

# FRESH WRITING

VOLUME 11



Matthew Capdevielle, Editor  
Elizabeth Cornwell, Assistant Editor

University Writing Program • University of Notre Dame



# FRESH WRITING

2011 • VOLUME 11

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Serina Bellamy, Laura K. Berlage, Richard C. Bevington III, Elizabeth Capdevielle, Patrick Clauss, Ph.D., Leah Coming, Erin Dietel-McLaughlin, Ph.D., John Dillon, Kelly Hagen, Henry Hodes, Kristina Jipson, Nicole MacLaughlin, Nathaniel Myers, Anna Sundbo, Elizabeth Van Jacob

**University Writing Program**

**University of Notre Dame**



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## Acknowledgments

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Developing as a writer is a complex project. It doesn't take place in a single course or over a single semester. It is a continual process that spans one's life. Indeed, we never truly stop growing as writers. We can always learn more. The best learning takes place in close collaboration with other writers, amid a community of careful and thoughtful readers—professors, Writing Center tutors, and fellow students. *Fresh Writing* plays a key role in that process of development for many writers at the University of Notre Dame, providing a record of some of our community's best work. And just as our development as writers depends upon our collaboration with other writers, so too this volume is the fruit of collaboration among several members of our writing community. Many people deserve thanks for making this volume possible.

This edition of *Fresh Writing* marks the eleventh year of publication for a series originally conceived by Dr. Connie Snyder Mick. The *Fresh Writing* project has flourished as a key component of the University Writing Program curriculum, which under the direction of Dr. John Duffy, Francis O'Malley Director of the University Writing Program, has fostered the development of hundreds of Notre Dame writers. We thank both Dr. Mick and Dr. Duffy for their vision in creating a venue for sharing good writing with the community of writers at Notre Dame.

Deepest thanks go to our contributors and to their nominating professors. In particular, we thank those professors whose students' writing appears in this volume: Dr. Ruth Abbey, Dr. Tobias Boes, Dr. Eileen Hunt Botting, Dr. C.F. Delaney, Dr. Erin Dietel-McLaughlin, John Dillon, Dr. Stephen Fredman, Emily Gandolfi, Ed Kelly, Iris Law, Dr. Blake Leyerle, Dr. Charles Rosenberg, Brian Smith, Lauren Spieller, and Todd Thorpe. Thanks also are due to all who submitted their excellent work for consideration for publication and to their professors for guiding their writing in composition classes and University Seminars.

Our editorial board is faced with the difficult task of choosing a small number of first-rate essays from a large collection of high-quality submissions. For their careful reading and hard work, special thanks goes to this year's editorial board

members: Serina Bellamy, Laura K. Berlage, Richard C. Bevington III, Elizabeth Capdevielle, Dr. Patrick Clauss, Leah Coming, Dr. Erin Dietel-McLaughlin, John Dillon, Kelly Hagen, Henry Hodes, Kristina Jipson, Nicole MacLaughlin, Nathaniel Myers, Anna Sundbo, and Elizabeth Van Jacob.

Terri O'Bryan, Administrative Assistant in the University Writing Program, deserves thanks for all her work to support the *Fresh Writing* project. Indeed, many interesting and exciting ideas hatched by Writing Program faculty and administrators would never get off the ground without her guidance.

I'd also like to thank Lisa Wess, senior managing editor at Hayden-McNeil, for her advice and assistance in this project.

And finally, I'd like to thank our Assistant Editor Betsy Cornwell for her tireless, careful, and cheerful work on *Fresh Writing*. Without her assistance, this edition would not have been possible.

Enjoy your reading.

Matthew Capdevielle, Ph.D.

Notre Dame, Indiana

March 2011

## Foreword

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“There is a kind of writer’s magic.”

—Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer*

Too often, when I tell new acquaintances about my studies in the prose MFA program or my tutoring work in the Writing Center, they respond, “Oh, I could never do that.” People tend to imagine good writing as either innate or divinely inspired, an alchemy understood by only a select few—a sort of magic, as Dorothea Brande has it.

Yet this is magic that can be taught. Brande herself acknowledges as much; in fact, the taught magic of writing is the basis of her classic manual *Becoming a Writer*. Learning to write well means engaging oneself, honestly and ethically, in a constant process of changing and becoming. It means attempting to understand and overcome one’s own limitations, remaining open-minded and thoughtful, and seeking out and communicating with a genuine *other*. This may seem like alchemy, but it is both a normal and a vital process, and one that occurs here on campus every day.

This year’s Fresh Writers are our sorcerers’ apprentices. They are fully engaged in the process of learning magic, and they have already begun to succeed. Chris Dillon invokes remarkable imagery and detail in “Mepps Aglia #1,” a narrative essay about fishing with his father. Dan McMurtrie thoroughly analyzes the pros and cons of Lady Gaga’s involvement in the gay rights movement in “Bad Romance.” Natalie Boll reads deep layers of meaning into a seascape painting in “A Marine Paradox,” one of this year’s Snite Museum contest winners. From these few examples, I hope you can see some of the breadth of subject and style that this volume contains. Like any kind of magic, good writing takes many forms, and it is always transformative.

However, these essays have much in common, too, even beyond their clear structures, vivid language, and compelling arguments. They share authorship by students who have come to understand that good writing is a craft, a practice, a learnable skill. They have honed that skill in first year composition, in seminars and electives, and by entering essay contests. They have approached their work



with the discipline, honor and steady work ethic that, as I have learned this year, so define student life at Notre Dame.

So if, as you read these wonderful essays, you find yourself thinking “Oh, I could never do that!”—well, you’re wrong. Good writing is absolutely magic, but it’s the magic of hard work and passion, open-mindedness and patience and discovery. This is magic anyone can learn.

I hope these students will inspire you to improve your own writing, whether in academia, journalism, or something as simple as a private journal or as daringly creative as National Novel Writing Month. Come see us at the Writing Center, too—I see small magics performed there every day.

There is proof of magic in this volume. I’m so glad you are discovering it with us.

Elizabeth Cornwell  
Notre Dame, Indiana  
March 2011

We are proud to share these excellent examples of student writing with you. These essays are solely the work of their individual authors and are not intended to reflect the views of the University Writing Program or the University of Notre Dame.





## ESSAYS

## *Author's Biography*

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### KEVIN BEDNAR

In “The Consequences of Human Genetic Engineering,” Kevin Bednar explores the increasingly significant issue of genetic engineering in humans through the biological perspective as opposed to the moral perspective. Inspired by his inherent interest in the topic, Kevin asserts that widespread genetic engineering should be cautioned against because of its potentially harmful effects on human health, evolution, and society. Originally from Essex, Vermont, Kevin is a chemical engineering major now living in Sorin College. He is still in desperate search of a career plan, but is attempting to enjoy that time of freedom while it lasts.

