

Volunteer State
Community College

Best of Student Essays

from the
2014-2015 Academic Year

Expository Essays
&
Research Writing

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Introduction

Volunteer State Community College Best Essays is a new incarnation of a previous publication entitled *VSCC English Department's Best Essays*. As the early version has done over the past decade, this publication will continue to showcase some of the best writing being done by students at Volunteer State, and we have just expanded the publication to include examples of excellent writing from a variety of academic disciplines. While much of the work appearing here is nominated by faculty in the Department of English, which publishes this book, faculty from other disciplines are now also invited to nominate student essays for collection. This year, we are pleased to include our first essay from a discipline other than English, "Patriarchy's Roots," written by Amy Leu for History 1110, World Civilization 1.

Each year, instructors at Volunteer State nominate students who have demonstrated excellence in writing and invite them to submit an essay to our selection committee; that committee of Vol State faculty then works collaboratively to choose superior student work for publication. *Best Essays*, then, represents the exemplary writing of student authors, the efforts made by nominating faculty, and hours of hard work the selection committee does in reading and choosing the best of the best submissions.

The purpose of this publication is twofold: first, to showcase exemplary student writing by Vol State students, and second, to provide our faculty with helpful tools for teaching writing and critical thinking skills to our students.

The student essays published here exhibit the elements essential to high-quality, college-level writing. They are separated into three categories, and one student in each category is awarded a prize for his or her work. Prize winners are chosen based on creativity, critical thought, organization, and an awareness of the fundamentals of good writing.

Section 1 focuses on English Composition 1 (English 1010) expository writing, personal responses to topics, and essays which do not typically include formal research. The essays generally rely upon the rhetorical modes of narration, description, and illustration.

Section 2 focuses on researched essays written for English Composition 1. This category gives first semester composition students the chance to show off their beginning collegiate research skills without having to compete with more advanced writers. Good research essays employ rhetorical modes such as comparison and contrast and/or cause and effect as a means of critical analysis. They include research from a limited number of sources.

Section 3 focuses on research essays written by students for English Composition 2 (English 1020) and for other courses. It also may include essays from other disciplines. The arguments are well-developed, and the research for these essays may be substantial.

The student essays appearing in this publication were submitted between the Summer 2014 and Spring 2015 terms. We think they demonstrate both the excellence and diversity of student writing at Volunteer State. We would like to thank all the professors who nominated student essays and encouraged students to submit. We'd also like to extend our sincerest

congratulations to the students whose work appears here. It is our goal to continue to develop this project, and to publish the best student writing at Vol State in a way that is meaningful to both students and faculty alike.

Leslie LaChance, Committee Chair
On behalf of the Best Essays Committee
Fall 2015

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Section 1:
Expository Writing
English 1010

PRIZE WINNER

First Place Expository Essay winner Jeremy Knight's essay "My Greatest Failure" is a compelling and narrative about how one man is able to find light and joy in his darkest moment. The strong sense of voice, rhythmic prose, and richly detailed descriptions are just a few of the things readers will find appealing in this essay. The author's subject matter is difficult, and the story is raw and emotionally honest, conveyed in artful prose. The essay redefines in a surprising way what it means to fail.

Jeremy W. Knight

Professor Deborah E. Moore, B.S., M.A.

English 1010

7 December 2014

My Greatest Failure

The barrel of the gun was cold against my tongue. The gun oil had a lightly acidic taste. I had reached the end of this path. My past kept pounding me, like giant waves beating against the great rocks of the shore, eventually turning them into sand. I could hear my teeth clatter on the gun as the tears streamed down my face.

I thought back to my earliest memories. I remembered summers over at my grandparents' house. Being awoken in the night by the bedroom door opening, and my grandfather pulling the covers back. I remembered having to work the fields with him, and how he destroyed my love for the outdoors. I remembered the feelings of dread and of shame. I remembered the confusion, not knowing how to tell anyone what was happening.

I remembered how, after I graduated high school, the one person I called friend used the hate and anger I felt to turn me into "muscle" for his "organization." I

remembered the horrible activities I performed in the name of loyalty and friendship. I still have nightmares about some of the things I did; I still hear the screams and pleas from people who did not deserve what happened.

I remembered finding the one bright spot in the darkness of my life, up till that point. She was beautiful, funny, and smart. She believed in me, believed that I was a good person. She even got me thinking that I was a good person, that I mattered. She pulled me off the path of destruction I was on. She was my everything.

I remembered the day I came home early from work. I remembered having knots in the pit of my stomach, and not knowing why. I remembered opening the front door and seeing her naked body intertwined with another man on my living room couch. I remembered the feelings of anger, of hatred, of disappointment. Of betrayal. The thoughts from my old life started to surface. The thoughts of what I could do to them, what I should do to them. Then I remembered feeling sorrow. I never wanted her to see me in the light of my old life, no matter how much she had hurt me. I closed the door.

That was the last straw, what led me to where I was. I was sitting in my truck in the middle of nowhere with a gun in my mouth. I could not take remembering all the bad and evil things that I had done, and that were done to me anymore. I was tired. I was weary. I was worn. I could not walk this path anymore, and the darkness was so thick I could not see any other way out.

I held my breath and pulled the trigger.

Time stopped.

I had always heard of people seeing their lives flash before their eyes, but could not say with any honesty that I believed it. In that moment though, as if on a movie

screen, I saw my life play out. I expected to see the atrocities of my life, but in their stead I was witnessing the good moments, the happy time from my life. I saw our family trip to Florida. The whole family together, laughing and playing in the ocean. I saw me and my dad playing darts. I saw the day my niece was born and holding her in my arms for the first time. As the images kept flashing, I realized the good moments far surpassed the bad. I just could not see it because all the anger, hate, and shame I felt kept those memories pushed down, locked up deep within the dark recesses of my mind.

Then the screen got dark. I saw my mom and dad weeping over my grave. I saw the devastation from my action drive them apart, cause them to become calloused and cold toward each other, and their friends and family. My heart broke at the thought of the pain I was inflicting on them, the two people who were always there for me no matter what. How could I do that to them? I couldn't. I wouldn't. I did not want to hurt them. I did not want them to feel that kind of pain. I did not want to die!

Click

I heard myself whisper, "Oh, Jesus." The gun fell from my hand into the darkness of the floorboard. My mind was still swimming, trying to grasp what had just happened. What was going on? Was I still alive? I had to get out of the truck. I struggled with the seat belt while clawing at the door searching for the handle. I could not get free. I had to get free. I had to get out of this truck.

Finally, the seat belt relinquished its hold and the door flung open. I fell from the seat onto the cold November ground. I was on all fours, vomiting like I was purging myself of the past that had been eating me up from the inside out. I collapsed onto the ground crying and exhausted.

It took me several minutes to realize that the gun had misfired. That gun had never misfired up until that point. I had put thousands of rounds through, and never a misfire. I do not have the arrogance to say I know why I was spared that night, but what I do know is that with a twitch of a finger, my life changed forever; it could have also ended. Then I would not have had all the wonderful experiences I have had since then. I know how deep the darkness goes, and when it gets that dark the only path you can see is suicide; but I promise you if you just stop, take a breath and let your eyes acclimate to the darkness you will see all the wondrous possibilities that stand before you.

Leslie Williams' essay relies heavily on dialogue to weave together a portrait and about her father's experiences in the Vietnam War. The work recounts the difficult and tragic circumstances faced by many military personnel, but Williams renders the voice of her father with such authenticity, the story becomes intensely personal. The skillful pacing of the essay, as it moves from detail to detail and moment to moment, keeps the reader engaged. The piece is a terrific example of how description and dialogue can work together to create an empathy-evoking portrait.

Leslie Williams

Professor Kevin Yeargin

English 1010

7 Feb. 2015

Pale Blue Eyes

The air was so thick with anticipation that I was having trouble breathing. He sat there wringing his hands as he struggled to speak the words that had haunted him for forty years. My father had never struggled to hold a conversation, and proudly declared on several occasions that he had “never met a stranger,” but on this gloomy Sunday afternoon he grimaced as though he were in pain trying to seek out the words to describe the nightmare that he had lived for three years. Although my father had never been a large man, he had always been stout and strong. I had always worried for days when I had to introduce a boy that I was dating for fear that my father would intimidate him, as he often did. Now, however, I almost didn't recognize the small, frightened figure that I stared at in apprehension. His emotional frailty at this moment broke my heart. Finally, after waiting what seemed an eternity, he finally looked at me, a skinny girl of only twenty years old holding a newborn baby, and smiled weakly.

“Go lay the boy in his bed, Pooh”, he said. “I'm as ready as I'll ever be.”

I opened my mouth to tell him that everything was okay, and that he didn't need to tell me these things that weighed so heavily on him if he wasn't ready, but he just smiled weakly and held up his hand to quiet my objections. I did as he asked and put my dreaming baby boy in his crib to sleep, then I sat on the couch near my father's chair so that I could be close to him as he spoke.

"I've never spoken to anyone about my time in Vietnam," he said. "I'm not ashamed of the choices that I made because we did our best given our situation, but I need you to know that there were things that we had to do in order to survive."

He paused to take a breath. His chest filled with so much air that I thought he might take in all of the air in the room before he continued.

"There were decisions made that no man should ever have to make, but we were still boys, and we were fighting an army that wasn't there."

My father's sky blue eyes glazed over with tears as he continued. "Your granddad expected me to join the service when I turned eighteen, and I never wanted to do anything to disappoint that man. You know how he was".

I thought back to the old sepia photograph that my grandmother kept next to her bed. The cheap wooden frame only helped to lend severity to the gaunt, handsome man in the picture. He was dressed in his army BDU's (Battle Dress Uniform) waiting for wartime, and my grandfather's signature half smile could still be seen despite the picture being nearly sixty years old. He would have, himself, fought in World War I if he had not been born with flat feet, a condition which at the time, was not compatible with warfare. "You never got to see the side of that man that I saw", my father continued. He was right. The man that I remembered worked hard, but he laughed often. He was never seen in his garden overalls without a lanky

little blonde girl by his side. I worshipped my grandfather, but I knew the sternness with which he treated my father. The elder Leslie immediately called me his “boy,” claiming that this way he would finally have a son.

As all of these memories came flooding back, I looked at the man that I will forever call “Daddy.” His strong hands had grown callused and dry from hard labor, and I knew the lengths that he went to in order to give me the life that he never had.

“I knew I was going to get drafted sooner or later, but I also knew how drafted men were treated. Dad would have never forgiven me if I were drafted. So I enlisted.”

He wet his lips, and paused as he continued. I knew that he was trying to prepare himself, more than me, for the story that he was about to tell.

“It was 1966, and I was with the 101st Airborne. They called us the Screamin’ Eagles. I’m not sure who came up with that name, but we liked it okay. We bragged to the other units that we had jumped out of more airplanes than they would ever fly on. We thought that we were on top of the world, but we didn’t stay there for long.”

His voice cracked as he delivered this last line, and he suppressed the urge to cry in front of his little girl. I hardened myself, and tried to pretend not to notice that he was falling apart. Inside I was shattering.

“Most of us were only eighteen or nineteen, but we pretended to be men. We pretended not to be bothered by the stories coming out of the jungle: the children with bombs strapped to them, the men that were dying, the countless that disappeared. We tricked ourselves into believing that could never happen to us.”

He looked up at me now, but his eyes were vacant. He saw his platoon, his men.

“What we ‘Screamin’ Eagles’ didn’t realize was that our job was to get dropped into the middle of battles while they were at their worst. We got dropped right in the middle of the hail of gunfire coming from both sides. When we dropped down we immediately started firing our weapons and running. What we didn’t know was that the Vietcong had built underground tunnels and bunkers that their small bodies could fit through. They would come up out of nowhere and grab you, or worse.”

His breathing had become to get rapid, and the tears were flowing freely now. He made no attempt to wipe away the streams that poured from his pale blue eyes.

“We were babies, Leslie. Could you imagine sending an eighteen year old boy to a place like that?”

My daddy composed himself and continued.

“We had raffles over there where a guy could win a ticket to go see The Bob Hope Show live. It was a way for us to get off that God forsaken piece of dirt, and remember what it’s like to live for a few days. A friend of mine had won the raffle, but would be going home during the time that he would be travelling, so he gave the ticket to me.”

I looked to my father’s calloused hands. They were shaking so badly now that even his constant twisting of them couldn’t keep me from noticing.

“The show was fine, but I remember that it was the first time that I realized how much people hated the war. Not only the war, but us. They threw things in my face, and called me a ‘baby killer’. God knows that I had to make some tough choices while I was in ‘Nam, but I never killed anyone that wasn’t trying to kill me first.”

The tears continued to flow, but the sadness in his eyes had been replaced with anger.

“I returned to Vietnam after four days, ready to tell my platoon about the labels that we were being stuck with, but my CO met me when I stepped off the chopper. I remember how grim he looked, but I tried to muster a smile. Being over there takes its toll on a man, and I always tried to keep spirits up. Until he told me that while I was gone my entire platoon had been wiped out.”

His eyes widened as if this was the first time he was hearing the news. His mouth agape, he choked on the sob that had been lodged in his throat. I slid onto the floor, and crawled over to his chair. I now sat on the aged, itchy, tan carpet in front of my father. I wanted to hold him, to sit in his lap, to tell him to stop thinking of these ghastly things, but I knew that he needed to tell someone. How could he have kept these horrors a secret for forty years? Even as my heart broke for him and his companions, it swelled with pride knowing that I had to have the strongest, most resilient man in the world as a father. I took his dry, beaten hand in mine, and murmured softly for him to continue.

