The two knights, though they are parallel to each other and share similar quests, are most distant here, operating on opposite sides of romantic idealism.

Perceval holds to social idealism as well as romantic idealism, but Gawain, too, reflects the opposite extreme. During his quest, Perceval establishes the perfect relationship between the knight and society. Through his valorous exploits, Perceval manages to transform Castle Baurepaire, where "everywhere one went were empty, deserted streets and abandoned houses, no men, no women to be seen,"[11] to a place where "the bells of every Church and monastery sounded, and monks and nuns gave grateful thanks to Our Lord. People were dancing up the streets, and everywhere."[12] Gawain's situation, on the other hand, is a cynical parody of the relationship between the knight and society. In his travels, he takes refuge in the wealthy city of Escavalon. Gawain is unaware that he is in "a place where everyone hated him."[13] The people hate him because of accusations that Gawain was responsible for the murder of their lord. Chretien never reveals whether Gawain is guilty of the murder or not, another way that he makes the seemingly ideal knight look unseemly. Gawain's mere presence transforms the utopia of Escavalon to a place where "every single rogue snatched up a pitchfork or a flail or a hammer."[14] The mob of peasants threatens to even tear apart the tower where Gawain resides and bring the roof down on his head. What Gawain has done is single-handedly throw a community into turmoil. Just as Perceval builds up a community, Gawain tears one down.

The knights' attitudes toward their respective quests reveals another way that Gawain's quest parodies Perceval's — through the deconstruction of moral idealism. Perceval bears a great deal of guilt for his failure in the grail quest. After the ugly maiden has cursed Perceval for failing the grail quest, Perceval makes the vow that he would never spend

> Two nights in a row in any
> Lodging, or hear of any
> Strange voyage and not test
> In strangeness, or learn of a worthy
> Knight, or pair of knights,
> Without offering to fight them —
> All this, until he knew
> For whom the grail had been borne
> And until he'd found the bloody
> Lance and understood
> Why it bled.[15]

This adamant vow comes at the expense of the other glory-mongering quests that knights like Gawain desire. The passage reflects the intensity of guilt that Perceval feels for having failed the quest and his honorable resolve to attempt to mend the damage he has done. His vow to attempt strange voyages and fight knights along the way are either for the glorification of Arthur's court or for Perceval's personal enlight-enment. He is not selfish. Gawain and the other knights leap at the opportunity to travel to foreign places and win honor, "but Perceval disagreed."[16] His heart, above all, is on the grail.

On the other hand, Gawain's reluctant acceptance of the lance quest shows his neglect of his moral responsibility. His decision to accept the lance quest is hardly as stirring as Perceval's decision to take up the grail quest. When Guinganbresil offers Gawain the lance quest as restitution for Gawain's slaughter of his lord, Gawain responds, "I'd much prefer to be murdered where I stand, or to spend eight years in prison."[17] Gawain cannot humble himself like Perceval can. He has too much personal pride to accept the quest at first. An old man convinces Gawain to accept the lance quest by assuring him that "no dishonor is involved."[18] For Gawain, honor and the self come before everything else. Again, this attitude is a total reversal of Perceval's. Again, the tone of Gawain's quest flies in the face of the idealism of Perceval.

In addition to parodying Perceval's quest through the deconstruction of his ideals, Gawain also parodies and deconstructs the very meaning of the grail space. The grail space can be understood on two levels; it is not merely the place where the grail resides. For Perceval, the grail space is the grail castle. Perceval's first adventure reaches its climax at the grail castle, and, had Chretien finished the poem, most likely Perceval's second adventure would have concluded in the same place. The extant portion of Gawain's adventure concludes at the Castle of the Rock of Champguin, which becomes Gawain's grail space, even though Champguin houses neither the actual grail nor the lance, Gawain's equivalent of the grail. Ultimately, the grail space houses whatever one wants most. For Perceval, the idealist, the grail space just happens to contain the grail. For Gawain, the grail space houses several hundred fair maidens. The worldliness of Gawain's grail space compared to Perceval's reflects the extent of the parody in Gawain's quest.