# The Consequences of Human Genetic Engineering

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KEVIN BEDNAR



Since the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, scientists and the general public alike have questioned in every possible form the origins of the modern human condition. Over the years, science has proven its societal value by unraveling nearly all of the secrets of our past, effectively answering this question along the way. However, we've now reached a virtual saddle point, where our focus has shifted from our evolutionary past to the future. Science is no longer concerned with where we were, but where we will be, and what we will become. And with the oft-damaging ramifications of our modern, intelligent brains, we find it difficult to sit back patiently and allow Mother Nature to decide what is best for us. We have instead taken the advice of our friends at Dodge and "grabbed life by the horns," thus drastically increasing the prevalence of genetic engineering technologies in everyday life, with the intent to further the evolutionary fitness of our species. In this sense, and in those more monetary in nature, species-altering technologies can possess appealing qualities to any aspiring scientist. But before adopting this revolutionary livelihood, it's enormously important that these attractions be weighed against the potential dangers inflicted upon our children, our children's children, and the prosperity of our species as a whole in the future. Human genetic engineering should not be widely implemented because of its detrimental effects on health, evolution, and society. Currently, the most apparent concern with genetic engineering is its potential to cause immediate health complications in its subjects. The well-known story of 18-year-old Jesse Gelsinger attests to this perfectly. In 1999, Gelsinger was injected with a high dose of a genetically modified virus to improve certain cells that were affected by his "genetic defect that prevents the correct metabolism of ammonia" (Wade). Even though the only known dangers were possible hepatitis and blood clots, Gelsinger's vital signs began failing just two days after the therapy, before he eventually passed away from what, his father concluded, could

have been nothing but “the procedure itself” (Wade). This tragedy demonstrates that the unknown residual effects of seemingly harmless DNA change can be fatal. The regret and sorrow that the doctors felt as a result of navigating a murderous vessel is indicative of the unnecessary dangers of gene therapy.

In the decade since Gelsinger’s death, a lot has been learned from the failures of attempted genetic engineering, and these practices are becoming safer and more widespread. However, scientists continue to delve further into new procedures with unknown consequences. Research is now being conducted on fetuses to investigate the possible healing qualities of gene therapy. Yet, these seemingly small genetic changes pose a high risk of “inadvertently altered” reproductive genes that can damage, primarily, the development of the fetus itself, and, secondarily, its descendants (King). Similarly, since so much about the process of genetic engineering is still unknown, inserting normal genes into the body is a very dangerous procedure

“because the good genes can grow in unintended places” (Rosenwald). In this sense, not only can the changed individual or gene be hurt, but also all individuals directly descended from it and all neighboring genes may be as well, making the consequences far more widespread than initially intended.

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*We’ve now reached a virtual saddle point, where our focus has shifted from our evolutionary past to the future*

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Though some agree that it can be potentially dangerous, most scientists currently studying bioengineering believe that the production of a human that is more evolutionary

fit than our current species is a very attractive possibility. According to bioethicist Dr. Gregory Stock, our future will hold an ability to “[circumvent] evolutionary programs that guide our behavior” in order to produce a new type of human that can be genetically altered: the posthuman. This may be viewed by proponents of genetic engineering as an opportunity to diminish harmful diseases or unfit personality traits through the use of embryo screening, such as a tendency toward depression or violence. The result would be a superhuman, both phenotypically and genotypically perfect in the eyes of the creator—the modern human. This species of human would most definitely thrive in our current societal and environmental state, performing according to how it was programmed, and quickly passing on valuable traits through inheritable “artificial chromosomes” that would otherwise take natural selection millions of years to incorporate. While this may sound all fine and dandy, the flaws of this supposition are many, and lie in the basic requirements of species preservation.

A preliminary issue associated with biotechnologies is the genetic uniformity of humans that would result. As Russell Powell from the University of Oxford suggests,

diversity in a species is vital in avoiding extinction and evolutionarily improving based on the process of natural selection. If all members of a species contain the same DNA and there are no seemingly disadvantageous mutations or differences, an entire race of organisms can be wiped out by one sudden environmental change or “large-scale epidemic” (Powell 2). As the human race stands right now, we don’t need to be specialized or improved at all. In fact, “the specialization of our species is generalization” (McKenna). We have so much genetic diversity and flexibility that we are able to “roll with the punches as they are thrown in the ordinary (and extraordinary) course of evolution,” and the manipulation of genes will do nothing but disrupt this stability (Powell 15). Powell asserts that genetic engineering “will operate on shortsighted motivations and flawed scientific beliefs, resulting in the elimination of potentially favorable variation” (15–16). In this sense, the appeal of being responsible for the formation of an initially successful species cannot surpass the possibility of increasing the odds of future extinction. The “blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and unhealthily proportioned” uniformity that would inevitably occur in the society so focused on making the perfect human portrayed by Stock is detrimental to its own survival in the long term (Powell 10).

We have already seen and are continuing to see attempts at this manual selection in the form of genocide. We saw it in the Holocaust and we see it now in China. As a result of a cultural preference for male children, 134 Chinese males are being born for every 100 females—a horrific idea from an evolutionary survival and success standpoint. If continued, this could result in “as many as 40 million men unable to find mates” in the next few decades. (Shannon 40). Selecting for a specific human trait has never granted a positive outcome, and now with science’s recent attempts at “genetic genocide” or eugenics, we can only imagine some of the negative consequences (Annas 25).

Today, we see the combination of embryo screening and abortion used to eliminate potentially “abnormal [children],” such as those with Down’s syndrome (Tokar 45). In this sense, we humans are impatiently attempting to evade the process of natural selection that Mother Nature herself intended. We try to select for certain traits that we think are beneficial in our current biological and social position, but it’s impossible for mere humans to know what our species needs now or in the future. There’s no telling that Down’s syndrome is harmful; for all we know, evolution could be quietly at work below our feet, very slowly selecting for a higher incidence of Down’s because of the benefits of being more dependent on others and forming more intimate relationships in our increasingly independent and chaotic world (NDSS). Natural selection works in the present, adapting to specific and current changes in environment. It cannot predict what environment of an organism in the following million years and select the most desirable trait for that time. In the same



sense, we don't know what the face of our future world will look like, so we can't risk creating a new species that will not survive in that world.

Similarly, sickle cell anemia is a very common genetic disease in East Africa because carriers and patients alike are immune to malaria transmitted by the omnipresent mosquitoes of the area. Seeing as sickle cell is eventually fatal, humans may try to eliminate it by directly manipulating genes through a selective process analogous to manual selection, as opposed to natural selection. Yet, this seemingly positive practice might result in a large spike in the number of malaria deaths. In this sense, we must heed philosopher Francis Fukuyama's warnings and avoid the temptation of thinking that we "can easily improve on [human nature] through casual intervention" (97). Instead, we need to accept the fact that the arduous and precise process of natural selection is above anything we should influence, and above, even, the mental capacities of our own brains.

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*We don't know what the face of our future world will look like, so we can't risk creating a new species that will not survive in that world*

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The consequences of human genetic engineering are not reserved solely to our biology. Continued research and investment in species-altering technologies could also result in damages to nearly all of our existing social organizations and means of living in ways that we can't yet understand. Still, as an example of a disturbance we've already noticed, tests such as genetic screening now "provide objective evidence that someone is more likely to contract a particular disease," a platform on which insur-

ance companies and employers have stood to justify their discriminatory rates and unexpected layoffs of individuals classified as financial burdens (Tokar 44). This fiscally frightening occurrence is not only unjust, but many people, including 59 year-old Woodbury, Minnesota resident Victoria Grove, are now so worried about higher health insurance or losing their jobs that they refuse to go to the doctor. One may instead opt to be sent a "test kit" with results returned directly to the patient so there are no medical records, or to ignore the potentially dangerous illness and let it go untreated (Harmon). This unsettling situation is a perfect illustration of the idea that widespread discrimination based on genetic differences uncovered by biotechnologies is a very real hazard that we must consider before continuing research.