“The fighting never stopped, Pooh. A week felt like a year. We rode in on planes, jumped out of planes into gunfire, ran, shot, and got shot at. We either won the battle we were in, or more often than not we had to hide out until they sent choppers in to pick us up. I can remember on several occasions, we had to run to get out of the jungle before they napalmed the whole place.”

Again his face hardened, and his pale blue eyes grew vacant as his mind took him back forty years.

“Running was the scary part. There were landmines and booby traps everywhere. You never knew if you were going to get your leg blown off or fall in a trap with spikes. I saw it every day.”

He stopped abruptly as if he was done with his story and began to wipe his face. I squeezed his hand, and reluctantly let it slip away so that he could take off his round, wire rimmed glasses to clean them.

“Pooh, do you know why I keep that?” He gestured to the black POW flag that had hung in our living room for as long as I could remember.

“No, Daddy”, I whispered softly, “Why?”

“After one of the times that I ran from a napalm strike, I was caught. They beat me up pretty badly, and took me to one of their ‘camps’ if you could call it that.”

I know that the expression on my face was pure shock and disbelief. My mouth fell ajar, and my eyes widened in surprise. A faint smile crept across my father’s tan, sun worn face as he continued,

“They tortured us in ways that I would never tell you or anyone. The cruelty that we endured at their hands was unimaginable. Out of the five of us that were in that camp, only two of us left alive.”

A deep sadness filled my father so completely that it radiated from him. I could feel the heartbreak in the marrow of my bones. He slid his rough hands back into mine, and gripped it ever so slightly to reassure me that he was okay.

“I always wondered why I was the lucky one. I asked God every day why I was allowed to survive when these other men had so much more to live for.”

He paused, and shifted his hand to my chin so that our faces were inches from each other. His pale blue eyes sparkled as he looked at me. They were the same as mine, and the same as my son’s. Pale eyes that had been passed down through what my dad liked to call the “onlys” since we were all only children.

He ended his story with a whisper, “And then you came along.”

This essay by Tracy Brewington recounts two journeys, one physical and the other emotional, as the author tells the story of a trip from Tennessee to Chicago, looking for answers to an important question. The narrative essay makes excellent use of figurative language in describing the passengers on the northbound bus, and it offers some important insights about what it means to say goodbye.

Tracy D. Brewington

Kathy Halbrooks

English 1010

28 October, 2014

Closure

I started packing a week ahead of time. I bought my bus ticket a month before the day I planned to leave. The first trip I had ever taken by myself turned out to be one of the most enlightening. I knew this trip would close a chapter in my life. I just didn't know how it would happen.

My mother and her husband pulled in the driveway to pick me up and take me to catch my bus to Chicago. We arrived at the pickup spot and as other passengers arrived, I started to wonder what I had gotten myself into. This group of people looked like an accurate sampling of Baskin Robbins ice cream. There were people of every kind. The little blonde college girl in tan pants and a plain white tee-shirt was a vanilla cone. The African American man in his wide ill-fitting pants and black shirt was a chocolate cone. The woman, who appeared to be from India or some other bright foreign place I have never visited, was a blend of all the flavors. Her hair was as black as asphalt, her jewelry gold, turquoise and red, and it sparkled like sugar sprinkles. Her clothes were as colorful as the mouth of a sailor on leave, too many

colors to describe, so many colors she looked like a sampling of every flavor of ice cream ever made. She had a red barrette in the crown of her head like a cherry on top of a sundae. The entire bus was a mix of people like this.

It was finally time to board the bus, I said goodbye and got settled in for a nine hour ride. I got lucky and scored a seat in the top of this double-decker bus right by a window. Wouldn't ya know, vanilla ice cream cone came and sat next to me. We chatted while waiting to pull out; she seemed nice enough.

Not long after pulling out everyone shut off their overhead lights and tried to get comfortable enough to sleep for a while. I am not a person who can sleep in a moving vehicle, so I played games on my cell phone, checked Facebook, and just stared out the window at the dark highway rolling out in front of us until we stopped. After about four hours the driver pulled into a truck stop. Everyone on the bus was shaken awake as the air brakes hissed and brought the twenty-foot tall people-mover to a stop. Thankfully, little vanilla ice cream woke up too, and we started chatting again on our way into the truck stop for a potty break and something to eat.

Just as we walked in the door, we were finally introducing ourselves; her name was Casey. She looked as if she had never seen a truck stop before. Casey was amazed at all of the trinkets for sale. The place had that truck stop smell too, that dirty man smell mixed with a just-showered man, diesel fuel and a mix of various air fresheners and whatever fast food joint that happened to be attached to give drivers variety.

Casey found all the knickknacks! She found bells, magnets, spoons and tee-shirts, all with Indiana blazoned across them, as that was the state we were in. She had to buy trinkets for her mom and dad back in Tennessee. She spent so much time shopping, she almost missed

the bus when the driver was ready to pull out, but she made it just in time with a bag full of tchotchkes and a bubbly statement, "My parents love knickknacks."

Apparently, after pulling away from the truck stop, the hum of the engine and the vibration of tires against the road must have allowed me drift off to sleep for a couple hours because the next thing I remember was the driver coming across the loudspeaker announcing, "We will be pulling into Chicago's Union Station in approximately thirty- five minutes. Please gather all of your items and be sure you don't leave anything on the bus. Thank you for traveling with Megabus."

I was there, Chicago, where he lived now, and I just had to come. I retrieved my bag from the cargo area and started looking for the subway. This, I was excited about. I had never been on a subway train and couldn't wait. I asked a police officer where to go, and he told me exactly what train to catch and what stop to get off at for the street I needed to get to my rental car.

Two hours after arriving in this city I was finally at my hotel. After sitting on a bus all night, I wanted nothing more than to take a shower, put on clean clothes, get a bite to eat, and then, I would make the call.

Riiing, Riiing, Riiing...I was praying he wouldn't answer, and I would get his voicemail so I could prolong this. We had so much fun in Tennessee. Then his job moved him to Chicago. I guess I knew it wouldn't work as soon as he told me, but I thought I would try. Rii...hello? It was him.

We talked about my trip and how his job was going. He asked about our friends in Tennessee and about the latest gossip around our building. It came like I knew it would. I asked him if he was going to be able to make it over that night. Surprisingly, he said yes. You

can feel it when the conversations aren't the same anymore and a person isn't excited to see you, but this wasn't the case with him. He seemed to be excited to see me.

He arrived around six o'clock that evening smelling as good as ever, like a man, woodsy smelling cologne but a hint of sweat from working hard that day. He asked if I had eaten dinner, and I told him no, so we went next door to Bob Evans and had dinner. After dinner I knew it was going to happen. We would end it or drag this on longer, but I could tell by his half smile and faraway looks during our dinner what was about to happen. We talked more about our families and how our lives were going, skirting around the issue until I finally asked, "So what are we going to do about this?" There it was, the look on his face, like that of a child caught with their hand in the cookie jar right before dinner.

He explained he met up with an old flame from when he lived there before and things were going well. While it felt like a hard slap across the face, like when I back talked my parents as a child, at least I wasn't surprised. We stood there another hour talking about the weather up there and in Tennessee and every other subject you can think of. It was ten o'clock. I had had a long bus ride, and now that I knew we were done, I planned to spend the rest of my time in Chicago as a tourist, so we kissed one last time, hugged longer than necessary, and said our good byes.

The next two days I shopped, went to the casinos, visited landmarks, and enjoyed time for me. Monday was another long bus ride home, home to my son, home to my family and home to a man I had met through friends before I left who said he knew my trip was not going to work and that he would be waiting for me to get back.

Closure is an important thing in some folk's lives. It is in mine. I knew Chicago and I were meant to be, but I also knew when he moved, that was the end. I had to go close that

door. To close the door on that chapter so I could start the next with the man who waited on me. The man I proudly now call my husband.

Vernesser Ausley addresses one of our most difficult and pernicious social issues: the effects of racism on African American children. Ausley develops the essay through examples and illustrations of the problem drawn from her and her children's experiences as well as from current events. Her writing illuminates sensitive issues from the perspective of someone dealing directly with these problems, and it does so in frank and honest language.

Vernesser Ausley

Professor Renee Eades

English 1010

16 February 2015

The Challenges of an African American Mother

As a mother, when my children were small, I would always talk to them about safety. I taught them never talk to or take anything from strangers, never wander too far from the safety of the front yard, and always look before crossing the road. I made sure to cover as many rules of safety with my children as possible to create awareness. However, as an African American mother of teen age and adult children and because of the constant fear of harassment by law enforcement of African American youth, racism from peers in the public school system, and the importance of maintaining a positive cultural identity, I am pressured to talk to my children about how to cope with racism and the internalized oppression that it causes.

Because of the constant fear of harassment by law enforcement of African American youth, I continually speak with my children about what to do or how to react if they are stopped by a white police officer. It's no secret that young African American youth are more likely stopped, profiled, and sometimes murdered by white police officers than any other race of people. I've always respected and regarded law enforcement to be noble men and protectors of the community, but as an African American, especially an African American mother, I

question the integrity of white police officers with a great dilemma. I've witnessed via social media, news broadcasts, Internet, and cell phone recordings many unarmed African American youth with their hands lifted in the air, posing no threat of endangerment to the white police officers who shoot them down like animals and murder them with no repercussion or indictment from the law. As a mother concerned for the safety and protection of my children, I don't trust that the law provides protection without discrimination to children of color and to the communities of our youth as they do the communities of their white counterparts.

Because most school personnel are not typically trained to be culturally sensitive to the complex needs of African American students, often African American students are misunderstood, unfairly treated, and given harsher discipline than other students. Talking to my children about how to deal with racism from school administrators and some of their white peers in public schools is a prevalent conversation, among others, that I discuss with my children. There are times when my children have come home from school very distraught because of disciplinary measures taken with them by school personnel that seemed to be more reflective of their race than their character. Seventy-one percent of all suspended minority students are suspended for nonviolent offenses and things such as breaking school policies.

For instance, my daughter attended her first year of high school at Lebanon High School in Wilson County, Tennessee. The first couple of weeks she came home from school in tears every day. My daughter had always been a respectful outstanding student who had never been in trouble before. She was given ISS (In School Suspension) for breaking the school's dress code for wearing a skirt a little above her knee with stretch pants. A white teacher standing in the hallway while she was changing class wrote her up for breaking dress code policy. My daughter made sure she was conscious of what she wore from then on; however,

she was aware of the same teacher allowing several white students to break the same dress code or worse. Sometimes she noticed that some white students dressed in a very provocative way with very short skirts and scantily clad spaghetti strap tops, which was clearly against the school's dress code policy, and walked past that same teacher every day without any disciplinary actions being made. My daughter clearly felt a sense of bias coming from that teacher. After witnessing this situation go on for weeks, she and a couple of her African American friends who had similar experiences, deliberately broke the dress code to see what would happen. They all received write-ups from that teacher and received ISS.

Racism can cause African American children to become internally suppressed. Of all the disparities in the African American communities, discrimination has caused far more complex issues; therefore, I feel the need to teach my children the importance of maintaining a positive cultural identity. Helping them to understand their roots will help them to be proud of who they are. Slavery was an evil enforced upon African Americans that stripped them of their identity and the family structure that they were so familiar with. Being forced to survive in a new world so unfamiliar, diminished to believing they were inferior, and treated with less regard than animals, the African American culture has suffered a brutality that has caused disaster to the structural foundation of family and values.

In conclusion, as an African American mother concerned for the safety and well-being of my children, it's important to me to talk with my children and help them deal with racism whether from law enforcement, peers, or administration in public schools. I also teach them the importance of a positive cultural identity since they all are factors that have affected the lives of my children, as well as the lives of many other African American children.

Hanna Carr's narrative of her father's year-long struggle with cancer is a strong example of descriptive narrative writing. Carr not only details her father's treatment; she shows how a grave illness can affect an entire family. The essay moves from descriptions of medical procedures and treatments to a concluding metaphor inspired by the work of author Annie Dillard. Carr does a good job incorporating a quotation from Dillard's work and showing how it fits the circumstances of caring for someone who is gravely ill.

Hanna Carr

Professor Marjorie Lloyd

English 1010

21 April 2015

The Sudden Leap Out of Childhood

It is a disease that can affect anyone in a monumental, colossal way. It is a disease that many people devote their lives to, either battling through it or striving for a cure. It is a disease that can be curable, but many unfortunate souls lose their lives battling it. It is cancer.

Cancer had made a home in my father's tonsil in the summer of 2011. Initially, we all thought this protruding lump on the side of his neck was just a swollen gland. It began to grow larger throughout the summer, and it started to cause pain. Daddy, being the stubborn man he is, would not go to the doctor. In March, he finally went to the doctor for a check-up. They gave him antibiotics. He was on the medicine for a few months. However, it failed to help. He was then referred to an ear, nose and throat doctor, who did a needle biopsy and an X-ray that proved negative for cancer. This doctor thought it was a congenital cyst. Numerous tests were run, and we were told the life-changing news. "I'm sorry to inform you. You have tonsil cancer."