The grail spaces, like the grail knights, contain many close parallels. Both castles claim beleaguered people as inhabitants, and both are under the curse of a terrible spell. In both castles, the knight can break the spell only if he undergoes a test. Both castles have a pair of monarchs as rulers, though two kings lord over the grail castle while two queens control Castle Champguin. Most peculiarly of all, and perhaps the strongest evidence that the two castles function as parallels, is that the kings of the grail castle are close relatives to Perceval, while the queens of Castle Champguin are close relatives to Gawain. The parallels show that the two places are related, that Castle Champguin's relationship to the grail castle is not just incidental, and that Gawain's behavior at Castle Champguin is a response to Perceval's behavior at the grail castle.

Unfortunately, the exact nature of how Gawain deconstructs the meaning of the grail space remains uncertain because certain parallels are ambiguous. One of these vague parallels involves the mothers of Perceval and Gawain. One of Perceval's chief concerns during his travels is whether his mother is still alive. He learns eventually that she has died and, worse still, that her death is his fault. Perceval's hermit uncle tells him, "She died of sorrow, and that was the sin which caused you, later, to ask no questions about the grail or the lance."[19] This error appeals to Perceval's moral sensibility. His guilt leads him toward learning why he failed the grail quest and toward repentance for his sin so that he will not fail in the future. The corresponding episode in

Gawain's quest is his shocking discovery that his mother, thought to be dead for over twenty years, is actually alive. However, the purpose of this odd parallel is a mystery. The connection here between the two quests is just bizarre. Perhaps the completed poem may have clarified this ambiguity.

Other ambiguities relating to the parallelism of the grail spaces call into question the validity of the view that Gawain's quest is a parody of Perceval's. While Perceval's quest champions romanticism and Gawain's quest tarnishes it, Chretien seems to reverse this pattern in the grail spaces. Perceval fails during his first visit to the grail castle. Gawain, however, manages to break the spell on Champguin on his first attempt, though he nearly dies in the attempt. This situation creates another disturbing upset in the established pattern of rising and falling action — the trial to break the spell at Champguin seems like a greater challenge than the trial at the grail castle. All Perceval had to do was ask a question, but Gawain had to survive magical bolts and the assault of a lion. The themes that have been consistent up to this point now seem confused, as Gawain's scenario is the more romantically idealistic of the two.

However, Chretien has not broken his pattern. He has simply maintained it in another form. Perceval may have failed at the grail castle, but, since he repents of his sins, he has a chance at redemption. Gawain, now lord of Champguin, seems to have reasserted his status as the ideal knight toward the end of his quest, but he soon learns from his host that "whoever God so loves that He makes him master of this place… needs to understand that he's bound never again to go out of this castle for any reason whatever."[20] Gawain has reached his zenith and his nadir at the same time: he has fulfilled the duty of a romantic knight by winning great honor, but he has stymied further quests for glory by unintentionally domesticating himself.

As a side note, Gawain does, in fact, leave the castle for a time. How he manages to do this, or whether he suffers any consequence, is another ambiguity resulting from the unfinished text. In any case, Gawain's success is another instance of cynical deconstruction; his success is actually a failure. On this note, the Perceval breaks off, not with the hope of success in Perceval's romantic adventure but with the failure of Gawain's parody.

In writing the Perceval, Chretien de Troyes creates a compelling grail romance and then parodies it through the various deconstructions of romance themes. He has given his audience a twice-told tale without sounding boring or stupid or, for that matter, even finishing the tale. The unfinished state of the poem, however, does raise a question about how far Chretien was willing to take his parallels, and how he would intertwine them in order to complete the Perceval. A more probing question is whether Chretien would maintain the parallels beyond the current ending of the Perceval. The greatest question, then, is why the poem is unfinished at all. The obvious answer is the author's death, but the intricacy of the relationship between Perceval and Gawain suggests another reason that could have impeded the poem's completion. Perhaps Chretien, in his final years, could not decide whether to write a genuine romance or a parody. Perhaps his inability to side with one character or the other caused him to fail in achieving his own grail, the completion of the Perceval.