Furthermore, biotechnology proponents admit to the possibility of large social segregation in the future as a result of a small minority of genetically superior humans. Upon exploration of our future society, Fukuyama agrees, in saying there will be large class separation and discrimination as a result of genetic engineering "[upending] existing social hierarchies" (82). Moreover, Princeton biologist Lee Silver concludes that about ten percent of people will have both ample interest and money to genetically alter their children, while the remainder of the population will remain

who we are today, producing the “GenRich” class and the “Natural” class (4). As the businessmen and movie stars, the GenRich will be far more affluent in society, with the Naturals acting as metaphorical, and potentially literal, janitors. Living in modern times, we’ve seen the heinous products of major racial discrimination in our past, and if genetic engineering continues, it appears that history will repeat itself in the lives of our ancestors.

Of course, many potential genetic engineers will continue to cite the possible health benefits of continued modification. Successful alteration of the germline may find cures to many diseases that are the cause of a high proportion of deaths, including HIV/AIDS and cancer. As evidence, scientists at Intronn have already made great leaps in the treatment of hemophilia by “tricking mutated genes into working properly,” as well as the betterment of heart problems by “increasing the body’s ‘good’ cholesterol” through gene therapy (Rosenwald). Curing fatal illnesses such as hemophilia and heart disease is one step in the direction of producing an überhealthy race that far exceeds our current life span. However, genetic engineering can also change the aging process directly, targeting “the human gene for telomerase,” which defines aging and eventually initializes the process of dying (Fukuyama 60). More futuristically, it may be possible to “introduce an improved stem-cell generator,” allowing failing genes to quickly be replaced by brand new ones (Gorman 154). Successful reduction of disease and modification and these aging genes would allow humans more than enough time to live a meaningful, satisfactory life, however that may be defined for different people.

While it is true that life extension is an appealing possibility for the future of our species, it does not take into consideration the biological necessity for death and how immortality will affect humans, not just in the near future, but many generations to come. Death is obviously a very daunting idea for most, and part of the allure of genetic engineering is its potential to quell this lifelong fear by delaying or doing away with death altogether. This may seem beneficial to humans in the short term, but lack of death is very dangerous to the survival of our species. In fact, death is one of the *requirements* of a species. According to Dr. Thomas Shannon, “death is a survival mechanism for life” (41). In other words, each human must die at some point to keep the species intact. This idea relates to the issue of human genetic variation, that diversity must “take root and flourish” for a species to be successful, and death is an imperative piece of this cycle (Shannon 41). Insofar as the continuation of our species is concerned, prolongation of life through genetic manipulation has far more costly results than benefits, and these must be taken into account before considering further exploration. After all, is there a really any point in living forever if the species will eventually become extinct from genetic uniformity?

To play the devil's advocate, let us assume that somehow the inevitability of uniformity does not result from the use of species-altering technologies. You might say that, in this case, all is well. The world is filled with happy, healthy people of all ages. But herein lies the problem: the world is filled. Another reason that death is necessary is the potential for extreme overpopulation of our planet. In recent years, we have already seen the combination of a population boom and further depletion of natural resources result in overwhelming fear in the scientific community that our planet simply cannot support the amount of people we currently have. If this isn't scary enough, imagine all of the approximately 40 million Americans that are currently over 65 living for at least the next 50 years, further depleting our resources and placing even more pressure on the planet and the rest of the human race.

The negative implications of bioengineering in the survival and prosperity of the human species, while evident, are often masked by the potential benefits. With this

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*Current genetic engineers  
are ignorantly discovering  
ways in which we can slowly  
exterminate our species*

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frame of mind, current genetic engineers are ignorantly discovering ways in which we can slowly exterminate our species, while assuming that we're doing the world a service. Instead of submitting to the process that created the powerful, intelligent form we call a human, we feel the need to take matters into our own hands, ignoring the laws of nature so delicately defined over billions of years by utilizing these newfound technologies to our "benefit." We've seen over and over that health compli-

cations, genetic uniformity, social discrimination, and overpopulation are all detrimental consequences of a technological advancement that, while appearing mostly advantageous initially, has the ability greatly to damage the survival of the human species. After all, "building a dam disrupts unseen relationships and destroys the system's balance in totally unanticipated ways" (Fukuyama 97). Upcoming genetic engineers must have the foresight to recognize these unanticipated disturbances and reconsider the building of this dam, placing their interest for discovery in other, less harmful arenas. For in the end, who wants to be responsible for the extinction of the human species?

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## *Author's Biography*

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### GABE CASEY

Gabe Casey grew up in the small, rural town of Niles, Michigan. As a member of the class of 2014, he is pursuing a double major in business consulting and political science. Upon graduation, Gabe plans on entering the consulting industry and gaining enough experience to return to Notre Dame and begin his pursuit toward an executive MBA.

In “Near Catastrophe: The Story Behind the Collapse of Wall Street,” Gabe analyzes the causes behind the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. He identifies actions taken by Congress, presidents, and the banking sector that nearly pushed the American economy off a cliff toward unprecedented catastrophe.

Gabe’s deep passion for business and politics can be credited to his high school teachers Michele Clement and Katherine Elsner. He would also like to thank Richard Beymer, Lynn Rouse, and Professor Matthew Capdevielle for their exceptional ability in teaching writing skills, which led to the creation of this work.

# Near Catastrophe: The Story Behind the Collapse of Wall Street

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GABE CASEY



September 28, 2008, an average day for the typical American: get up, drop the kids off at school, drive into work, go home, eat dinner with the family, and go to bed to start the cycle all over again in the morning. This is how many Americans spent this particular Monday, and most likely assumed that Mondays would be this way for the next several years. But this was no usual Monday; this was no mundane case of “lack of weekend”; this day, forever etched in history, marked the worst day the American economy had ever seen. We were on a cliff and, as the day went on, teetered on the edge of catastrophe.

But the signs were there. Economists knew it was coming. Prior to what some analysts call “Doomsday” (Kirkpatrick), the U.S. financial sector buzzed with activity: financial firms were bought, stocks were sold, and companies were restructured. Such activities were especially true days before the 28th. On September 7th, for instance, mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, guaranteeing about half of the U.S.’s twelve trillion dollar mortgage market, were officially nationalized and taken over by the federal government. On the 14th, Bank of America acquired investment banking firm Merrill Lynch in an all-stock transaction worth about fifty billion dollars (Associated Press). Also on the 14th, Lehman Brothers, a New York-based investment firm worth nearly one trillion dollars, collapsed and filed for Chapter Eleven bankruptcy the next day. On the 19th, the Federal Reserve gave insurance corporation American International Group (AIG) fifty billion dollars to prevent the company from following suit of Lehman Brothers and filing for bankruptcy. On the 25th, the FDIC took over savings bank holding company Washington Mutual, signaling the biggest bank failure in American history. But these events were modest compared to what occurred on the morning of the 28th, that typical American Monday morning, when the stock market lost 776 points, the biggest stock market

loss in a single day in history (Lewis). When asked about the loss and the speculation of a seven hundred billion dollar emergency bailout of toxic assets during a news conference, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke responded that “If we don’t do this, we may not have an economy on Tuesday” (Nocera).