Tonsils are two oval-shaped pads in the back of the mouth that are part of the body's germ-fighting immune system. Tonsil cancer often causes difficulty swallowing and a

sensation that something is caught in one's throat. The doctor's first step of action was to remove the affected tonsil. This procedure is called tonsillectomy. Undergoing such a procedure at the age of forty-nine was extremely difficult. During the surgery, Daddy's throat collapsed. The doctors had taken the affected tonsil out, but there was still one tonsil in his throat that needed to be removed. After his throat collapsed, the doctors medically paralyzed Daddy to get the muscles to relax in order to intubate him. However, they would not take the risk of getting the one tonsil he had left.

The next step of action was chemotherapy and radiation. During the treatments, I witnessed my father lose hair, weight, muscle mass, strength, and himself. For three months, Daddy was "chair-ridden." He could not lay back in a bed because there was too much pressure on his throat; therefore he had to sit up in his recliner. He lived in that chair, besides the trips to and from the doctors. Because of the intensity of the chemo and radiation treatments, Daddy could not eat through his throat. He had to get a feeding tube put in his stomach. That made the food go directly into the stomach. The only thing that could go in this feeding tube was a liquid substance. My mom, my sister, and I all took turns putting the substance in his feeding tube eight times a day. However, during the times when we were at school or work, Daddy had to do it. He would say he did fill his feeding tube, but he did not, which made him lose one hundred pounds.

After they put the feeding tube in his stomach, they put a power port in his chest. He received his chemotherapy treatments through this port. Within the same doctor visit, two life-impacting procedures had occurred. Throughout the treatments, Daddy was in extreme pain. The pain was caused by the cancer itself, but mostly from the radiation; the raw skin that was around his neck burned. Because of the pain, Daddy took several amounts of pain medication,

mostly Oxycontin and Morphine. Due to the pain and the medication, Daddy would be blacked out for days. The only way to try to escape the pain was to sleep.

Cancer had a chain around my family for one long year. One long year of agony. Cancer not only pierced my dad's life, but affected me as well. I learned at a young age that life is not filled with rainbows and butterflies, but rather pain and suffering. Witnessing such a devastating event for such a long period of time can make one insane. I wanted to get away from it all. I did not want to see the strong, fearless man that I looked up to, to become so weak. However, I had nowhere to go. Like the young girl in Annie Dillard's autobiographical story, "The Chase," as she was running for her life, she felt like there was nowhere to go: "Mikey and I had nowhere to go, in our own neighborhood or out of it." The angry man kept chasing her. It did not matter where she went, he would always be behind her, gaining on her. Cancer was the angry man chasing me, gaining on me. It did not matter where I went, it would always be with me. For one long year, it was always with me.

Section 2:
English 1010
Researched Argument

PRIZE WINNER

First Place Researched Argument winner Jason Gammon's essay is an excellent example of an original, well-focused argument that is supported by solid research. Gammon considers how decisions by two U.S. presidential administrations likely contributed to the rise of terrorist organizations in the Middle East and Africa in recent years. To support his claim that the U.S. is, in part, to blame for the current proliferation of terrorist groups, Gammon incorporates research from a good variety of reliable sources. The research he has chosen to include demonstrates that Gammon's position on the Iraq War, and the rise of terrorism after it, is well-informed and credible.

Jason Gammon

Professor Deborah Moore, B.S., M.A.

English 1010

22 April 2015

The Inadvertent Architects:

How U.S. Politics Built The Islamic State

In April 2003, U.S. coalition forces captured the city of Fallujah in central Iraq. Fallujah marked a crucial gain for the coalition, as its central position and placid residents provided a fulcrum for the panoptical invasion into Saddam Hussein's urban strongholds. Unfortunately, Fallujah and the wider Anbar province to which it belonged would quickly devolve into a crucible of sectarian violence. So when the new year dawned in 2014, Fallujah and its strategic advantages had been captured once more, this time by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Considering the vast measure of military resources in the area, how was control so quickly wrested from the coalition? Can undulating domestic political pressures explain such wild swings in operational results? The externalities generated by complex geopolitical statecraft dictate that there are no simple answers to such questions. Nonetheless, sufficient evidence exists to make at least one decisive inference concerning the Iraq War: Western

foreign policy decisions have accelerated the destabilization of the Middle East by inadvertently facilitating the rise of ISIS.

The desire to liberate Iraq from the autocratic Saddam was paramount in the early decisions that culminated in the emergence of ISIS. The Iraqi Liberation Act of 1998, signed into law by President Bill Clinton, clearly states “...that it should be the policy of the United States to seek to remove the Saddam Hussein regime...and to replace it with a democratic government.” (“H.R. 4655”). The calls to expel Hussein reached their apex after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 when intelligence suggested that the Iraqi government was actively involved with Al-Qaeda - the radical Islamic group responsible for the attacks. Ancillary intelligence also indicated that Saddam may have been purchasing and developing components for use in military-grade “weapons of mass destruction” (“Iraq’s Weapons”). In response to these allegations, the Bush administration spearheaded a full-scale invasion of Iraq in 2003, resulting in the fall of Saddam and his Baathist government. Unfortunately, these seemingly positive developments were attenuated by the unexpected convergence of hostile entities into the region who attempted to fill the vacuum created by the sudden expulsion of Hussein. Chief among these insurgents were operational cells from Al-Qaeda itself, later to be rechristened Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I).

Consequently, the attempt to prevent the AQ-I insurgency from gaining control of the Iraqi power structure forced the western coalition to evolve their initial strategy of invasion into a complete occupation. Domestic political divisions were exacerbated among western leaders because of these new strategic developments, and the resolve of the coalition was weakened considerably. Member-nations began to carefully withdraw operational personnel from Iraq as early as 2006, forcing the U.S. to assume a majority of both the administrative and

engagement responsibilities for the remainder of the war. Intelligence gathered from captured insurgents further compounded tensions among the allies when it was revealed that there was never an alliance between Saddam's government and Al-Qaeda ("Postwar Findings" 108).

In an attempt to mitigate the negative political effects of these revelations, U.S. leadership began to transfer operational directives to the newly established pro-western government of Iraq. The young Iraqi military proved largely incapable of the task however, and AQ-I swiftly regrouped and expanded as a result of decreased western military presence in the region. George W. Bush carried these adverse developments into the apogee of his presidency, and both his diplomatic influence and the influence of the U.S. military in the Middle East were softened as a result. In what would prove to be a final act however, the Bush administration engineered the "troop surge" of 2007, which was largely successful in expelling AQ-I from many critical urban areas. According to former Army Intelligence Officer Jessica D. Lewis:

[AQ-I] reached its apex of territorial control and destructive capability in late 2006 and early 2007, before the Surge and the Awakening removed the organization from its safe havens in and around Baghdad...degrading the organization over the course of 2007-2008 such that only a fraction of its capabilities remained...(Lewis 7)

It is evident that a capricious western foreign policy had begun to stabilize by 2007, but that equanimity would not endure. Lewis further explains, "As of August 2013, [AQ-I] has regrouped, regained capabilities, and expanded into areas from which it was expelled during the Surge" (7). Throughout the period between 2008 and 2013, the convulsive nature of U.S.

foreign policy in the Middle East would again render a path for AQ-I's advancement. The results were consistent, but the names had changed.

Cratering support for the Iraq War was an almost singular factor in the ascension of Barack Obama to the U.S. Presidency in 2008. Positioning himself as the "anti-Bush", Obama introduced a new strategy for Iraq as Commander-in-Chief. The Bush administration's intrepid venture to bring democracy to the Middle East was replaced by a more passive counter-reactionary foreign policy. The Obama administration quickly began to curtail U.S. military operations in the region, preferring to cede engagement responsibilities to the fledgling Iraq government. Predictably, the Iraqis were again incapable of interrupting AQ-I advancement, and the insurgency began yet another phase of rapid growth. Simultaneously, Al-Qaeda in Iraq expanded their roster to include thousands more Sunni fighters by supplying vital military assistance to rebel factions during the eruption of the Syrian Civil War. These developments were crucial to the evolution of AQ-I. After gaining control of important strategic areas in Iraq and Syria, antipathy between AQ-I and traditional Al-Qaeda leadership resulted in the metamorphosis of AQ-I into ISIS - The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Bunzel 17).

In a strange reversal of fate, the Obama administration was compelled by domestic political pressures to surge back into Iraq to prevent the fall of the Iraqi government to the newly-emboldened ISIS. President Obama was also forced to publicly abandon planned military support for rebel factions in the Syrian Civil War when it was discovered that many rebels were defecting to ISIS (Catalucci). The Obama administration then changed course and offered military support to the Syrian regime, initiating a precision air offensive against the rebels. Obama and U.S. military commanders were forced into a lengthy state of deliberation after finding themselves in such an impossible political situation, and ultimately responded by

ordering another large withdrawal of forces in the region. Top Al-Qaeda commander Dr. Ayman al-Zawahir curtly defined the U.S. predicament - “The Americans are between two fires. If they remain [in Iraq] they will bleed to death, and if they withdraw they will have lost everything.” (qtd. in Byman and Pollack 55).

Inevitably, these military reductions precipitated an expansion of ISIS operations into Africa. After the Obama State Department engineered the overthrow of the militant dictator Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, ISIS satellites rushed in to fill the vacancy in much the same manner as when Hussein was felled in Iraq by the Bush coalition. Journalist Catherine Herridge recently reported on, “One of the alleged ISIS leaders in [Libya] is Abdelhakim Belhadj, an al-Qaeda-linked [Libyan] who was considered...a willing partner in the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi...”(Mora). Adding to these vexatious circumstances was the reticence of western nations to involve themselves in central African affairs. This protraction has allowed numerous terror groups (such as Boko Haram) to proliferate and pledge their loyalties to the Islamic State (“ISIS Expands”). As a result, the deathly scope of ISIS has expanded beyond Iraq and into the Eastern Mediterranean region, a mere two-hundred miles from Europe.

Ultimately, history is the only laboratory in which we may accurately calculate the “rights” and “wrongs” of Middle Eastern foreign policy, and even then the results will surely be rife with contention. Despite these eventualities, we must never undervalue the irrepressible evidence that the United States and her allies, however inadvertently, aided the Islamic State in its rise to prominence. We may never know if the alternatives were preferable, but we can be sure that the erratic push and pull of internal politics helped clear the way for this barbarous new enemy. Though recent gains against ISIS in both Iraq and Syria are encouraging, the pragmatism of history should temper any confidence. Once again, Fallujah belongs to pro-

western forces, but according to Byman and Pollak, "...it is far too soon to count [ISIS] out. History is littered with the corpses of countries who believed that they had eliminated an insurgency, only to have it come roaring back when they prematurely shifted their focus" (57). Viewed through that prism, Fallujah hardly seems to belong to anyone.

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Preston Neal's essay "Alzheimer's Costs" examines the economic impacts of this terrible disease and offers numerous insights about how national and global health care policy can impact funding for medical research in this field. The author believes that more substantial funding is needed for real advances in Alzheimer's research, and the essay argues that governments need to make this funding more of a priority. Neal supports this position using a variety of sources, including those from specialized health care periodicals.

Preston Neal

Professor Cynthia Wyatt

English 1010

1 December 2014

Alzheimer's Costs

Alzheimer's disease is a radical form of dementia that plagues the elderly all over the world. To contextualize the current state of medical research, it is currently unknown what directly causes the disease, and how it can be prevented. Furthermore, there are many theories relating to what causes the disease and how it can be avoided, none of which are concrete. Although public awareness of Alzheimer's has increased in recent years, research funding has mostly dwindled. This is a worldwide and highly relevant issue in regards to not only the lives of the afflicted, but the economic ramifications that stem from the copious amounts of money spent on long-term care and treatment. Millions of people all over the world suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's, which costs billions in treatment and care, and this issue doesn't seem to be moving towards a solution, at any pace. The fact of the matter is that while Alzheimer's disease has gained considerable public awareness, it doesn't receive the research funding it deserves and requires.

According to Scott Hannaford of *The Sydney Morning Herald* in Sydney, Australia; Alzheimer's Disease accounts for a staggering 60% of dementia cases, and costs a minimum of

\$4.9 billion dollars every year for treatment and care in Australia. Today's Alzheimer's tests are very expensive, and seem to be losing funding, because the results don't justify the cost of research. It seems prudent for governments in developed countries to relinquish the funds needed for Alzheimer's research, because the cost of care and treatment monumentally outweighs the amount of funds necessary for research many times over. It seems wiser to pursue research now, rather than have such a drain on the economy, but with countless other demanding issues across the globe, Alzheimer's disease research funding is not very high on the priority list. In today's world, this is understandable. However, from an economic standpoint, the \$156 billion that goes into treatment annually across the globe is unacceptable. We simply cannot afford to perpetuate the problem as we have so far.