[1] Chretien de Troyes. <u>Perceval: The Story of the Grail</u>. Trans. and ed. Burton Raffel. New Haven: Yale, 1999, p. 20. Hereafter, P.

[2] P, 152

[3] P, 52

[4] P, 240

[5] P, 240–241

[6] P, 31

[7] P, 119

[8] P, 142

[9] P, 133

[10] P, 211–212

[11] P, 56

[12] P, 87

[13] P, 182

[14] P, 188

[15] P, 150

[16] P, 149

[17] P, 195

[18] P, 195

[19] P, 202

[20] P, 253

biography

Author's

BRIAN DROSTE

Brian Droste comes from Paola, Kansas, a rural town of about 5,000 people. He indulges in the simple pleasures of life, such as working on his old Chevy, reading a book by the lake, or sharing stories with his friends around a campfire on a starry summer night. This love for the simple life inspired Brian to write the following piece on a social justice issue that he could relate to — the small farmer's struggle to maintain his livelihood in a world dominated by industrialization. Although Brian does not farm, many of his friends and thousands of his fellow Kansans do. He hopes others will become aware of the problems of agri*business* and do their part to help preserve agri*culture*.

Brian is a proud resident of both Sorin College and Bond Hall. He plans to graduate from the School of Architecture in 2010 and continue to pursue his wildest dreams shortly thereafter.

Agribusiness VS. AGRICULTURE

Brian Droste

McPartlin Award Third Place Winner

First-Year Composition — Community-Based Learning

Professor Ed Kelly

"One Kansas Farmer Feeds 128 People + You," reads an old, rickety sign along a lonesome stretch of Interstate 70 outside Manhattan, Kansas. Weary passersby might find the subject of this sign rather trivial. They could assume that the source of their food has little importance in their daily lives. This, however, is anything but the case. The means by which food is produced greatly affects our health, our economy, our environment, and our society. Food production throughout history has undergone drastic technological advances, whether through the invention of fire, the practice of agriculture, or the chemistry of preservatives. In more modern times, food production has become an essential component of the United States economy. This essential component comes from two basic sources: small, simple farms such as the one alluded to by the sign and large industrial farms run by corporate giants. Thus, a choice arises between big and small. Should American agriculture be industrialized or kept at a small scale?

There are pros and cons for each of the two options. Supporters for industrialized agriculture point out how much more technologically-advanced corporate farms are than small farms. They also cite greater production levels as an advantage over small farms, which produce less food individually. Supporters for localized agriculture, however, stress how much healthier food produced by small farms is when compared with industrialized food, which contains larger amounts of pesticides, herbicides, and other chemicals. Furthermore, small farm advocates point to the fact that localized agriculture is much more environmentally friendly than industrialized agriculture is. Both choices should be carefully analyzed before reaching any conclusions.

First of all, what is meant by the terms "small farm" and "industrial farm"? For the intents of this paper, a small farm is a food-producing operation run by a farmer or a small group of a few farmers, which produces non-commercialized food products. An industrial farm is a food-producing operation run by a large corporation, which produces commercialized food-products. Wendell Berry cites in his essay "The Whole Horse: The Preservation of the Agrarian Mind" that each of these means of food production carries its own outlook on life. "Industrialism," as he calls the industrial farm

mindset, seeks to provide "commodities, amusements,...distractions," and other con-veniences to the world (Kimbrell et al. 7). "Agrarianism," or the small farm mindset, is "an attitude, a loyalty, and a passion-all based in a close connection with the land" (Kimbrell et al. 7). In a sense, industrial farms are the epitome of agri*business*, whereas small farms are the essence of agri*culture*.

As was said earlier, food production has become an essential component of the United States economy. Because industrial farms are such large-scale businesses, they are gen-erally more efficient than small farms in terms of economic competition. As Harold Breimyer states in Farm Policy, industrial farms can "negotiate better delivery terms and tap cheaper credit sources" than small farmers can (70). Industrial farms are also more efficient at "buying supplies, getting credit, and marketing products" (Breimyer 70). Put more simply, industrial farms are more adept to the ever-growing business side of farming than small farms are.