With these words, Congress acted, and on October 3 President Bush signed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act and enacted the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). With such swift action and worth the full seven hundred billion dollars Bernanke asked for, banks were loaned the capital they needed, pulling them off the edge of the cliff, and thus sparing the economy from a depression much worse than that of the 1930s. But how could things in America have gotten so bad? What could have triggered such a crisis that halted credit markets and required unprecedented government intervention? What happened? The answers lie in data, in statistics; they can be found in the most miniscule government policies. Through my research, I have come to believe that there are five major factors that caused the Panic of 2008.

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*How could things  
in America have  
gotten so bad?*

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Beginning with a period of economic growth in 2001, banking institutions decided to take on additional debt in the form of home loans. Calling them subprime mortgages, banks gave loans to people that would normally not qualify. These groups of people included borrowers with low FICO scores, a higher debt-to-income ratio, lower incomes, and a lower ratio of loan to collateral. But why did banks take on such risks? Simply put, *profit* (Rose). Because of the significant growth with the economy, banks believed that people in this risky category had a lower chance of defaulting on their mortgages partly because employers were hiring and giving out raises to workers (increasing the amount of income a person received, and thus acting as an incentive to buy a home). The more borrowers banks had paying monthly payments to them, the more profit they received. Further realizing the potential that this economic utopia offered, banks offered low interest rates to their customers, further acting as an incentive for home-buying. But as any typical business does, banks needed to back-up their risk taking (Taylor). At the time, this was done through the emphasis of adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs), which legally allowed a bank to increase the amount of interest a customer pays monthly, sometimes for no logical reason at all. If defaults happened to increase, banks would then increase the interest rates of other customers, whether it be that of financially smart customers or those months behind on their payment. When asked about this matter in 2006 by a member of the Senate finance committee, CEO of Bank of America, Kenneth Lewis, stated that interest rates were “based on financial conditions and the federal funds rate.” (United States).

Had the economy not collapsed in 2008, this cycle of risky lending through misleading incentives may have well continued for years to come. In fact, this risk-taking was a result of deregulation measures that began nearly thirty years ago during the Carter administration, continued during the Reagan and Clinton administrations, and finally ended during the Bush administration when the crisis occurred in 2008.

When Democratic president Jimmy Carter signed the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act in 1980, it was seen as a victory for consumers (Lewis). It increased FDIC insurance coverage from forty thousand dollars to one hundred thousand dollars ensuring that the money people placed in their saving and checking accounts would be protected. Years after its signing, however, it's now seen as a major blow to consumers for two reasons. First, it lowered the mandatory reserve requirements banks keep in non-interest bearing accounts at U.S. Federal Reserve banks. High mandates ensure that banks have enough ready cash to meet normal demand for withdrawals, but lower mandates puts the money of banking customers in jeopardy (Billitteri). Second, the act *blocked* state usury laws that limited the rates lenders could charge on residential mortgage loans. Lenders now could charge virtually any rate they wanted to, giving rise to the adjustable rate mortgage system.

President Carter's successor Ronald Regan also pursued an agenda of scaling back the federal government. Part of this effort came when he signed the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982. Having many broad terms and conditions, the act "raised the allowable ceiling on direct investments by savings institutions in nonresidential real estate from twenty to forty percent assets." It also allowed these same institutions to "make commercial, corporate, business or agricultural loans of up to ten percent of their assets, dangerously high percentages" (Billitteri). Just like the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act, it put consumers' money in jeopardy by taking the chance of organizations defaulting on their their corporate, business or agricultural loans.

Then again in 1999, the banking sector was further deregulated when President Bill Clinton signed the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, officially repealing the long-standing and widely popular Glass-Steagall Act (Lawrence). Sponsored by Democratic Representatives Henry Steagall from Alabama and Carter Glass from Virginia in 1933, the Glass-Steagall Act was signed as a result of the Great Depression. It officially created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and promoted tough new regulations that were meant to control stock market speculation. It also separated banking types based on their industry-specific practices, mainly commercial and investment practices. By having this separation, the federal government could more easily regulate the banking industry and prevent a single-industry



monopoly from rising. But during the time of Bill Clinton the economy was expanding. Banks were making profit, people were buying homes now more than ever, and things didn't need regulation. More importantly, fraud and abuse were nearly non-existent. Given this economic utopia of sorts, the President pursued an agenda of deregulation, and, in 1999, the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act was signed and then enacted in 2000.

But as is typical with the American corporate sector, the American banking system pounced on this deregulation, and now that Uncle Sam was out of the picture, they could now merge into one giant conglomerate. For instance, Citicorp merged with Traveler's Group, and the new industry giant Citigroup was formed. This single corporation combined banking, insurance, and securities services under a number of brands that included Citibank, Primerica, and Smith Barney (Sorkin). By having no regulation, banks could now do virtually whatever they wanted, as long as they followed basic rules and regulation created by the Securities and Exchange

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*Banks could now  
do virtually whatever  
they wanted*

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Commission. This was the beginning of the end for many banks, as the choices they made during this time period, choices of nondisclosure, greed, and deception, set the tone for years to come. As evidence to my claim, in November 2008, Citigroup's net worth per share was one penny: one single cent per share (Sorkin). This was after they pleaded with the government to loan them twenty billion dollars (Taylor).

The final blow came in 2004 when Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan successfully fought to keep the derivatives market unregulated (another instance of the corporate sector pouncing on government deregulation). To summarize, a derivative is an investment whose value depends on the value of some other asset; it is a purely synthetic investment. The benefit of a banking institution to utilize derivatives is that it inflates their books and makes it seem that they have more investments than they actually do. As I said before, a derivative can only possess value if the primary investment on which it is based has value. But in 2008, because the banks were not getting loan re-payments from consumers, their investments became worthless, and when this happened, all the derivatives tied to these investments went belly up. Shan Gilani, leading contributor to the online journal *Investment News*, offers an excellent explanation of the situation, using the insurance giant AIG as an example:

What imploded [AIG] was an accumulation of misplaced bets on credit default swaps. By the best estimates of the International Swaps and Derivatives Association and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), often referred

to as the central banks' central bank, the notional value of credit default swaps out in the market place is some \$62 trillion, at an exchange rate of \$1.78. A credit default swap (CDS) is akin to an insurance policy. It's a financial derivative that a debt holder can use to hedge against the default by a debtor corporation of sovereign. But a CDS can also be used to speculate. When the housing market collapsed, imploding home prices resulted in precipitously rising foreclosures. The mortgage pools AIG insured began to fall in value. Additionally, the credit crisis began to take its toll on leveraged loans and it saw mounting losses on the loan pools it had insured. In 2007, the company was starting to feel serious heat.

And serious heat it was. By the time September 2008 had rolled around, AIG's share prices had fallen over ninety five percent to just \$1.25, from a fifty two week high of \$70.13. The company reported over \$13.2 billion in losses in the first six months of the year, confirming that their heavy dependency on derivatives was what brought the company down (Sorkin).

Gross errors in judgments were not limited to only the corporate sector. Another widely recognized miscalculation occurred under Alan Greenspan in 2001 with regards to the significant lowering of the federal funds rate (Shah, 2009). This rate is the percentage of interest that banks charge each other for the use of Federal funds. It changes daily and is a sensitive indicator of general interest rate trends. During times of growth, these interest rates are set at a stable percentage, usually around five percent. During times of economic retraction, the rates are slightly lowered, which allows banks to pay less in interest and have more capital on hand. In 2001, as Alan Greenspan was nominated to another four-year term by newly elected president George W. Bush, he proceeded to lower the federal funds rate to stimulate the economy and get it out of a state of, what he called, "*limbo*" (Taylor, 2008). The economy did, indeed, see an increased pace and a steady growth, and as time went on Chairman Greenspan continued to lower the funds rate from five percent in 2001 to two percent in mid-2002. Economists applauded Greenspan for his work, but soon changed their tune as they witnessed what he did next.