In John O'Connor's article that covers a recent study, he highlights some of the faults in how this issue of Alzheimer's disease is being addressed in the U.S. O'Connor states that "The annual costs of dementia care could more than double by 2040 if the age-specific prevalence rate of the disease remains constant as the nation's population grows older" (O'Connor, *Assisted Living*). This statement reinforces the claim that if Alzheimer's disease research doesn't receive the funding it needs to move forward in the near future, costs of care will continue to grow exponentially, further increasing the financial drain on the economy. In other words, this debilitating disease doesn't receive the attention and funding it needs in order to decrease the massive amount of money that is spent annually for long-term care of those who suffer from Alzheimer's disease. This claim of fact is supported by Regina A. Shih, the lead author of the study covered by O'Connor, who states that "The majority of Americans' cost-burden for dementia is caused by long-term care." (O'Connor, *Assisted Living*)

The number of people affected by Alzheimer's disease and dementia across the globe (according to Karger, a medical and scientific publishing site) is an estimated 27.7 million, and based on that figure, 156 billion dollars is being spent annually worldwide. While these numbers may not be 100% accurate, they prove that this disease is one of the most expensive medical conditions in the world. As stated in the article "Economic Considerations in Alzheimer's Disease", here in the United States, Alzheimer's disease is the third most costly disease. It is said to be costing our country \$100 billion every year, with roughly 4.5 million people diagnosed. In correlation, this statistic is a remarkable two-thirds of the worldwide cost, possibly due to a higher awareness and increased number of diagnoses in the United States, compared to other nations.

Suffice it to say that this disease is not only robbing many elderly people of their quality of life, but it's also an incredibly expensive drain on not only the economy of America, but of the entire world. This fact has clearly been recognized by many journalists and researchers; however, very little is being done to solve the issue. This is possibly due to the fact that although Alzheimer's has been a known form of dementia for over 30 years, a miniscule amount of progress has been made towards developing a cure. However, the science and medical community is aware of the tremendous cost of treatment and care, which is the first step in finding a solution.

Why do dementia and Alzheimer's receive such a miniscule amount of research funding? If so many senior citizens across the world are suffering from this terrible affliction, why has there been so little progress? Some may speculate that the reason is because treatment and care for these conditions brings in massive amounts of money, and that if it was cured, that income would dissipate. However, that is an entirely different topic altogether. I prefer to

believe that, in truth, the actual reason is far less sinister in nature. Although projects and experiments have been put into effect, such few advancements have been made that it is difficult to justify the billions required for research.

According to freelance journalist Beth Baker, one such project that was initiated in 2010 is known as the National Alzheimer's Project Act, which was passed by Congress. (Baker) The goal of this act was to "implement a national strategy to fight the disease and improve support of patients and families." (Baker) The reason for this act to be passed by Congress is because of the massive amounts of funds spent on long-term care. (Baker) Furthermore, scientist and policy makers are very keen on finding a solution because of all this money that's spent annually. (Baker) Baker goes on to write: "In 2010, health care for dementia patients — including long-term and hospice care — was expected to cost \$172 billion, including \$123 billion paid by Medicare and Medicaid." It is also estimated by the Alzheimer's Organization that by the year 2050, the number of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease may reach 13.5 million, with the amount of money being spent in care costs an astounding \$1 trillion annually. (Baker) This is what's causing the sudden economic worries of the science and medicine communities, and understandably so.

Adriel Bettelheim of the *CQ Researcher* contends that "...Alzheimer's still suffers from the image of being an old person's disease." Bettelheim supports this claim of cause by providing the example: "Even former President Ronald Reagan's 1994 announcement that he had the early stages of the disease didn't prompt a flood of new money for finding a cure." Bettelheim also writes that this may have a hand in the lack of concern that is sometimes exhibited by society in relation to this disease. Some may think the research funds it needs aren't justifiable in comparison to other more common and malicious diseases, such as cancer.

Although people may not voice this particular opinion, it's still a common one: that even if cured of Alzheimer's, the elderly only have a handful of years to live, regardless. (Bettelheim)

According to Sharon Wallace Stark, Ph.D., another cause for the seeming reluctance to devote the research funds necessary for progress may be that after years of meticulous research, there has yet to be a method identified of halting or reversing the effects of Alzheimer's disease. There have been various drugs that help to slow the progress, but they remain equally ineffective at stopping the development of the disease (Stark). In regards to those who are making the effort to discover a solution to this problem, Stark states that "The NIA Alzheimer's Disease Prevention Initiative seeks to accelerate the rate of new drug discovery and development." Also, "The Alzheimer's Association is a national organization that provides patient advocacy and funding for research of potential new therapies." (Stark)

The cause of Alzheimer's disease itself remains a mystery, but there are several theories on how it develops and what can be done to prevent it, although none of these theories are definitive, or help to develop a cure. However, the cause of the colossal amount of funds that go into direct-care of the diagnosed is evident. The amount of money that's required to attempt to provide the afflicted with the best quality of life possible is incredibly expensive, and is a massive drain on Medicare and Medicaid. If we can't find a solution to this economic crisis, Alzheimer's disease will continue to be a growing burden on societies worldwide.

It is blatantly evident that Alzheimer's disease is a malicious illness that is costing the world billions of dollars every year, due to the excessive treatment and care costs. However, thanks to organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association, public and private awareness has risen substantially over the years, although awareness can only accomplish so much. Now that we as a nation are more aware of the problem, and what is causing it, it is past time to find a

solution to this drain on the economy and health care system. What should be done to remedy this issue that is plaguing developed nations worldwide? What changes to policy need to be made in order to make progress?

As stated by an entry on the Health and Wellness Resource Center database, some previous changes to national policy for Alzheimer's disease patients had been put into effect in regards to Medicare in 2001. (Gale Cengage Learning) The entry claims "The White House has quietly authorized Medicare coverage for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease (AD). The policy change, initiated late last year, means that Medicare beneficiaries cannot be denied reimbursement for the costs of mental health services, hospice care or home health care because they have the disease." ("Medicare Coverage Authorized for Alzheimer's Disease") The reason why they made this change to policy is because doctors and other licensed parties in the medical community had developed the ability to diagnose the disease while it was still in its early stages, at a time when patients are able to gain benefits from medical services. ("Medicare Coverage Authorized for Alzheimer's Disease"). This was an important step that may have led to some of the more recent policy changes, and will undoubtedly lead to even more beneficial changes in the future.

As stated by the previously mentioned Alzheimer's Association, the most detrimental change to policy that needs to be made is research funding (Alz.org). It is imperative to persuade Congress that Alzheimer's disease doesn't receive the funding it deserves and requires, and in order to make this happen the Association seeks to educate those with the power and influence to make these changes a reality (alz.org). There are various reasons Alzheimer's disease desperately needs more research funding, and the Association aims to help expedite changes to policy by providing an annually updated collection of statistics, titled

Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures, to illuminate just how pressing this issue really is (alz.org).

The Association has several legislative proposals they are advocating, such as the Alzheimer's Accountability Act, the HOPE for Alzheimer's Act, and the National Alzheimer's Project (alz.org). The Accountability Act "...represents a bipartisan effort to ensure that Congress is equipped with the best possible information to set funding priorities and reach the goal of the National Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease — effectively preventing and treating Alzheimer's by 2025" (alz.org). This will be a difficult goal to achieve, but the Association is confident it can be done. The goal of the HOPE (Health Outcomes, Planning, and Education) for Alzheimer's Act is to increase early diagnosis rates, provide exceptional information and services to diagnosed patients and their relatives, and implement a requirement for a diagnosis to be added to the medical record of patients (alz.org). Finally, the Association recently implemented the National Alzheimer's Project Act, which was passed unanimously by Congress and signed by President Obama due to recognition of the enormous strain on healthcare and the federal budget caused by the disease (alz.org). Furthermore, the Alzheimer's Association website states "Now, the Secretary of Health and Human Services must thoroughly and expeditiously implement this law by creating a plan to comprehensively address the federal government's efforts on Alzheimer's research, care, institutional services, and home- and community-based programs" (alz.org). This was a monumental step forward, and has the potential to begin the process of lowering the exorbitant amounts of funds spent on patient care and treatment.

David Hoffman, Bureau Director for the New York State Department of Health, writes that "The initial foray into the federal policy arena, the National Alzheimer's Project Act, is a

good first step but remains limited in scope and resources” (Hoffman). Furthermore, Hoffman believes that in order for this policy change to be as effective as possible, a degree of cooperation, coordination, communication in every state is required (Hoffman). Most of the United States has already begun to answer the call, as Hoffman says “seeing the need for greater effort, thirty-three states have convened advisory groups and published their own plans for coordinating state-level activity to address Alzheimer's disease across service systems” (Hoffman). Hoffman is of the opinion that although hope should remain for developing a cure or preventative treatment, we should keep in mind the full scale of the issue while working towards a solution.

In conclusion, although several encouraging changes in policy have been made, we must continue to treat Alzheimer's as the economically, emotionally damaging, and malevolent disease that it is. Further policy changes regarding research funding must be made to find a solution in order to remove this heavy financial burden from our country, and the world in general. This financial drain is only going to grow exponentially, as the heavily populated baby-boomer generation continues to age (alz.org). Essentially, more changes to policy must be made, and the ones that have already been made must be implemented in the most effective way possible.

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Melody Johnson examines the factors which contribute to the unique challenges faced by ethnic minority students when they arrive at college. By incorporating research from a mixture of scholarly journals and general periodicals, Johnson illuminates the cause and effect relationship between poverty and low academic achievement faced by minority communities in poor urban public school districts. With the help of these sources, Johnson's essay successfully argues that the struggles of ethnic minority students at the college level can be addressed and alleviated, in part, by better funding of inner-city K-12 public schools.

Melody Johnson

Professor Renee Eades

English 1010

May 2015

The Plight of Ethnic Minority Students in America

In America, going to college is considered the best path, as Americans firmly believe education is the key to success and that it can take an individual anywhere he or she wants to go. However, ethnic minority students are at a disadvantage in comparison to non-ethnic students in regard to having the financial means and academic skills needed to succeed in college and ultimately in life. Research suggests that “African-American and Hispanic students require more time to complete an undergraduate degree than their Caucasian peers” (Ward, Strambler, and Linke 312). With that information, one can concur that ethnic minority students face additional challenges in college that delay their ability to attain their degree more so than non-ethnic students. Ethnic minority students do not have much success in college due to the continuing rise of college tuition, receiving a poor quality of education from inner-city secondary schools, and having low academic self-esteem, which increases the dropout rate and causes them to continue on in the repetitious cycle of minorities having underprivileged

lives. The problems that ethnic minority students face in college prohibit them from succeeding in life; however, the problems could be significantly reduced, or eliminated, if legislation increased educational funding for inner-city secondary schools.

The cost of attending college is steadily increasing, and since most ethnic minority students come from low-income households, they often have to take on the responsibility of paying their own way through college. According to Ralph Becker, a college counselor and columnist, “Since the early 1980’s tuition has increased [by] more than 1,000% while the consumer price index has risen [by only] 240%” (1). In essence, the cost of college tuition supersedes the financial means of most ethnic minority students. Renee Mitchell, a reporter for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, postulates that “minorities are being priced out of ... colleges and are ... dropping out because they can’t [pay] tuition [and fees]” (par.14). There are some ethnic minority students who attempt to pay their own way through college by working long and strenuous hours. Though their drive is commendable, working long hours does not leave much time for one to put the required energy and time into studying and completing assignments, thus, contributing to their lack of success in college.

In addition to the financial burdens that cause ethnic minority students not to succeed in college, many ethnic minority students have a difficult time adjusting to the academic demands that are associated with college due to the poor quality of education they received during secondary school. Many are ill-prepared for college-level coursework because inner-city secondary schools are not provided the funds that are necessary to ensure that its students are being provided the academic resources and tools that help to prepare its students for college. A chart entitled “Minority Funding Gaps by State”, a nation-wide analysis on educational funding, showed that “[i]n 28 states, school districts with high- minority

enrollments received less per-pupil funding . . . than districts with low minority levels” (Clemmitt 364). In turn, many ethnic minority students feel unprepared and burdened by college-level coursework; this cripples their chances of succeeding in college.

As a result of being ill- prepared for college-level coursework, most ethnic minority students have low self-esteem which negatively impacts their academic performance; often times, this decreases the likelihood of college completion for most ethnic minority students. Research suggests that “students who are academically unprepared for the rigors of college-level coursework . . . are placed at an increased risk of dropout at the postsecondary level” (Ward, Strambler, and Linke 313). Ethnic minority students often times are unprepared for college and this causes them to suffer from low self-esteem as it is likely they feel left behind or incompetent which causes them to drop out of college. This would explain why, “[i]n 2011 [only] 20% of African American [students] and 13% of Hispanic [students] . . . completed a bachelor’s degree or higher” (Ward, Strambler, and Linke 313). The correlation between low self-esteem and college completion rates among ethnic minority students is evident. In essence, the decline in college completion amongst ethnic minority students is due to low academic self-esteem.

Ultimately, the lack of success ethnic minority students have in college eventually leads to them having underprivileged lifestyles: a cycle that many adult minorities are caught in. According to C. Feliciano and M. Ashtiani, “[p]ersistently low academic performance, graduation rates, college enrollment and completion rates among African American students negatively impact their ability to successfully transition into the world of work” (qtd. in Ward, Strambler, and Linke 313). It used to be that if a person did not have a college education, he or she could still possibly land a fair-paying job. Contrarily, in this “new, global, technical

economy” a college degree is essential in order for one to be able to compete in the job market (Clemmitt 9). With the expansion of global businesses, a college degree helps to set one apart in the job market. In short, ethnic minority students who are unable to attain a degree often times have to get jobs that are unfulfilling and require very little skills, which is not conducive to achieving a privileged lifestyle.