However, when it comes to efficiency in food production, small farms have the upper hand. This might sound false, as an individual small farm might produce only a fraction of what an industrial farm might produce. One could take this to mean that industrial farms are more efficient, but this is not nec-essarily true. A 1974 study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that "the optimal size for efficient irrigated farming" of veg-etables was 200 acres, which was less than 10 percent the size of the average farm at that time in California (Select Committee 59). Andrew Kimbrell, the editor of Fatal Harvest, also affirms that industrial farms are generally less efficient than small farms are in terms of food production. Kimbrell recognizes that industrial farms may produce greater quantities of food overall, but the ac-tual food production per unit area on a small farm is "virtually always higher than that of larger farms" (57). He also points to a 1992 U.S. Agricultural Census report, which found "smaller farm sizes are 2 to 10 times more productive per unit acre than larger ones" (57). In other words, a farm operated with small-farming methods would produce more food than a farm of the same size operated with industrial-farming methods.

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Furthermore, there are greater differences between small and industrial farming prac-tices than merely size. They have very different methods of actually producing food. For example, small farms are much easier to manage with manual labor than industrial farms are. According to Kimbrell, industrialized agriculture is generally more mech-anized because of its large scale. This mechanization includes not only mechanical tools such as tractors and combines, but also chemical equipment such as pesticides. Small farmers have the option to use non-chemical means of protecting their crops, such as rotating crops to different fields after a few years, in an efficient manner (Kimbrell et al. 56).

The use of chemicals on food products brings up another very important issue: the health and safety of the food being produced. Opponents of industrial agriculture

point to the liberal use of pesticides, herbicides, and even antibiotics as a "toxic con-
tamination" of the nation's food supply (Kimbrell et al. 52). These pesticides are pres-
ent in the crops and the soil they are sprayed on. In fact, a 1998 survey by the Food
and Drug Administration found pesticide residue on "over 35 percent of the food
tested" (Kimbrell et al. 52). Furthermore, pesticides are present in industrial farms'
runoff water, which makes its way into the drinking water of more than one million
Americans (Kimbrell et al. 52). "So What?" you might ask, "If it happens every day, it
can't be all that bad." That is a dangerously false assumption.

The Environmental Protection Agency has targeted 165 common pesticides as having
the potential for causing cancer (Kimbrell et al. 52). This statistic is even more alarm-
ing when you realize these common chemicals were more than likely found on the
food tested by the FDA in the aforementioned 1998 survey. That means potentially
cancerous chemicals used in industrial farming are a part of everyday Americans' diets.
This includes the diets of fetuses, infants, and young children, for whom there is no
specific legal protection from certain chemicals being used on their food (Kimbrell
et al. 53). In fact, many scientists blame industrial pesticides for the "current cancer
'epidemic' among children" (Kimbrell et al. 53). Even farmers who merely work with
these chemicals are at risk for cancer — six times more likely than non-farmers ac-
cording to a National Cancer Institute study (Kimbrell et al. 53).

One could easily take these facts to mean that the practices of industrial farming are
endangering the health of Americans, but these facts can be misleading. However
harmful pesticides and herbicides may be for consumers, industrial farms are not the
only ones who use such chemicals. Small farmers commonly use these same chemi-
cals as well; they are just as guilty. Granted, they are not used on as large a scale as at
industrial farms, but the adverse effects could be just as dangerous. In this case, we
must choose the lesser of two evils.