Going against a basic economic principle called the Taylor Rule, created by renowned Nobel winning economist John Taylor, Greenspan proceeded to lower the funds rate below two percent, an unprecedented move in American history. According to Taylor's rule, federal interest rates should never go below two percent and should always increase after an extended period of time of lowering (calculated using the complex equation of  $i_t = \pi_t + r_t + a_\pi + (\pi_t - \pi_t) + a_y(y_t - y_t)$  (Panic, 2009). This period of time had come in 2002, but Greenspan lowered the funds rate to an all-time low of one percent in mid-2003. The downfall to low federal

funds rates could not be seen during the economic expansion, especially in 2003, for two reasons: first, lowering the rate *stimulated* the economy by allowing banks to keep extra capital on hand to loan to small businesses and people for vehicles and homes; and second, in 2004 interest rates began to increase, calming any worried economists and signaling an upcoming period of stability. However, as the funds rate began to increase, banks had to pay more in interest, decreasing the amount of capital on hand. And because banks based their interest fees for customers on the federal funds rates, the mortgage payments of people who had adjustable rate mortgages dramatically increased.

Those who did not have adjustable rate mortgages also were suffering while the Fed raised its interest rates, but not because of the Fed's direct actions, rather because of the dramatic increase in the cost of energy, oil, and food and the effects of a deep recession. In 2007, the average inflation rate was three and nine-one-hundredths of a percent. This meant that for every fiscal quarter, the prices of all goods and

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services were increasing an average of nearly three and a tenth of a percent.

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Moving into June of 2008, only months before the collapse, oil reached a record-setting high of one hundred twenty-six dollars a barrel and consumers were paying an average of four dollars per gallon of gasoline (United States). These prices also hurt corporations and small businesses, forcing layoffs and salary reduction. With less

income to pay bills and in some instances no income at all, defaults on mortgages in 2007 jumped to a little over one million, equaling one percent of all U.S. homes. As a result banks lost thirty-two billion dollars (Taylor). Banks had thought that they backed up their risky loans enough that those with ARMs who were not risky could take the hit with an increase in monthly interest. The problem was that because of the recession, the category normally considered safe began to default on their loans. For several months banks hung on for dear life, but in September of 2008, there was simply not enough income to sustain life.

In hindsight, when anything is done to the economy virtually every aspect of society is affected. With regards to the collapse itself, I believe that the above mentioned economic and business activities are in fact causes of the Panic of 2008 because of their effects on the economy. But it's hard to pinpoint patterns and similarities that suggest economic downturn because the American economy is so complex and cyclic. Andrew Sorkin, a renowned author on this subject, sums it up best:

No one person is responsible for the credit crisis; no one person is responsible for the failure of investment banks; and no one person is responsible for the insolvency of commercial banks world-wide, the implosion of the world's stock markets, or for leading us to the precipice of another great depression. Where disagreement can come into play is who and what caused the problems, and the intention of those government policies and people involved. (Sorkin)

One of these disagreements involves who should get credit for the great increase in homeownership during the 1990s. I say President Clinton should receive credit; many say, however, that U.S. banks should receive credit, as they were the ones who stepped up and took on additional risk in giving loans to unqualified customers. James Crotty from the Cambridge Journal of Economics explains this point of view: "In a move that could help increase homeownership rates among minorities and low income consumers, the *Fannie Mae Corp.* [eased] the credit requirements on loans that it [purchased] from banks and other lenders."

In my eyes, giving banks credit for the increase in homeownership during the 1990s is absurd, and through my research, I believe that President Clinton is responsible. For starters, President Clinton had to ask U.S. banks to be more flexible and generous when it came to conducting business with minorities and low income Americans because banks were extremely reluctant in giving out loans. The last thing banks wanted to do was to give loans to minorities and low income Americans because of the liability: they were unqualified and would have most likely defaulted on their loans. Further strengthening my logic is the statistics from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' on the incredible growth of the economy from 1992–2000. To begin, the budget *surplus* was at an all-time high and publicly held debt was reduced by \$363 billion—the largest three-year pay-down in American history. Also, federal government spending as a share of the economy was cut from twenty two percent in 1992 to eighteen percent in 2000—the lowest level since 1966. Jobs supported by American exports grew by 1.4 million between 1994 and 1998, with jobs supported by exports paying about thirteen percent to sixteen percent above the U.S. national average (United States). The number of Americans on welfare was at its lowest levels in history, the homeownership rate reached 67.7 percent for the third quarter of 2000, the highest rate on record, and the racial income gap had closed significantly.

It wasn't because banks reduced credit requirements (which allowed minorities and low income Americans to more easily get a loan) that homeownership rates increased; it was the fact that minorities and low income people had the wealth to take out mortgages because of significant gains the American economy made during the 1990s.

Discussing the above-mentioned disagreement over the events of the 1990s brings me to another disagreement. This one, far more complex and controversial than the first, involves the motives behind American banks as to why they continued to give out subprime mortgages when the economy was shrinking under President George W. Bush. Before giving my theory, however, it's important to first look at the decade and a half as a whole.

Returning to the early 1990s, one of the reasons that handing out these subprime loans was not risky was because the economy was growing: people had jobs, employers were hiring, and the federal government's budget was in great shape. Unqualified people now had the money to pay back their loans; there was nothing risky about this security. But banks still thought that it was a risky practice to give out these types of loans and had to be convinced otherwise. Once banks finally did change their paradigm, they began to lend out non-risky subprime loans. Banks continued to give out non-risky subprime mortgages all throughout the 1990s and up until the financial crisis in 2008.

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*Banks should have  
stopped giving out subprime  
mortgages altogether*

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But after the election of 2000, and the swearing in of George W. Bush, banks should have stopped giving out subprime mortgages altogether because the corporate economy began to suffer (Lewis). Basic economics tells us that during times of economic contraction, a business must begin to shave off as many liabilities as possible and return to its core investments that it knows will not

fail, and as discussed earlier, subprime mortgages are not a bad investment when the economy is strong and growing, but become a liability when handed out during periods of economic contraction. And economic shrinkage there was under President Bush.

When President Bush took office in 2001, the median household income was approximately \$46,129. Through the years it decreased to \$46,058 in 2001, \$45,062 in 2002, \$44,482 in 2003, and \$44,389 in 2004 (Lewis). The unemployment rate also ticked up through the early years of the presidency from 4.7 percent in 2001, to 5.8 percent in 2002, and to 6.0 percent in 2003 (United States). Further showing contraction, the poverty increased from 11.7 percent in 2001 to 12.1 percent in 2002, 12.5 percent in 2003, and 12.7 percent in 2004 (United States). The change of these three rates shows that giving out subprime mortgages at the time was a mistake.

My theory on the matter is that banks wanted profit (Taylor). If they continued to give out subprime mortgages, the banking sector could make billions. Take, for instance, the year 2007. During this time frame the seven biggest banks and investment firms in the country (Citigroup, Bank of America, AIG, J.P. Morgan Chase,

Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs, and Wachovia) made a record shattering profit of nine hundred and fifty nine *billion* dollars (Lewis). Seven companies alone made almost a trillion dollars of pure profit (the money *after* taxes) in a single year.