Ethnic minority students are not succeeding in college due to being bogged down by the rising cost of college tuition, by not having the necessary academic skills needed to thrive in college, and having a lack of motivation to finish school produced by low self-esteem, which ultimately causes them to repeat the cycle of having underprivileged lifestyles. Ethnic minority students are born into this cycle, and many struggle to get out of it with very few resources. Everyone should be able to build a better life for themselves, especially, those who are going about doing so legally. However, most ethnic minority students are simply in situations where the odds are stacked against them.

Fortunately, there are a number of ways to bring an end to this travesty that has become the social norm. Many experts argue that increasing educational funding for inner-city secondary schools is the most ideal and practical solution to closing the educational gap between ethnic students and non-ethnic students. This would level the playing field by enabling ethnic minority students to be able to have just as much of a chance as non-ethnic students in regard to being able to succeed in both college and, ultimately, life. Research shows that increasing educational funding “eliminate[s] between two-thirds and all of the gaps in . . . adult outcomes between those raised in poor families and those raised in non-poor families” (qtd. in Yettick). Increasing educational spending for inner-city school districts would benefit ethnic minority students, as they would have access to better teachers, hence, access to quality

education. A majority of critics argue that “ensuring a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is critical to closing achievement gaps and maximizing students learning” (Clemmitt 14). However, many urban schools have a difficult time attracting highly qualified teachers due to the low paying salaries offered to the instructors. Marcia Clemmitt, a veteran social policy reporter, explains this disparity:

Often schools with the greatest needs and, consequently, the most challenging working conditions, have the most difficulty retaining talented teachers . . . Many hard-to-staff schools are high-poverty inner-city school[s] . . . that, as a consequence of their location in economically depressed or isolated districts, offer comparatively low salaries and lack [the] amenities with which other districts attract teachers. (14)

That is to say, increasing educational funding for inner-city schools would attract more qualified teachers who would be able to prepare for higher learning.

Additionally, students from low-income households, which would mainly be ethnic minority students, would benefit from increased educational spending for life. Those who attended inner-city schools that increased their spending “were 20 percent less likely to fall into poverty . . . their individual wages were 25 percent higher than they would have been without the changes . . . and their family incomes were 52 percent higher” (Yettick par. 7). With this information, one can concur that the amount of funds that is invested into school districts significantly impacts the lives of the students and helps them to escape the cycle of having underprivileged lives.

In order to make educational equity a reality, legislation would need to implement a “fiscal mechanism that achieves equal educational opportunity . . . by eliminating or

substantially reducing the link between local fiscal resources available to a school district and its ability to provide public education” (Reschovsky par. 3). In short, legislation would have to create a new finance plan that significantly increases the amount of money that inner-city school districts receive, because, as of now, “local property tax continues to provide a substantial portion of school district revenues, districts with large amounts of property wealth will spend more on public education and will provide higher quality public education than poorer school districts” (Reschovsky par. 4). Being that inner-city schools are not located in areas that have a lot of wealth, these schools do not receive a decent amount of funding from their communities. According to Joydeep Roy, “a professor at Columbia University and a senior economist at the New York City Independent Budget Office, it is slightly tricky to compare across states when each state’s financing formula might involve many unique features” (qtd. in Yettick par. 29). It would be irrational to suggest that a national fiscal reformation within the school system would be an easy thing to do; however, it could be done if legislation made budget cuts and focused a larger percentage of their spending on education.

Ethnic minority students, for the longest, have not had access to quality education due to not having access to well-educated, high-standard teachers; this has negatively affected the outcome of the lives of many ethnic minority peoples as they often times have to work underpaid and unfulfilling jobs. Ultimately, the problems ethnic minority students face in college leads to them having underprivileged lives. However, an increase in educational funding is indeed the solution to this discrepancy. It is time for a nationwide fiscal reformation that enables every student to receive a quality education that sets him or her on the path to a bright future. Besides, all individuals should be afforded an equal opportunity to create a better life for themselves.

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Dionndra Robinson takes a close look at rap and hip-hop lyrics in her essay, demonstrating how some of today's artists portray women negatively in popular music. Robinson's essay combines analysis of primary texts (song lyrics) with arguments supported by research from scholarly journals to suggest that some of these lyrics may contribute to a poor sense of self-worth, especially among black women. She also points out the work of several artists whose work may be regarded as more positive and empowering, offering a thoughtful contrast to the others, and a more complex picture of this musical genre.

Dionndra Robinson

Professor Cynthia Chanin

English 1010

6 May 2016

Lyrical Destruction

It was 1979 when these words hit the air waves: "I said a hip, hop, the hippie, the hippie/To the hip hip-hop, and you don't stop/ The rock it to the bang-bang, boogie say "up jump"/ The boogie to the rhythm of the boogie, the beat/ Now, what you hear is not a test/ I'm rappin' to the beat/ And me, the groove, and my friends are gonna try to move your feet." These lyrics sparked the hip-hop era, "a street art form that was largely free of violence or sexual exploitation" (Katel 2007). According to Katel "hip-hop is a cultural movement originally comprised of four elements: MCing (rapping), DJing, graffiti art and breaking (break dancing)." Hip-hop was initially used as empowerment for poverty-stricken black communities. Since this time, hip-hop has evolved from, "hard-driving dance numbers into sex and violence filled "gangsta rap" (Katel 2007). Lyrically, hip-hop affects the way Black women are viewed and view themselves.

There was a time when women were adored and looked at as queens. Rapper Lil Boosie has a song, "Honor Roll," which talks about his high grade list of women. Sounds positive?

Well, it's anything but that. The hook of this song states, "Check out my honor roll. /Grade A b*****s Grade A Grade A b*****s./Check out my honor roll./ Grade A b*****s./ Put your hands up, if you a Grade A b***h./" Are your hands up? No, they're not. As a woman you want to believe that you are "Grade A" material, but certainly not a female dog. Dr. Johnetta B. Cole, president of Bennett College for Women, believes hip-hop is more disrespectful of women than any other music genre. This is due to the misogynistic nature of the lyrics. These lyrics are prime examples of the type of images women have in this genre.

As hip-hop has strayed away from its origins, it has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Its success is primarily due to the popularity of strip clubs, "many recent hits have revolved entirely around the premise of women as sex workers" (Hunter 2011). Rapper Akon has a song "I Wanna F*** You", that states, "I see you winding and grinding up on that pole./I know you see me lookin' at you when you already know. /I wanna f*** you, you already know/I wanna f*** you, you already know, girl." These types of lyrics give most listeners the illusion that all women are strippers and are only good for having sex. The same can be said about rapper Nelly's "Tip Drill" song. This song basically says, no matter how unattractive a woman is, as long as she has a vagina, a man is willing to have sex. These types of lyrics also impact how some women view themselves. Dr. Cole had this to say about how black women view themselves:

What value can there be in descriptions of Black girls and women as "bitches," "ho's," "skeezers," "freaks," "gold diggers," "chickenheads" and "pigeons"? What could possibly be the value to our communities to have rap music videos functioning as backdrops, props and objects of lust for rap artists who sometimes behave as predators? In the culture at large, including popular culture, White subhuman,

promiscuous, predatory and hypersexual, this has been the burden of Black women since slavery, and hip-hop... is complicit with these stereotypical and damaging depictions of Black girls and women. (94)

She is absolutely correct. This nature of hip-hop has also impacted how female rappers view themselves. For example, rapper Trina's song, "Da Baddest B****," explains in great detail all the sexual favors she's willing to do for money. She constantly refers to herself as a "bitch" and refers to other women as "ho's." These types of lyrics have led Black women to degrade themselves. All too often, Black women go out dressed the part of strippers. They are baring their breasts and butts, which plays right into the stereotype that hip-hop lyrics portray. There are some female rappers with positive messages. Early female rapper, Queen Latifah, focused on uplifting Black women and all women. Her song, "Ladies First," emphasizes all the positive things in women and reminds men that we should be treated as ladies. It also stresses that women were put on earth to be more than sex toys for men.

Hip-hop has truly evolved over its 30 year history. It started with messages of black empowerment. This is evident in early hip-hop songs, such as, Run D.M.C.'s "Proud to Be Black" and Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Today's hip-hop is based solely on what will sell and get Black women to shake their behinds. It seems as though, no matter what the words say, as long as the beat can make you dance, women are fine with a song. As a result, the generation of upcoming Black women don't have much hope. With all of today's technology and social media, it is very easy to find a video of a Black woman "twerking" in booty shorts for the whole world to see. Hip-hop lyrics have made that "acceptable" in the eyes of many Black women. They have also led many Black women to believe dressing half naked is the only way to gain the attention of the opposite sex. In an industry full of misogyny, it's hard for

a young Black woman to listen to good hip-hop lyrics, lyrics that don't entice them to view themselves as strippers, and dress the part when in public.

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Section 3:
**Advanced Researched
Argument and Essays from
Other Disciplines**

PRIZE WINNER

First Place Advanced Researched Argument winner Samuel Pinzur examines a critical paradox in a short story by American author Jack London. Through a close reading of the original text, coupled with insights afforded by scholarly research, Pinzur carefully analyzes how London's "The Law of Life" reconciles the conflicting themes of life and death. The essay is an excellent example of how a student writer's original critical analysis can enter into a conversation with the work of noted scholars in a field.

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English 2120
21 April 2015

A Reason for Living and Dying:

Conflicting Themes in Jack London's "The Law of Life"

At first glance, Jack London's "The Law of Life" is an entertaining, albeit somewhat depressing account of an Eskimo tribe leaving behind to die an old man who was formerly the chief, Koskoosh. The story consists primarily of a dramatic account of a wolf pack hunting down an old moose, witnessed by the old man when he was just a boy, as well as the blood-curdling death of the old man, who was beset by these same ravenous terrors of the tundra. The tale is fast paced and exciting, but upon more careful examination, two broader, deeper themes come to life beneath the adventure and suspense. London postulates that the forces of nature impose one, and only one purpose on each man and woman, and that purpose is to take part in perpetuating the human race by reproducing. On the other hand, London claims that these same forces of nature drive each and every person to the same inevitable end: death. London subtly, yet masterfully weaves these contradictory themes into a tale of a man and his ongoing encounter with nature. This struggle with the forces and laws of nature is a direct extension of

Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection and survival of the fittest as recognized by Lawrence I. Berkove in his essay "Jack London's 'Second Thoughts.'" Berkove asserts that "If there was a constant concern in London's mind, it was respect for Darwinism. But although London *respected* Darwinism, he hardly celebrated it. London saw it as a law that linked human beings to animals and ultimately controlled and restricted their destiny" (62). This respect for the principles of Darwinism led London to his conclusions regarding man and his destiny as determined by nature. In "The Law of Life," Jack London simultaneously develops two conflicting themes, then masterfully harmonizes them into a resounding conclusion on the power of nature over mankind.

London articulates the theme of man's sole purpose with three different approaches. First, he observes that nature causes each person to reproduce, but neglects all other personal interests of man. Second, he demonstrates that every man and woman is soon forgotten by the succeeding generations despite owing their existence to these men and women. Third, he reasons insightfully that nature determines every woman's worth almost entirely by her ability to bear children.

First, London declares that nature completely disregards the hopes and dreams of man, thus making it apparent that reproduction is man's only purpose. As Koskoosh is left behind, he begins to contemplate life and death and the laws of nature by which these are governed. He ultimately concludes that "Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that concrete thing called the individual" (1044). The reality of each individual is lost on nature. They have no names. They have no faces. Nature's "interest lay in the species, the race" (1044). This is indeed, a sweeping declaration that drastically diminishes the individuality of man.

Other than their ability to reproduce, the individual, his wants, needs, hopes, and dreams, are of no concern to the forces of nature.

In addition, London observes that men, once they have reproduced, are eventually forgotten by the very children they have begotten. Nature requires not that man be remembered, but merely requires that he reproduce. Koskoosh reasons further, "The tribe of Koskoosh was very old. The old men he had known when a boy, had known old men before them. Therefore it was true that the tribe lived, that it stood for the obedience of all its members, way down into the forgotten past, whose very resting places were unremembered" (1044). The only lasting proof, the sole memorial of these ancients is the current existence of the tribe. Furthermore, these men "did not count; they were episodes. They had passed away like clouds from a summer sky. He also was an episode, and would pass away. Nature did not care. To life she set one task....To perpetuate..." (1044). This is an even clearer enunciation of man's insignificance, which is effectively equivocated to the fleeing nature of an August cloud. Men, once they have had children and grandchildren, are ultimately forgotten and consequently erased from the memory and consciousness of their descendants.

Finally, London argues powerfully that the worth of women is determined almost entirely by their ability to reproduce. He paints the scenario of a young girl becoming more desirable and attractive as her body matures until one young man can contain his desire for her no longer. They then marry and have children. "Ever she grew fairer and yet fairer to look upon, till some hunter, able no longer to withhold himself, took her to his lodge...to become the mother of his children" (1044). This is indeed a poetic but, nonetheless, accurate description of youth and its desires. In stark contrast to the women's attractiveness before childbearing is the picture that London so poignantly paints after she has reproduced, the picture of a woman

worn, broken, and undesirable to all excepting the children she has borne. "And with the coming of her offspring, her looks left her. Her limbs dragged and shuffled, her eyes dimmed and bleared, and only the little children found joy against the withered cheek of the old squaw next to the fire. Her task was done" (1044). Nature has such arranged it that a woman is desirable only in terms of her ability to create and then nurture new life. London powerfully argues through this observation that women's sole purpose in existence is reproduction and continuation of the race as a whole.