Another important issue to consider is the presence of food-borne illnesses present
in food from each type of farm. The Center for Disease Control has determined that
reported cases of salmonella and *E. coli* poisoning have increased tenfold in the past
two decades, an increase which is blamed largely on the rise of industrial poultry and
livestock farms (Kimbrell et al. 53). Rightfully so, as none of these pathogens were
discovered in meat until industrial farms took over the majority of American meat
production (Kimbrell et al. 53). Unlike small livestock farms with large open pastures,
industrial farms are more like "animal factories" with animals living in crowded cir-
cumstances for ideal space efficiency (Kimbrell et al. 53). Living in such close proxim-
ity would make livestock incredibly vulnerable to disease from each other and would
allow infections to spread easily among the animals. Conversely, a sick animal on a
small farm would be relatively easy to isolate from the rest, making it much more
difficult for an infection to spread. Proponents of industrial farms promote the use of
irradiation to sanitize meats, but this process of killing potential bacteria with X-rays
also destroys natural nutrients in the meats and can damage the DNA of consumers
(Kimbrell et al. 53). With small, localized livestock farms, these dangers are nonex-

istent and the dangers of bacterial infection are minimized. When it comes to protection from food-born illnesses while maintaining nutrients, food from small farms clearly has the advantage.

The next point to examine in the debate over agribusiness versus agriculture is the cost involved with each type of production. As far as the monetary price consumers pay for food at supermarkets goes, it is logical that food from industrial farms can be sold for less than food from small farms. Because industrial farms produce vast quantities of food, each item can be sold for less, which can increase sales and maintain a profit. Small farms, on the other hand, produce less and must sell food at a higher price per item to make a profit. However, while industrial food may seem cheaper at first glance, there are other costs that must be taken into account, such as taxes. American taxpayers contribute millions of dollars every year to help subsidize industrial farms (Kimbrell et al. 55). For example, an average of $659 million is spent every year to promote industrial agriculture products (Kimbrell et al. 55). This includes $1.6 million for promoting McDonald's Chicken McNuggets in Singapore and $11 million for advertising the Pillsbury Doughboy worldwide, both of which were spent over the course of only eight years (Kimbrell et al. 55). None of these costs are associated with locally produced food from small farms.

Besides monetary costs, there are several other prices both consumers and producers must pay for food production. First of all, as was already examined, there are numerous health costs involved. The aforementioned presence of possibly carcinogenic chemicals in food could cost consumers their invaluable health. Ailing health would also cost lost workdays and wages for the average "80 million Americans who contract food-borne illnesses each year" (Kimbrell et al. 55). Furthermore, farm workers encounter numerous dangers to their health. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates the number of farm workers poisoned by pesticide each year to be nearly 300,000, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that the occupational fatality rate of industrial farm workers was nearly six times the national average for all private sector industries (Kimbrell et al. 55). Once again, both industrial and small farms present health risks from chemicals and food-borne illnesses, but small farms minimize these risks with safer agricultural practices.

Another non-monetary cost associated with food production is the environmental cost. Modernized farming is a major source of air, soil, and water pollution from pesticides and other chemicals (Kimbrell et al. 54–55). The intensive use of machinery in industrial farming only exacerbates this problem as it causes massive erosion of fertile topsoil, 50 percent of which has been lost in the U.S. since 1960 (Kimbrell et al. 54). Industrial machinery also contributes to air pollution through the burning of petroleum, as does transportation for food products. Before it reaches the dinner table, an average American's food travels a minimum of 1,300 miles, which consumes an incredible amount of fossil fuels (Kimbrell et al. 55). This would increase the depletion of fossil fuels and aggravate the problem of global warming. This is not to say that small farms do not create serious environmental costs, but their negative impact on

the natural world is far less than that of their industrial counterparts because they use fewer chemicals, less machinery, and fewer destructive practices.

Perhaps the greatest costs associated with food production are the intangible costs to society as a whole. It is undeniable that American farming is becoming increasingly more industrialized. As Harold Breimyer states, "agriculture has been emancipated from its dreary agrarian past" (9). However, the small farms that remain in America create "constant conflict with the systematic order and centralized control that are the hallmark of industrial processes" (Breimyer 9). In a sense, those who stress traditional small farming practices are limiting those who wish to discover and implement new agricultural technology. By embracing the past so much as to reject the future, traditionalists are, in effect, putting a damper on the technological development of American society.