I will concede that it takes a couple of years to see how the economy will react to a new president, but by 2002 or 2003, banks should have seen that the nation's economy was going to contract and should have immediately stopped giving out subprime loans. But they didn't; they chose not to. They continued to give out loans that were now risky because of the weak economy in order to maximize their bottom line. It was profitable for the banks to give out subprime mortgages to people and when confronted on the issue, the banks place blame back on President Clinton when he asked the banks to be more flexible in giving out loans. But if not profit, as naysayers of this theory would say, then what? Did the banks simply not believe that the economy was shrinking under President Bush? This seems unlikely as statistics by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the U.S. Bureau of Labor of Statistics clearly showed that the economy was indeed shrinking.

The country may never get a straight answer from the banks as to why they continued their unwise practices under President Bush or if they were responsible for the increase in homeownership that benefited millions during the nineties or not. What the country can be certain of is that an economic crisis slammed America in 2008 that caused the nationalizing, failing, and selling of investment firms and banks worth nearly thirteen trillion dollars (Lewis). It caused the country to lose eight million jobs and made unemployment soar to nearly ten percent (United States). People are still feeling the effects of the crisis today, but what's most frightening is that things could have been worse. The economy teetered off a cliff towards absolute catastrophe. The basic things that Americans hold dear such as dropping the kids off at school, driving into work, going home and eating dinner with the family, and going to bed to start the cycle all over again in the morning were called into question. If there's one lesson that can be learned from the crisis it's this: be grateful for what you have because one day, it may be gone. Derivatives, profit, the federal funds rate, or even the Taylor Rule mean nothing compared to those typical American days that we all hold dear to our hearts.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### JOHN COTTER

John Cotter comes from East Aurora, a small town outside of Buffalo, New York. He is pursuing a double major in history and either management or marketing and still has to figure out what he will do with that combination. He currently lives in Zahn House and enjoys playing on its interhall hockey team.

John's essay entitled "*Parody in A True History: How Lucian Whales on Homer and Herodotus*" is a literary analysis of a passage in the satirist Lucian's *A True History*. It was inspired by the discussions of travel-accounts and history-writing in his University Seminar, Ancient Travel and Travel Narratives. In writing the essay, John was impressed by the wit and detail through which Lucian referenced and attacked the works of such paramount figures as Homer and Herodotus. He would like to thank Professor Blake Leyerle, for her insight and efforts in making him a better writer, as well as his sister, Cara, who will always be his best editor.

# Parody in *A True History*: How Lucian Whales on Homer and Herodotus

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JOHN COTTER



In *A True History*, the Greek satirist Lucian presents a fictional first-person narrative that parodies ancient travel literature. One section offers a fantastical tale in which Lucian's ship and crew are swallowed by a gigantic whale. This story spoofs the writings of Homer and Herodotus through its setting, characters, and actions. Lucian's descriptions of the whale and the world that exists within it poke fun at the ridiculousness and fallacies present in the creatures and worlds of both Homer's *Odyssey* and Herodotus' *Histories*. The parody continues as Lucian and his crew interact with the inhabitants of the whale, each major action coinciding with a scene or motif found in the works of Homer or Herodotus. Through the scene, Lucian effectively calls into question the validity of such ancient narratives.

The whale episode begins with a line that directly refers to both *The Histories* and *The Odyssey*. The narrator Lucian says that "it seems a turn for the better often means the start of worse troubles" (Lucian 30). This statement reflects the ebb and flow of fate that is a major focus of Herodotus' work, while at the same time alluding to the changes in fortune experienced by Odysseus in his wanderings. The story then immediately displays the perils of sea travel by describing how the ship came upon "many sea-monsters and whales" (Lucian 31). The dangers of sea travel are a common theme in many travel narratives, and are especially prevalent in *The Odyssey*. The reference to sea-monsters parodies Homer's mythical creatures Scylla and Charybdis faced by Odysseus and his crew (Homer 11. 234–259). Lucian then describes the whale that goes on to swallow his ship, estimating it to be "about one hundred and seventy miles long" (Lucian 31). This size is absolutely unheard of, and such hyperbole illustrates the ridiculousness of the tale. The exaggeration also mocks the embellishments and liberties taken by Herodotus in his descriptions throughout *The Histories*. At one point in his work, for example, Herodotus

describes a silver mixing-bowl capable of holding five thousand gallons of liquid that was transported from Lydia to Greece (Herodotus 1. 51). An object that large would have been nearly impossible to transport a great distance in the ancient world. At another point, Herodotus fabricates a description of what a hippopotamus looks like (2. 71). Lucian's marvelous exaggeration of the whale clearly targets the wonders and inaccuracies found in the works of Homer and Herodotus.

Lucian also directly draws parallels with earlier travel literature in his depiction of the world within the whale that swallows him and his crew. The whale's insides are first described as "a great hollow cavern, flat everywhere and high" (Lucian 1. 31). This concept of a cavern or cave seems to allude to the caves of Polyphemos and Kalypso within which Odysseus found himself trapped (Homer 5. 57–74, 9. 216–224). The cavern of the whale supports an entire environment, with trees,

vegetables, birds, and fish (Lucian 1. 31–32). The prosperity within the whale's belly further links the setting with Kalypso's cavern, which is abundant and copious with plants and goods. This linkage also serves to spoof the idea of such ample abundance within a cavern because the idea of a fully sustained environment within the body of an animal is ridiculous and meant to be so. Overall, Lucian is commenting on the irrationality of Homer's alternate worlds.

*The Odyssey* is further spoofed as Lucian and his crew explore their new world and meet a man, Scintharus, and his son, who were swallowed by the whale and have

been living within it for twenty-seven years (Lucian 1.34). The ability of the two men to live within a whale for twenty-seven years re-emphasizes the impossibility of Lucian's narrative. More importantly, the meeting with Scintharus and his son serves another function because the action of the scene coincides with ancient greeting and hospitality methods that are a central theme of *The Odyssey*. Scintharus and his son greet their guests, bring them into their home, feast with them, and then exchange stories (Lucian 1. 33–34). The method in which the two men, whose home is inside of a whale, greet and entertain the first fellow humans they have encountered in twenty-seven years is completely ordinary. It is as if Lucian and his men have come to any standard home on Greece. This instance of regular action taking place within a fantastically impossible setting adds a subtle hilarity to the scene and parodies Greek guest-host interaction, an essential component of Greek civilization.

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*Regular action taking place within a fantastically impossible setting adds a subtle hilarity to the scene and parodies Greek guest-host interaction, an essential component of Greek civilization*

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The satirical passage then shifts its target from settings to creatures as Scintharus tells Lucian of the other residents of the whale's belly. He tells of the "Saltfish tribe, with their eel's eyes and crayfish faces: they are quarrelsome, bold, and flesh-eating" and live in the tail-end of the forest. Scintharus also speaks of the half-man, half-lizard Sea-Satyrs, the Crabclaws, the Tunnyheads, the Crabs, and the Solefeet (Lucian 1. 35). The bizarre part-human creatures within the whale correspond to similar races described in both *The Odyssey* and *The Histories*. In Homer's tale, Odysseus encounters the Lotus-Eater people, the one-eyed Cyclopes, and the cannibalistic and gigantic Laistrygones (Homer 9. 82–542, 10. 80–132). Herodotus, while describing the Scythians and those that live near the Black Sea, also depicts many odd human-like creatures. He speaks of maneaters, a race of bald men that live on the ponticum-tree fruit, a goat-footed race, hibernating people, and a race of one-eyed humanoids (Herodotus 4. 18–27). Lucian's creatures, like those of Homer and Herodotus, have both human and non-human characteristics, and by placing such races within the impossible environment of a whale's belly, Lucian displays how far-fetched their existence is. He is sardonically remarking on the impractical, fictitious features of both famous works.