Nevertheless, as London is so carefully crafting this theme of man and his sole purpose of perpetuating life, he is also simultaneously developing the decidedly contradictory theme of every man's inevitable end: death, as forced upon him by nature. London fashions three distinct lines of reasoning in support of this unavoidable end at the hands of nature. First, he contrasts the vigor of youth to the feebleness of old age, that ever-present foe who overtakes even the stoutest of and hardiest of Earth's sons. Second, London compellingly illustrates that this same pattern is abundantly evident in the animal kingdom also. Third, he argues that since the very basic necessities of man's subsistence, food and water, are available to him merely by the whim of nature, nature must both keep man alive and put him to death.

London first points to every man and every woman's destiny of death by comparing the vibrancy and vitality of youth with the weakened senses and physical capabilities of old age. Koskoosh is contrasted strikingly with his young granddaughter in order to accomplish this comparison. London writes:

Old Koskoosh listened greedily. Though his sight had long since faded...Ah! That was Sit-cum-to-ha, shrilly anathematizing the dogs as she cuffed and beat them into the harnesses. Sit-cum-to-ha was his daughter's daughter, but she was too busy to waste a

thought upon her broken grandfather, sitting alone there in the snow, forlorn and helpless. Life called her, and the duties of life, not death. And he was very close to death now. (1043)

The one unable to see or to care for himself and so left to ponder with what faculties remained his impending doom, Koskoosh is the picture of the end which nature imposes upon all her sons. The other, Sit-cum-to-ha, active and exuberant in the flush of youth and the activities of life, has yet to be touched by nature's impartial hand. But her time will come; decline knows no partiality. The onset of death, whether sudden and in the prime of life, or slowly and ploddingly, will come as the forces of nature continually bear their offspring away.

London further symbolizes this inevitable onset of death by taking note of the same pattern in nature of the ultimate triumph of death over life among even the plants and animals. Leaves blossom and bloom in the brilliant colors of life, only to wither and fade as winter wields its deadly sickle of cold. The most majestic of beasts grow weary and weak and worn, ultimately to fall prey to those who will but briefly usurp their reign atop the animal kingdom before being overtaken and discarded themselves. Koskoosh's vivid childhood memory of the moose and his valiant fight against and surrender to the wolves is London's prime example of this. Koskoosh recalls:

The trail was red now, and the clean stride of the great beast had grown short and slovenly. Then they heard the first signs of battle—not the full-throated chorus of the chase, but the short, snappy bark which spoke of close quarters and teeth to flesh....Together they shoved aside the under branches of a young spruce and peered forth. It was the end they saw. (1046)

Even the mighty and magnificent moose, a grand specimen of nature indeed, finds himself helpless against the forces of nature bringing about his impending death.

Finally, London closes his case for the control of nature over man's final fate by ingeniously illuminating every man and every woman's complete dependence on nature for survival. Basic to human subsistence are food, water, and temperatures moderate enough to nurture life; without these three necessities, mankind cannot and will not survive. Each of these vital factors, furthermore, is made available only through workings of the natural world. London relates another of Koskoosh's memories in order to reveal this reality:

Koskoosh placed another stick on the fire and harked back deeper into the past. There was the time of the Great Famine, when the old men crouched empty-bellied to the fire...He had lost his mother in that famine. In the summer the salmon run had failed, and the tribe looked forward to the winter and the coming of the caribou. Then the winter came, but with it there were no caribou. Never had the like been known, not even in the lives of the old men. But the caribou did not come, and it was the seventh year, and the rabbits had not been replenished...And through the long darkness the children wailed and died, and the women, and the old men; and not one in ten of the tribe lived to meet the sun when it came back in the spring. (1045)

Simply put, humankind will live as long as nature provides food, and will die upon nature's removal thereof. In addition to this example, Koskoosh's dependence on the small pile of sticks left him by his granddaughter, whose heat upon burning would provide him with a barrier against the cold of the frozen tundra, is yet another instance displaying man's reliance on supplies of nature to survive the forces of nature. As Koskoosh contemplates, "At last the measure of his life was a handful of fagots....When the last stick had surrendered up its heat,

the frost would begin to gather up its strength. ...His head would fall forward upon his knees, and he would rest.... All men must die” (1044). The length of every man’s life then, and its end, are determined by nature. Surely nature’s control over man and his fate is revealed in man’s utter dependence on the whims of nature for the most basic necessities of life.

London has now clearly established the theme of man’s sole purpose, to reproduce, and the theme of his unavoidable end, death. These two themes, however, appear to pose a paradox, a conflict. Nature dictates man’s sole and unequivocal purpose, to perpetuate life, and also determines man’s ultimate and unequivocal destiny, death. Nature nourishes life with one hand, yet snuffs it out with the other. London is well aware of this contradiction, as he makes clear through two examples. First is Koskoosh’s account of the death of his childhood friend and a skillful hunter, Zing-ha, who freezes to death in the icy grip of nature’s winter (1045). Surely the premature death of a hunter in his prime, who could provide food in abundance to the tribe, is counter-productive to the sustaining of life. Second is the case of Koo-tee, a small child who is weak and sickly (10430. Regarding Koot-tee Koskoosh surmises, “It would die soon, perhaps, and they would burn a hole through the frozen tundra and pile rocks above to keep the wolverines away” (1043). This conflict between life and death is drawn out more sharply in the likely death of a sickly child long before he reaches his prime and is able to reproduce.

This question then remains: How can mankind carry out their duty when they have no control over their destiny? London’s answer is simple and succinct. Death wins. Nature seeks to perpetuate life, but when push comes to shove, death triumphs, and nature cares not. Xiaofen Zhang reveals tellingly in his article “On the Influence of Naturalism on American Literature” that “Often, a naturalist author will lead the reader to believe that a character’s fate

has been pre-determined, usually by heredity and environmental factors, that the destiny of humanity is misery in life and oblivion in death and that he/she can do nothing about it” (Zhang, par. 2.1). This is most certainly an accurate assessment of London’s viewpoint as espoused in “The Law of Life.” London openly establishes this viewpoint through Koskoosh’s musings on both the child Koo-tee’s predicament and the child’s worth, or lack thereof, to the tribe. Koskoosh reasons, “A few years at best, and as many an empty belly as a full one. And in the end, Death waited, ever-hungry and hungriest of them all” (1043). This indeed is somber statement revealing the chilling reality of imminent death. The forces of nature hold the final judgment and determine man’s end, whether premature, as in the case of Zing-ha, or timely, as in Koskoosh’s death. Man is ultimately powerless against nature, and is subject to nature’s every whim, whether pleasant or painful.

There is, nevertheless, a silver lining to this dark and foreboding realization. In his article “Loving Life While Accepting Death,” Vivekanand Palavali reveals his interpretation of and response to “The Law of Life” asserting that “[Koskoosh] accepts death as the ‘law of life’ and that his time has come. That short but dramatic story made me accept death as an inescapable reality....It is hard to go on with daily life thinking about the reality that, in the end, it won’t matter. But it does matter, right now....Instead I think about life—the beauty, pleasure, wonder, and magnificence of it” (39). Here is offered an alternative to the despair that is wont to set in upon contemplation of mankind’s inevitable end and powerlessness against nature. London subtly suggests this alternative in old Koskoosh’s willing acceptance of his imminent death, which is made increasingly evident throughout the story. Koskoosh ultimately believes that life, whether long or short, and then death is the way of all things. Therefore, while no man, woman or child can control his destiny, every person can control his or her outlook on

life while it lasts, choosing to appreciate the happiness life affords rather than to resent the hopelessness death brings.

In conclusion, London seamlessly crafts two apparently contradictory themes within the same story. He postulates that nature has but one purpose for man: perpetuation of life, yet, in opposition to this first theme, he clearly claims that nature has one and only one unavoidable end in store for every man: death. London creates this apparent dichotomy, however, merely to establish his final conclusion all the more powerfully, a conclusion that he weaves very subtly beneath the more apparent themes of life and death. London harmonizes these opposing themes by concluding that nature rules, both in life and in death. Nature has the first say and the last. Man has but to accept his destiny at the hands of this awful and beautiful force. This is the law of life.

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Angela Hendry's research essay focuses on a complicated and specialized healthcare issue, the treatment of patients with psychiatric needs in hospital emergency departments. Hendry begins her essay with a short narrative depicting the plight of a patient confronting a mental health crisis, illustrating just how complex and difficult the situation can be for such individuals and the staff who treat them. Using the story as to build the reader's empathy and awareness, Hendry goes on to examine the multiple causes of the many problems faced by patients in crisis and their caregivers. In her discussion, she incorporates original research conducted at a local facility, as well as information gathered from professional sources documenting treatment models elsewhere. Hendry also uses section headings as an organizational strategy to guide the reader through the complexities of the discussion. Notice also how the essay proposes solutions to the problem and how Hendry's critically astute suggestions are based on demonstrated models of effectiveness documented by current research.

Angela Hendry

Professor Leslie LaChance

English 1020

6 November 2013

Underfunded: America's Mental Health Crisis

It is 0700 in the emergency room. Amy (name has been changed for privacy purposes) has been here since 1400 hours yesterday. When she first arrived the nurse drew her blood, asked for a urine sample and demanded she change into paper scrubs. Her belongings were quickly gathered and taken. Then she was placed in a room with multiple beds separated by curtains. She has had very little sleep due to the constant chaos of this environment. She is exhausted, lonely, and scared. The feelings of isolation are beginning to exacerbate her depression and thoughts of wanting to simply end her life. Everything she brought with her has been removed by the nurse, and she has been given these scratchy paper scrubs to wear. There is no TV, no radio, and nothing to do but lie here and think. The voices in her head grow

louder with each passing minute. Hospital security sits outside her door and the police officer who brought her in sits near her bed playing games on his phone. There is also a hospital employee monitoring her every move. “Why are they here?” she thinks. “I am not a criminal.” Amy has been denied visitors and any ability to make phone calls. Everything feels cold and robotic. No one seems to care. She is overwhelmed with the feelings of unworthiness, abandonment, and the denial of her rights.

Amy is not alone. According to Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a shocking 12 million emergency room visits in 2007 were related to mental health and substance abuse, or in many cases both. This means that one of every eight emergency department (ED) visits is psychiatric in nature (Mental Disorders). Emergency Departments are ill-equipped to give adequate psychological care to mental health patients, yet this number is rapidly growing as resources for our mentally ill patients are declining (Butcher). They simply have nowhere else to go.

How did we get here?

Our sociological viewpoints of the mentally ill have drastically changed over the years, yet in many ways we in the US are heading right back to where we started. During the 1800’s, the creation of residential institutions for our psychiatric population stemmed from a woman who saw a need for better care of our mentally-ill and fought hard for it. Realizing that many mentally-ill people were lost in prisons or were homeless, Dorothea Dix spent over 40 years convincing the U.S. government to build 32 psychiatric hospitals across the country to house and manage this population (Unite for Sight). In theory these institutions were meant for the betterment of a lost and uncared for subculture. Unfortunately, the reality of underfunding as well as uneducated staff led to abuse and unethical medical treatments within these facilities

(Novella). As these realities became known, the fight for deinstitutionalization began. The theory of deinstitutionalization is that our mentally ill should be better served within local communities, supported by community-based mental health programs than they are locked away in insane asylums (Unite for Sight).

Deinstitutionalization of our mentally ill began in the 1960's. Across our nation, the amount of residential beds for our psychiatric patients fell from nearly 400,000 in 1970 to a mere 50,000 in 2006 (Alakeson et al.). More recently states made a massive cut in funding of \$5 billion in mental health services between 2009 and 2012 (Szabo). This has created a massive shortage of bed space for our growing population of severely mentally ill patients. The Community Mental Health Centers Act of 1963 was created in an attempt to replace these inpatient facilities with community mental health centers. Unfortunately, these centers have been given inadequate funding and staffing which creates an inability to satisfy the demands placed on them (Alakeson et al.). Due to this lack of funding and limited resources, we as a society are miserably failing to properly care for our mentally ill.

While deinstitutionalization seems as common sense as abolishing slavery, the consequences are just as complex. The National Institute of Mental Health explains this dilemma as such:

The institutionalization of severely mentally ill people, particularly in hospital back wards, constituted a form of societal paternalism in which many persons suffered bleak, meaningless lives. With deinstitutionalization and the lack of community support system, many former patients and others with severe mental illness have been given nearly absolute liberty but with a very high price. Now that patients can

be committed to treatment services only if they are extremely and imminently dangerous to themselves or society, our society allows individuals incapable of realistic planning to struggle through life and wander the streets. Like ships without rudders, homeless people with severe mental illness are free, but at significant risk to life and without much hope of happiness. (Simpson, chapter 1)

Many of the mentally ill are uninsured and therefore have fewer treatment choices. Those who have received past treatment are often non-compliant with taking their medications or unable to afford them. In a recent *USA Today* article, we are told that a shocking 60% of adults with any form of mental illness were left untreated (Szabo). According to a study cited by Lisa Hefflefinger, approximately 1 out of 4 Americans have had mental health problems during 2009 alone (Hefflefinger). When rock-bottom hits for many of these patients, they end up in their local emergency rooms seeking help for their mental health emergency.