However, industrial farming is taking a much more evident toll on small farming. Our country lost an average of nearly 26,000 small family farms between 1987 and 1992 due to "the onslaught of industrial agriculture" (Kimbrell et al. 55). More specifically, small farmers are essentially at the mercy of industrial farms. As Wendell Berry points out in his book In the Presence of Fear, small farmers "must...take for their produce simply whatever they are paid" as they do business with "large and remote corporations" (18-19). If the small farmers cannot make enough money, they simply go under. Quickly fading with these small farms are the communities based around them. Once-rural farming communities are quickly transforming into suburban sprawls. In this sense, one of America's most traditional types of communities is being paved over with parking lots, strip malls, and large-scale industries. Supporters of industrialization would call this development. Opponents would call it an atrocity.

I recently had the opportunity to interview Jim Meinig, a fourth generation farmer in rural Paola, Kansas. He echoed the same feelings of being at the mercy of industrial farms. When asked about his farm's effect on the food industry, he replied, "What we do around here has absolutely no impact on the whole spectrum" (Personal Interview). I went on to ask him about the earnings he receives for selling his products to industrial distributors and he answered, "It sucks. My grandfather was getting almost the same amount per bushel as what we're getting today" (Personal Interview). When asked if there was any sort of union to help protect farmers like himself, he said, "As far as what you understand to be a union? No...There is no negotiation as far as prices go" (Personal Interview). Industrial farming is essentially being a bully to the great tradition of small farming. The small farmers did all the homework in the past; now the industrial farmers are stealing their homework and their lunch money to boot.

What industrial farming fails to take from small farming is its amazing intangible aspects that make it unique. Small farming has a rich culture and soul associated with it that cannot be found amidst the sterility of industrial farming. Small farms are what we Americans generally picture when we think of farming — a man in overalls driving his John Deere through endless rows of corn, tending the fields with his weathered, hardened hands. We usually do not picture a chemist in a lab coat engineering some

new pesticide for a new hybrid type of soybean. Small farms are the source of the phrase "home grown," whereas we connect industrial farms with the term "genetically altered."

Agriculture is based on a relationship with nature, something which small farming has seemed to preserve. Industrial farming, on the other hand, has tried to outsmart nature. In his essay "Organics at the Crossroads: The Past and the Future of the Organic Movement," Michael Sligh says that the problem with chemicals and food production is that they are "designed to 'beat' nature" rather than work with it (Kimbrell et al. 341). To beat nature is to approach agriculture from the aspect of squeezing as much as possible from the land. Such is the practice of industrial farming. Small farming does not use the land; it works with it. There is a very strong sense of the moral work ethic present among small farming. Small farmers represent a sense of pride in the work they do, while industrial farmers pride themselves on efficiency as a business.

Thus we return full circle to the idea of industrial farming being agri*business* and small farming being agri*culture*. The ultimate goal of agribusiness is to make money and it does an excellent job in that respect. Granted, industrial farmers also try to produce healthy, inexpensive, and environmentally-friendly food, but they clearly fail at it. Besides, this is just the means to an end for industrial farming. The ultimate goal of agriculture should be much less shallow. A committee member from the Select Committee on Small Business stated in a 1975 joint hearing about family farms that a small farmer's land "is his home, his life, not just his livelihood" (Select Committee 59). Small farming is what agriculture was meant to be — more than just an occupation. As Jim Meinig said about his farm, "It's just part of me" (Personal Interview).

After examining both types of farming, it is clear to see which type American agriculture should embody. Although industrial farming is more efficient as a business, small farming is better at the most basic premise of agriculture: food production. Small farms use safer agricultural techniques and fewer chemicals, which means they produce healthier food than highly-mechanized industrial farms. Small farms cost Americans less than industrial farms, whether in terms of money, health, or environmental damage. Finally, small farms foster greater tradition, values, and cultural identity than industrial farms do. For all of these reasons, American agriculture should be kept at a small scale. American farming should be taken back to its roots so we can all experience the wonders of that one Kansas farmer, not just those lucky 128 people.

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