Homer and Herodotus are further parodied as Lucian gives an account of warfare. Conflict in the form of battles was a basic part of ancient life, a crucial aspect of proving one's masculinity, and it is consequently a common subject of that time's literature that can be readily spoofed. When telling Lucian of the multiple beings living in the whale, Scintharus states that there are a great number of them but that they have no true weapons. Fearing aggression and seizing their opportunity, Lucian and his crew decide with Scintharus to "meet [these beings] in battle" so that they can live in the whale in peace for the rest of their lives. Then, with their group numbering twenty-five, Lucian and his men proceed to utterly rout a group of "more than a thousand" (Lucian 1. 36–39). Such an outcome in the real world is virtually impossible. The battle story, however, directly parallels the slaughter of the unarmed suitors by Odysseus and his small contingent of allies (Homer 22. 8–329). The unrealistic setting of Lucian's story ridicules the plausibility of Homer's story. Furthermore, the brevity of Lucian's battle description parodies the method in which Herodotus discusses certain battles. For instance, Herodotus sums up an important battle between the Egyptians and Persians in just a few lines. He states that "the fight began; and after a hard struggle and heavy casualties on both sides, the Egyptians were routed" (Herodotus 3. 11). Lucian describes the fighting between his crew and a force made up of the Saltfish, Tunnyheads, and Crabclaws in a similar way. He says "we routed them, as they were lightly armed, and chased them into the forest" (Lucian 38). Lucian's Herodotean description of a battle taking place in the absurd environment of a forest growing within a whale mocks the great historian, who focused much of *The Histories* on battles.

Once Lucian and his allies have defeated the other beings in the whale, they find themselves entrapped in a utopia, a theme of ancient literature. Lucian notes that they “were like people who live in luxury and are free to roam around in a large prison they cannot escape from” (Lucian 39). This idea directly correlates with the time Odysseus is unable to escape the paradise of Kalypso’s island for seven years. (Homer 7. 254–260). The correlation adds another link to ancient literature and, because Lucian’s utopia is bizarrely inside of a whale, it enhances the overall parody that the entire scene works for. Lucian and his men live within the whale utopia for a year and eight months. Eventually, after seeing a fantastical battle of giant warriors on the ocean near the whale, they attempt to escape. The men set fire to the forest within the whale, and burn the beast from the inside out. When it finally dies, the crew remains on the whale until there is a favorable wind, and then the incredible journey continues on (Lucian 1.40–2.2). This quick solution to the men’s problems, in which the actual departure happens with ease, corresponds to Odysseus’ long-prevented return to Ithaca as he sleeps peacefully in the Phaiakian ship (Homer 13.70–124). By winding up the episode with such an easy departure, Lucian adds one final Homeric parallel to complete his satire.

Lucian of Samosata offers a carefully crafted parody of ancient travel literature through his story of the whale in his *A True History*. Every absurd and preposterous event that he narrates in the whale section has a reference or connection to the literature of Homer or Herodotus. He uses these connections to effectively spoof the extraordinary people, places, and things often found in *The Odyssey* and *The Histories*. The satire challenges the verity of these epic tales and, consequently, all stories. Lucian, through telling an incredible lie, makes it known to the world how much he values the truth.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### MARGARET FRANCHINO

Margaret Franchino is from Madison, Wisconsin. Inspired by payday lending's prevalence in Wisconsin, she chose to research alternatives to this market in her essay "The Value of Payday Lending Reforms and Alternatives." After considering a variety of options, Margaret argues that credit unions should replace payday lending companies. Although she is currently undecided about her major, Margaret is interested in pursuing Spanish. She would like to thank Professor Kelly for his support and Lois Kitsch for being a valuable resource on credit unions.

# The Value of Payday Lending Reforms and Alternatives

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MARGARET FRANCHINO



Money doesn't grow on trees—or at least that's what the old adage tells us. A commercial for Check Into Cash payday lenders, however, could make anyone think just the opposite. A catchy ditty tells viewers that they can “make [their wallets] sing,” as a handful of bills appears in the hands of an astonished, yet thrilled, young woman (We). Marketed as a quick and easy way to get money for unexpected, unaffordable costs, payday lenders appear to be an ideal, almost magical, cash source, and with more locations than McDonald's has in the U.S., they're extremely widespread, as well (Gallmeyer and Roberts 2).

The reality of such businesses, however, is often quite different. At payday lending outlets, customers can get small loans within minutes by writing a postdated-check for the amount borrowed plus a fee of about \$15 per \$100 borrowed (Faller 127). Payday lenders do not check credit histories or risk, so almost anyone is eligible to receive a loan, provided that he has a checking account. After receiving a loan, customers must then pay the amount borrowed back by the date on the check, usually within few weeks, or risk legal consequences. In theory, the system should not be problematic, but in practice, the majority of customers can't repay loans, and therefore choose to take out a second loan (called a rollover), which starts a cycle of borrowing so that eventually, “more than 50% of payday loan borrowers [pay] more in interest and fees than the initial value of the loan” (Faller 135).

Horror stories of financial ruin for repeat borrowers have led to a variety of proposals for payday lending reform. So, what is the best way to offer small loans to high-risk customers? This is a question everyone should consider, given our country's current economic problems and uncertainty. Some argue that creating interest rate caps will solve the problem, while others believe that many of the issues could be eliminated with better consumer education. A more extreme tactic is eliminating payday



lenders altogether and forcing banks and credit unions to offer smaller loans. Out of the proposed solutions, I argue that looking to credit unions to take the place of payday lenders is the best, most effective reform, and that other proposals would perpetuate the problem.

According to Ginna Green from the Center for Responsible Lending, there is “only one solution...to spring the payday debt trap, and that is a comprehensive interest rate cap of around 36% APR” (2). The government has already created such a cap on payday loans to members of the military, and many argue for the extension of the cap for all borrowers (Faller 141). With the annual percentage rate (APR) of payday loans at an average of 470%, it’s easy to see why many advocate an APR cap (Faller 136).

Given instances of such rate caps, though, I believe that such a measure would serve to eliminate payday loan companies, leaving people without a small loan option.

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*Payday lenders appear  
to be an ideal,  
almost magical,  
cash source*

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According to rate cap proponents, payday lenders reap huge profits from high APRs, yet payday lenders argue that such rates are necessary, given the high risk of their average client (Arguments 1). In an article for *Regulation* magazine, law professor Todd J. Zywicki contends that “longer store hours, more intensive customer service, and high store density” also account for the APRs’ values (5).

Additionally, he explains, “researchers have concluded that there is no evidence of persistent economic profits...in the payday loan industry once risk and costs are taken into account,” meaning that, at least according to this research, high rates are necessary (5). Also, regardless of whether payday lenders need to charge such high rates, examples of payday lenders closing after rates are limited abound, demonstrating that payday lenders can’t or won’t do business without these high rates. Because of this, if payday lenders are to be the main source of small loans, rate caps aren’t a logical solution.