Why the Emergency Room?

Although some of the patients who come to the ER do so of their own accord, many more are brought in by the local law enforcement or family members. Some have sought help through a mobile crisis unit or crisis help line where they are often sent to the ED for medical clearance. Some 24%-50% of all psychiatric patients also suffer medical illnesses. Due to the lack of psychiatric facilities which can address both mental and physical health issues, many psychiatric patients are forced to undergo a process called medical clearance prior to placement in a psychiatric facility (Olshaker). This process is basically a physical of sorts performed by emergency room physicians in an ER setting. Once cleared, the patients then wait for assessment by mental health professionals who determine the best next step. Often, uninsured

patients will wait as long as 8-24 hours for an open bed in a psychiatric facility after being medically cleared.

Emergency Departments all across the nation are feeling the effects of this mental health crisis. According to Judge David L. Bazelon, founder of the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, mental health related ED visits increased 75% between 1992 and 2003. Bazelon also states that those with psychiatric illnesses have a higher rate of ED visits compared to those in the general population (Bazelon). For example, in 2014 Nashville General Hospital, reported drastic increases in their number of psychiatric cases medically cleared through their ED each year. In 2011 psychiatric patients required approximately 4,326 nursing hours. By 2013 this had nearly doubled to 7,790 nursing hours, creating as well increased bed occupancy or boarding (Hawley page 1). This increase in numbers is costly for the hospital and divides the attention of the ED staff from more critically ill patients.

There are many problems with this model of care, not only for the hospitals themselves, but the patients as well. During their long waits, these patients are often left to soak in the cesspools of their minds, instead of receiving the help they desperately need. The ED staff are poorly trained, if trained at all, to meet the needs of these patients. ED physicians are prepared for life-threatening medical emergencies, not psychological ones. The environment is noisy, chaotic, and often overwhelming for those who are likely experiencing chaos of their own inside their heads. (Alakeson et al.)

Is there a better way?

The real question is: how can we do better? The first priority of treatment for those experiencing a mental health crisis is caring for their physical safety. However, shouldn't we consider their mental health just as important? If we created a more holistic approach in our

care model, these patients would have much better continuity of care. Currently, we are simply right back where we were well over 100 years ago when Dorothea Dix sought change.

The process of medically clearing most psychiatric patients has been created to rule out and/or treat any existing medical needs. The evaluation of this process is a critical first step. A study done by Dr. Jonathan Olshaker, et al. revealed that only 19% of those with psychiatric complaints had coexisting acute medical conditions. These commonly consisted of lacerations, chest pain, hypertension, hyperglycemia, and bronchitis. Of these 19%, acute medical conditions were discovered through patient history 94% of the time (Olshaker). These statistics hardly warrant costly routine lab work on every psychiatric patient regardless of how thorough their self-reported history or how recently they have been seen in the ED. Hospitals could develop better triage systems for these patients and cut costs by being more selective of who receives full work-ups. The money saved could be used towards revamping the ED to better treatment for these patients.

Another major government expense is the often overlapping excessive resources provided to restrain many mentally-ill patients against their will. Each governmental entity has its own policies to secure the safety of patients who have either the desire to harm themselves or the inability to protect themselves. Often this begins with the local police department (PD) or a local mobile crisis unit. If the patient is not already in police custody, the mobile crisis unit will contact the PD to transfer the patient to the ED for medical clearance. For example, in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, it is the policy of the Metro Nashville Police Department for the officer to remain with the patient until discharge or transfer is complete. This creates a shortage for the already short-staffed patrol unit of the PD, plus the expenses of that officer's salary during that time frame. These officers are also required to remain solely with the patient they

bring in, even if there are already 4 or 5 other officers in the ED for the same reason. Yet, it is also the policy of a city hospital in Nashville, that hospital security as well as a sitter monitor and stay with the patient at all times. Often there can be as many as 3 people monitoring one patient. Since few of these patients are insured and these are all government entities, this becomes a huge cost to the city. I propose that these separate agencies come together and create a policy that lessens the strain on any one agency. One possible plan could be that the hospital security increases staffing and takes over the securing of the patient from PD, allowing them to get back to duty. The main problem with this plan is that while these are all government agencies, they all have separate budgets. Unless the changes were made within the city budget, this plan would become more costly to the hospital while saving money for the police department. Re-arranging the budget along with this policy change could allow for a larger allocation of funds to the hospital to better their psychiatric care.

For most hospitals, it seems that length of stay (LOS) and boarding psychiatric patients are the greatest expenses and problems. Lisa Hefflefinger cites research that the average LOS for psychiatric patients is 8.6 hours for those who get discharged and 15 hours for those being transferred to another facility. For those patients who present to the ED intoxicated, this time increases by an additional 6.2 hours for a total LOS averaging nearly 24 hours (Hefflefinger). According to Vidhaya Alakeson et al. these boarded patients do not receive the quality of care they need. In addition, the presence of these long-term ED patients exhaust the staff's ability to fully focus on their more critically-ill patients (Alakeson et al.). One hospital in New Mexico began to relieve this problem in 2005. Hefflefinger explains their impressive multi-phase approach which took many years to fully implement. The hospital recognized that they lacked a safe location to house their growing psychiatric population, so in their first phase they created

one. This 7-bed Critical Decision Unit (CDU) is a locked area with video surveillance, panic alarms, and safe rooms. The other key factors include a calming environment and well-trained staff to care for the patients in this area. Because their CDU has its own set of protocols, it is easier for the staff to focus solely on the needs of these patients (Hefflefinger). Although this has cost the hospital money up front, it has cut costs in other areas of psychiatric care while providing better care to the psychiatric patients. Many hospitals could learn from this development model, while also understanding it was developed internally. It is important for individual hospitals to utilize their own resources in order to suit their particular population needs.

An example of how this could be feasible for a hospital like Nashville General would be to utilize their relationship with Meharry Medical College. Meharry residents of all specialties, with the exception of psychiatry, currently see patients in the ED. Mobile Crisis, or even their own trained assessment staff, if developed on site, could quickly assess potential mental health patients then refer to psychiatry as needed. A certain percentage of the psychiatric patients would benefit from being seen by and initially treated by a psychiatrist within the ED. Nashville General currently has unused hospital floor space as well. It would be prudent for this hospital to consider the development of its own CDU or even its own psychiatric floor, allowing these patients to be treated in house as opposed to waiting long transfer times for other facilities that are already overcrowded. These steps could drastically reduce the LOS for mental health patients in the ED.

This crisis is clearly one of national proportion. Despite all of the current discussion of healthcare reform, there is very little discussion about reforming our mental health practices. Consequently, the federal government is spending more than \$30 billion in social security

payments for the mentally disabled alone (Zipple). It is critical that we begin to put funding in place on the front end before people end up in such a dependent state. In a review of the book, *Healing the Broken Mind: Transforming America's Failed Mental Health System* by Timothy Kelly, Anthony Zipple summarizes the author's primary points he deems necessary for reform as follows:

1. Developing a system that is results oriented and focused on the use of evidence-based practices.
2. Developing a system that is innovative, abolishes state mental health system monopolies, and increases provider competition.
3. Developing a system that is adequately funded and implementing broad policy and insurance parity for mental health services.
4. Developing a system that is consumer friendly and empowers persons with severe mental illness and their families to have a strong voice in services and policy.
5. Developing a system that is committed to change. (Zipple)

The government needs to understand just how critical reform is in this overlooked arena of healthcare. City hospitals need funding in order to revamp and create a new standard of care that treats mentally ill patients rather than simply sifting them through our current broken system. We as a society need to realize just how many lives mental illness affects. As Americans we are ethically and morally bound to address this growing concern and stop sweeping it under the rug in attempts to ignore it. The reality is that almost half of all Americans will suffer some form of mental illness during the course of their lives (Butcher). No longer can we afford to treat those with mental illness as outcasts in our society. The need

for funding is clear as well as more facilities which are properly trained to aid the special needs of these patients.

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In the essay below, Tony Maxfield addresses a serious problem facing rural communities in Tennessee: lack of access to emergency medical services. The author incorporates research which documents the significant differences in response time between urban and rural services and shows dire effects lengthy rural response times can have on trauma patients. Maxfield uses this research to build an argument in favor of the establishment of more EMS substations in rural communities. Notice how the author incorporates research from professional medical publications as well as excerpts from an interview with a professional working in the field.

Tony Maxfield

Professor David Johnson

English 1020

Emergency Services in Rural Communities

Individuals in most urban communities take for granted the fact they have quick access to emergency care. Furthermore, in these urban areas, most citizens have come to expect a quick response by emergency services in the event of an emergency (NEMSIS, 2015). However, this is not the case in some rural areas of Tennessee, especially the neighborhood where I live. The Willow Grove community—located in the Southeast corner of Clay County—has only one way in, and requires emergency responders to travel into Overton County to access the citizens in this area. In Willow Grove, this is a problem when police or emergency medical services (EMS) respond to an emergency. On the other hand, most counties in the Upper Cumberland Region have placed substations in the rural areas where extended response times are an issue (UCEMSDA). In order to provide the citizens of Willow Grove with the same standard of care, we must provide them with an ambulance substation to reduce response times.

Celina—where the ambulance service is located—is separated from the southeast corner of Clay County by Dale Hollow Lake. The response time from Celina is approximately thirty minutes; for this reason, Overton County EMS makes all emergency calls to southeast Clay County; however, this does not solve the problem of providing sick and injured taxpayers in southeast Clay County with appropriate care. For example, Overton County EMS response times can be as much as twenty-five minutes; in either case, neither of these response times are acceptable when dealing with patients who suffer a traumatic injury, myocardial infarction (MI), or stroke. According to the National EMS Information System, the national average EMS response time is six minutes. The extended response times in the Willow Grove community, which can be as much as twenty minutes over national average, puts the citizens of this community at great risk.

In 2013, the Trauma Care Advisory Council of Tennessee reported 23,641 trauma patients who received care in trauma centers or Comprehensive Regional Pediatric Centers. Ground transports were responsible for about 80 percent of patients taken to trauma centers, while air transports accounted for about 20 percent (Guillamondegui, Seesholtz, Booker, & Love, 2014). When dealing with trauma patients, the goal is to deliver the patient to a trauma center within sixty minutes post injury. When patients receive definitive care within the “golden hour”, morbidity and mortality decrease significantly (Rogers & Rittenhouse, 2014). In short, when dealing with trauma patients, delay equals death.

Stroke is the leading cause of death and disability in the United States; moreover, Tennessee ranks fourth-worst in the United States for deaths caused by strokes. In Tennessee sixty-three out of ninety-five counties have no designated stroke center for EMS to transport patients who suffer an acute stroke. In addition, 38 percent of the population is twenty to fifty

miles away from a stroke center (Hern, Swafford, Winters, & Aldrich). For this reason, transporting stroke patients to a comprehensive stroke center within three hours can prevent major damage to the brain (McFarland, 2011). A fast response along with proper treatment and transport to an appropriate hospital will improve the outcome of an individual suffering from a stroke. Time is critical in saving brain tissue when an individual is having a stroke (Antevy, McTaggart, & Jayaraman, 2015). As Dr. David French stated in an article in *JEMS*, “Early EMS activation, identification, management, and rapid transport and triage to the most appropriate stroke center will give the patient the best chance to make a full recovery (French, 2015).”

One of the most time-critical calls that EMS encounters is an individual complaining of chest pain. Additionally, EMS receives a high volume of chest pain calls that continue to grow every year. Individuals who activate EMS in the event of an MI have a much better outcome than those who opt to be transported by personal vehicle (Maziar Zafari, 2015). EMS personnel are trained to provide life-saving interventions in the event an individual develops cardiac arrest. In an article on Medscape, “Myocardial Infarction Treatment & Management”; Zafari Maziar, MD, PhD, explains:

Approximately 1 in every 300 patients with chest pain transported to the ED by private vehicle goes into cardiac arrest en-route. Several studies have confirmed that patients with STEMI [S-T segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction] usually do not call 911; in one study, only 23 percent of patients with a confirmed coronary event used EMS (Maziar Zafari, 2015).

In some situations, emergency services can be the difference between life and death; for example, chances of surviving a sudden cardiac arrest decrease for every second treatment is delayed. Consequently, 65 percent of deaths caused by MI occur within the first sixty minutes; however, we can prevent most of these deaths with early defibrillation (Maziar Zafari, 2015). Additionally, quick response times will minimize damage to the heart muscle and possibly save the patient's life.

Increases in public safety budgets are always met with resistance, especially when requesting money to cover raises or equipment. Secondly, a common argument to refute ambulance substations is a lack of call volume compared to cost of operation; however, according to Chris Masiongale, Overton County EMA/911 Director, in 2014, 1261 calls were made by fire, police, and EMS in the Willow Grove area (Masiongale, 2015). Additionally, numerous grants are available to assist small communities with funds to improve public safety. With available grants and call volumes that increase from year to year, providing the Willow Grove Community with an ambulance substation is the right thing to do.

People who need emergency pre-hospital care depend on well-trained personnel reaching them quickly, identifying the treatment needed, and in life-threatening situations—such as multiple trauma, stroke, or cardiac arrest—administering the life-saving treatment needed. It is our responsibility as public servants to supply each community with access to emergency services that they require, and respond to everyone in need as fast as possible.

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In the literary analysis below, Honey-Rae Swann presents a comparison of characters and attitudes toward them in two American novels. Her study of women characters, their wealth, and male characters' responses to both show how two different authors addressed similar concerns about the so-called American Dream. Swann relies on a close reading of primary literary texts and smoothly incorporates quotations from each to support her thesis that the wealth, status, and decisions of two main women characters lead admiring male characters to disillusionment. The essay is a good example of how an original argument can be developed through comparative critical analysis of literary texts.

Honey-Rae Swan

Professor Laura Black

English 2030

28 February 2015

A Marian Mirage and Daisy Delusion:

A Comparison of Women's Roles in *A Lost Lady* and *The Great Gatsby*

In 1923, Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* depicts a disillusioned Niel Herbert who becomes more aware of his world through his observance and changing opinions of the married aristocrat, Mrs. Marian Forrester. Two years later, F. Scott Fitzgerald, an admirer of Cather's, published *The Great Gatsby*, in which a starry-eyed Nick Carraway observes the happenings of the elite class in New York. Through his observance, we bear witness to the difficulties Jay Gatsby has in obtaining class, money, and the American dream. Although the main characters and narrative structures are very similar, the most striking similarities of the two novels occur in Marian Forrester and Daisy Buchanan, observed to be so similar that, in 1925, Fitzgerald admitted to an "apparent plagiarism" of Daisy's description to the love object in Cather's novel (Corrigan 1453). The women in the novel are symbols of wealth and class, inspiring the

illusions and revealing the atrocities of their stature, made apparent in their appeals, relationships, and their decisions or actions within the novels.

As both novels separate and define two distinct social classes, the ladies owe much of their appeal to their placement in the social elite. In *A Lost Lady*, the prairie states are divided with the homesteaders and hard-workers, and the bankers and gentlemen ranchers looking to invest money to develop the West (Cather 3). *The Great Gatsby*, distinguishes East Egg from West Egg as old money and new money, respectively. These “eggs” echo Niel’s wish to not return to his “frail egg-shell house [...] where people of no consequence lived” (21). In *A Lost Lady* and in *The Great Gatsby*, much of the story is based on observing the women and their class, with and through those deemed lesser observers. In Niel’s introduction to this class through the Forresters, the young boy sees Mrs. Forrester as “one of the great and rich world” (13). This distinction was the same Jay Gatsby made with Daisy when he was a poor, young soldier. Daisy even makes it a point to emphasize her own superiority with, “I’ve been everywhere and seen everything and done everything [...] God, I’m so sophisticated!” and Nick observes her smirk as “she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished society” (Fitzgerald 22). Niel and Gatsby are especially disillusioned by the women and their elevated status.

Although these characters do not have a clear view of the women in the beginning of the novel, they are not alone or absurd in their lack of insight. Nick says Daisy’s eyes were “impersonal [...] in the absence of all desire” but when she “looked up into [his] face” she was “promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was the way she had” (17, 13). Correspondingly, Mrs. Forrester’s eyes are described with obvious contradictions. While having the ability to constitute an intimate and personal relation, her eyes

were “nearly always a little mocking” (Cather 26-27). The women had the ability to be both mocking and charming as a result of their status and wealth. They could be or do almost anything because of it. Cather and Fitzgerald make the women’s appeals universal to parallel the widespread charm of wealth and status. Similarly, physical descriptions could have been largely omitted for the same reason. Opinion varies on what constitutes beauty, but anyone can be made desirable when they are inextricably connected to money or an elite society and, though physical descriptions are slim, Cather and Fitzgerald consistently connect them directly to the women’s class. While Mrs. Forrester treats Niel’s injury, he notes only her paleness and softness, which gives a testament to her distinction from the homesteaders and hard-workers, before briefly noting her fine clothes or jewelry, and then observes the extravagance of her home (20-21). Likewise, Nick feels uncivilized around Daisy, and Gatsby reassesses everything in his home based on Daisy’s approval (Fitzgerald 96-97). Mrs. Forrester and Daisy embodied the symbols to the men outside their marriage, but were often only a means of expressing it for their husbands. It would be silly to say Mrs. Forrester and Daisy were not cared for by their husbands, but Captain Forrester and Tom Buchanan often objectified their wives. Captain and Tom buy their women jewelry and, Captain especially, takes pleasure in seeing his wife wear them. Consequentially, Tom views his wife as a testament to his success and stature, seeking sexual gratification in Mrs. Wilson. Both women have affairs, too, mostly satisfied in accepting materials from their husbands and pleasure from others, the most offensive part to Tom being that “Mr. Nobody from nowhere” was with his wife (137). These relationships provide foreshadowing to their decisions at the end of the novels. Mrs. Forrester marries again, reclaiming parts of herself Niel thought she lost after her husband’s death, the “right man” had “saved her” (Cather 143). After she “realized at last what she was doing,”

Daisy stays with Tom in order not to lose her reputation by marrying Gatsby (Fitzgerald 139). Both women knew that “money was a very important thing,” “realize[d] it from the beginning” and “[were not] ridiculous about it” in their decisions (Cather 96). With their inextricable connections to wealth and status, provided by their husbands, they would be nothing without them, losing all their charm and appeal in the absence of money or reputation.

As symbols of wealth and status and in their relationships and actions, the women serve as objects revealing the misconceptions of wealth, status, and the American dream to the novels’ narrators. Niel became thankful that Mrs. Forrester, “his long-lost lady,” “had a hand in breaking him into life” (147). Nick, too, recognizes that Gatsby’s dream was “already behind him” (Fitzgerald 189). Cather and Fitzgerald succeed in illustrating that these ideals and dreams were “already gone” and “nothing could ever bring [them] back” (Cather 145). “It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further” for the nonexistent American dream that “was nothing, and yet it was everything” (Fitzgerald 189, Cather 145). These women represented these dreams and, like them, their value was not diminished though they were forever lost.

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Amy Leu's essay, written for a World Civilization course, is a thoughtful synthesis of historical and anthropological discussions of patriarchy. It offers well-organized, original analysis of patriarchal society's possible origins, incorporating research and presenting information in such a way that it creates a chronological historical narrative. Through her research, Leu shows us how, as a sense of private property ownership grew, regard for the status and contribution of women to society diminished. Her essay is a good example of how strong critical writing skills can be deployed across academic disciplines.

Amy Leu

Professor Merritt McKinney

History 1110

18 February 2015

Patriarchy's Roots

Prestige has, for millennia, captured the human imagination. What an idea, that some people, like some jewels, are more precious and differently sought after. The elite have seemingly emulated the gods in position and influence for time immemorial. But what places people in their matrix? Why are some due more respect based on their names, or more curiously, their genders? In studying history, such questions of origins arise. The nearly global institution of patriarchy raises an interesting case with its fuzzy roots. By the time written records became prominent, male dominance was widely accepted and unquestioned. But ideas of prestige are just as adaptable as humans themselves, and patriarchy was once just a seed. Based on current interpretations, the Paleolithic Age had greater equality, with gender roles widening in the Neolithic, and women's dependent status seemingly cemented in the beginnings of the Urban Age.

First, we must retreat to a time when there were no influences and preconceived notions about gender roles, in order to consider the most basic societal setup. Obviously, none of these individuals left accounts; otherwise, they would not have lived prehistorically. But from observations of modern forager societies, a pattern emerges. In *Women in Prehistory*, anthropologist Margaret Ehrenberg states, “[Women] probably collected as much, if not more, of the food eaten by the community and derived equal status from their contribution” (19). If we can avoid imagining the stereotypical cave woman dressed in animal skins and cowed by the macho woolly mammoth hunters, we might understand that equal status would have made practical sense when uninterrupted by preconceptions. There may have been some division of labor, where males were mainly concerned with hunting, and women with gathering, but such a division would have made no plea for superior or inferior status. Both jobs contributed to the stores of food and wealth, and thus both sexes contributed to the group’s quality of life.

In fact, women in prehistoric times may have been making more fiscal contribution than previously imagined. Venus figurines, which are found across Eurasia and dated as the oldest carved figurines, may have been more than fertility charms. They exhibit woven items of clothing, and may have been used as models to immortalize and advertise such crafts, according to *Furs for Evening, But Cloth Was the Stone Age Standby* by science writer Natalie Angier. What scholars had previously interpreted as body art may be evidence of caps, skirts, and bandeaux woven by women, the plant-gathering experts. Such skilled craftsmanship could easily open the door for baskets, slings, and nets. This means that “women’s work” may have been a remarkable advancement, and an acclaimed credit to any clan, even though these woven items were not as durable as the arrowheads and other stone tools for which the age is named. As Angier puts it, “while vast changes in manufacturing took the luster off the textile business

long ago, with the result that such ‘women’s work’ is now accorded low status and sweatshop wages, the researchers argue that weaving and other forms of fiber craft once commanded great prestige” (8).

However, things began to change in the Neolithic Age. According to Ehrenberg, most current horticultural societies assign gardening or farming tasks to women, while men continue to hunt, which is supported by archeological evidence from the Neolithic period. Specifically, out of 104 existing horticultural societies, half exhibit agriculture managed by women, with another third showing shared farming responsibilities (20). It is most likely that women led the switch to farming the land, thus eventually leading the majority of the human race to settlement. This leads us to believe that women were still a significant contribution to the economy and of significant influence within society – even groundbreaking technological innovators in the Neolithic. Ehrenberg asserts that there was a matrilineal system of inheritance in place as well, as the skills and equipment for farming, the element of livelihood that now kept societies in place, would be passed down from mother to daughter (24). This potentially put the trust for continued fortune for all in the hands of the women.

Nevertheless, the gender roles continued changing, and made a drastic switch. Horticulture became plow agriculture as beasts of burden were tamed and harnessed, and more yields were required for the growing population. As authors Catherine Clay, Chandrika Paul, and Christine Senecal state in *Women in the First Urban Communities*, “Women of plow-using cultures may have preferred and chosen to work around the house and to perform lighter agricultural work. This scenario resulted in a gradual loss of women’s social power and prestige – sometimes through their own choices that made sense to them at the time, but that accelerated men’s control over economic activity and social resources” (27). Basically,

women's and men's physical differences became more consequential, as a focus on child rearing grew, and agriculture that required upper-body strength and less distance from home took root. Also, as men manned the fields and the herds of domesticated animals – the element of livelihood that kept societies in place – patrilineal descent and inheritance became of interest. More equipment was owned by plow agriculturalists, and concrete land ownership also became prominent during this age, so the more tangible patrilineage attracted more focus than matrilineage had (Ehrenberg 24). Since these patrilineal systems were so precious, it became imperative for men to “keep tabs” on their wives’ and daughters’ fidelity or virginity so as to ensure legitimate inheritance (Clay et al. 28).

A woman's reputation also became increasingly significant perhaps because her talent or contribution to the economy was increasingly insignificant. As people settled down and began to accumulate wealth, it could stay in the family, and create a gap between the prestige held by the rich and the poor. Thus people began to be seen as items of tradable monetary value, where slavery also developed in early urban societies (Ehrenberg 25). Where a man's monetary value may have resulted from his ability to contribute to the economy in terms of labor, a woman's monetary value generally consisted of her reproductive capacity, since women had largely exited the major industries with the forfeit of agriculture. According to Clay, Paul and Senecal, “Some have argued that men's control and exchange of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity generally became the basis of private property in Mesopotamia between 3100 and 600 B.C.E.” (26). Basically, a woman's value or prestige was now attributed to how well she was protected or controlled. This idea spread across the entire spectrum of class and status, as evidenced by the first known law codes. The ancient *Assyrian Law* details whether women should veil themselves or cover their heads, depending on whether

she was slave, free, wife, or concubine. The women did not have any choice in their head covering, as any women caught in public in a misidentifying garb was dealt harsh punishments, such as 50 blows with rods or the amputation of her ears. Men were dealt similar harsh punishments for failing to report a woman dressed incorrectly (70). Status must have been imperative to this society, where social hierarchy was rigidly addressed and upheld, and had much to do with a woman's potential sexuality, as opposed to her talent or contribution. Similarly, the "Family and Marriage" section of *Hammurabi's Code* is concerned mainly with protecting virginity and punishing infidelity mostly with death by drowning. Interestingly, if a woman refused her husband, her case was investigated. Depending on their findings, the woman was allowed to return to her father's house, or was drowned. No punishment is mentioned for the man (55). Perhaps the rules were executed fairly, and the authorities were precise and accurate in their investigations. But in an imperfect world, it seems unlikely anyone would gamble with such consequences. And so we see male dominance fully sprouted, and yielding nearly complete control in matters of state and home. Individuals were no longer judged only by their contribution to society, but oftentimes only by their status.

In conclusion, a slew of cause-and-effect events led to the eventual loss of prestige for women in society. There may have always been some division of labor, but in matters of influence and regard, it might easily have been inconsequential for centuries, even millennia. During the Neolithic Age, that division of labor is thought to have grown into widening gender roles. In the Urban Age, patriarchy fully took root, exhibiting itself in new camps of thought, an emphasis on physical differences, social stratification, and law codes. Prestige was no longer based on an individual evaluation of gifts to society, but on labels. But there is hope in

that the biases constituting patriarchy had a historical beginning: we can see them wilt away in the sun of a bright new age.

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