Others argue that payday lenders should better inform borrowers of the risks of taking out loans to prevent careless borrowing, and while I agree that this can be effective to some extent, it would most likely not prevent all from falling into debt. Lois Kitsch of the National Credit Union Foundation explains that many feel that payday lenders aren’t public enough about their interest rates, so borrowers might not know how high APRs are when considering a payday loan (Interview). Even if APRs are posted in payday lending facilities, customers do not necessarily understand their implications, or as Karen Francis argues in her article “Rollover, Rollover,” borrowers might be “biased” and unrealistic as a result. A borrower can be “biased” in many ways, Francis explains, from underestimating how much he

will borrow in the future, to incorrectly assuming he will have enough money to pay back large loans (627). Many, like Francis, believe that government regulation that forces payday lenders to explain the risks of loans would eliminate many of the problems associated with payday lending. Francis goes on to say that “personal narratives framed to emphasize the likelihood of losses in the payday-loan transaction may do well to debias overoptimism [sic] in consumers” and “requiring lenders to provide each borrower with personalized data...could be a major factor in reducing consumer-credit mistakes” (635). These techniques would help people to reconsider their need for a loan with more personal information in mind, because, as Francis argues, numbers such as APRs and statistics are easy to ignore or misunderstand (637).

I agree that increasing consumer knowledge is useful to some extent, yet I don't believe that it would be an effective solution to the problems of payday lending as a whole. A potential client who enters a payday lending facility to, for example, get money for a new television might walk out without the loan if he is better informed about the long-term risks. However, I would think that someone needing money for groceries or to pay a utility bill—the target client of payday lenders—would be coming to a payday lender after having exhausted all alternatives and be desperate enough to get the loan regardless the long-term costs. According to Francis, “one-third, or more, of payday-loan borrowers are not using these loans for emergencies” (618). This means, however, that although “debiasing” might help those who have financial options, the remaining two-thirds of payday lending customers will most likely continue with their loans regardless of mandated increased borrower education.

This leaves the option of having banks and credit unions take over the small-loans market. Larger, less risky loans appeal to banks and credit unions in that they tend to yield greater profit, yet banks and credit unions are the most logical entities to take over the small-loans market if payday lenders are eliminated. Although some argue that both should offer small loans to borrowers, I propose that credit unions are better suited to fill this need.

Banks have offered small loans in the past, yet I believe that they are not best organized to resume their previous role in this market. In his article “Payday Loan Solutions: Slaying the Hydra (and Keeping it Dead),” law student Benjamin Faller argues that before bank deregulation, people turned to banks for small loans, so “the small consumer loan market is certainly not an alien role for banks” (152). With deregulation, banks abandoned the small-loans market for more profitable enterprises, which gave rise to the advent of payday lenders in the early 1990s (Faller 133). This very sequence of events highlights an important feature of banks: they

want, like payday lending companies, to make a profit. Payday lenders, however, make a profit through high rates and rollover loans. If banks lowered rates and limited rollovers, they also would eliminate their means of profit and risk losing money. What motivation do they have, then, to offer a payday loan alternative?

In his piece, Faller claims that banks might voluntarily enter the small-loan market with the thought that they can expand their clientele (153). He also mentions giving incentives to participating banks (156). Finally, as it is unlikely that either of these two options will motivate many banks, given the high risk and low or no profit involved, Faller concludes that the government could force banks by law to offer small loans (157). Is this, however, too big a role for the government to play in the free market? Faller anticipated this question, and responds: “While free-market adherents may recoil from such a solution, there are in fact legitimate and long-standing bases for such an approach. Even Alexander Hamilton, writing on the role of a national bank, acknowledged that such an institution existed first to serve the

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*Banks and credit unions are the most logical entities to take over the small-loans market if payday lenders are eliminated*

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public good; private profits were to remain secondary” (157). With the current economic crisis often focusing on the role the government should have in controlling the banking industry, there is no clear answer regarding whether or not this involvement would cross boundaries in the U.S.’s economic system. What is clear, however, is that many banks would resist Faller’s plan.

Because of this, I propose that having people obtain small loans through credit unions is a more logical and feasible plan. In his article “Are Credit Unions Viable Providers of Short-term Credit?” Professor Victor Stango writes that “fewer than six percent of credit unions currently offer payday loans, and credit unions probably comprise less than two percent of the national payday loan market” (4). Later, he presents the results of a survey he helped to conduct, which reveal that many credit unions fear the risk associated with the payday loan market (11). However, from my point of view, credit unions have a duty to offer such loans. Unlike banks, credit unions don’t focus primarily on earning a profit. In fact, as not-for-profit businesses supposedly working chiefly for the benefit of their customers, credit unions receive a tax exemption (Credit). Therefore, in order to completely fulfill their role and be deserving of said exemption, I argue that credit unions should offer smaller loans to members.

As mentioned before, some credit unions already do offer small loans to customers, and a number of them have characteristics that I suggest respond well to the problems that often arise from payday lenders. Lois Kitsch of the National Credit Union Foundation claims that one of the biggest problems of payday lending is the “cycle

of debt that comes from balloon payment,” that is, the often unrealistic requirement that borrowers must pay back the full amount of their loan within a short time period (Interview). Payday lenders benefit from such a requirement because borrowers often can’t pay back the full amount and must roll over the loan, leading to more profit for the lender. Kitsch explained that for a payday lender it’s “expensive to acquire a customer,” giving the lenders incentive to make it hard for customers to take out only one loan (Interview). Without the main goal of profit, however, credit unions should not have to require such a quick balloon payment. Given a longer window in which they can pay back the loan, borrowers would be less likely to have to take out further loans, giving them more financial success in the long run. Ultimately, this would benefit the credit union as well, as unlike payday lenders, they have a long-term relationship with members, and they, like “Banks[,] generally do well when their customers do well (Faller 153). Kitsch also explained that some credit unions offering small loans incorporate financial counseling and savings programs into their small loans programs, which again would benefit both the credit union and its members (Interview).

Not everyone, however, sees credit unions as a viable alternative to payday lending. In his article against credit unions replacing payday lenders, Professor Victor Stango analyzes the results of a survey of current payday borrowers, which concluded that given the choice of where to take out a small loan from, a majority would choose to go to a payday lender, even if a credit union offered the same service (21). One of the main reasons cited by participants in the survey is the comparative convenience, including hours and speed, of payday lenders (21). As mentioned before, such characteristics of payday lending are factored into the high rates, so if they kept rates low, would credit unions struggle to match such long hours and fast personal service? I respond, however, that this issue is resolved to some extent by credit unions being not-for-profit organizations, which allows more money to be put into extending hours and service. Also, I propose that online and phone services could help to resolve this problem. Many payday lenders already offer services both online and by phone that transfer money into people’s bank accounts. If credit unions created a similar system, they could not only increase the convenience of their products for customers, but also decrease the number of people they need working at a certain time, thus saving money.

A final complaint some raise against using credit unions as payday lending alternatives is the issue of credit scores. Many use payday loans to begin with in order to avoid potentially hurting their credit score if they can’t repay loans immediately (Stango 5). However, it is important to recognize that with credit unions, more would be able to pay off loans by deadlines because of the longer, rollover-free repayment plans, so there would be less risk of hurting credit scores than some

assume. Also, although failure to repay loans harms credit scores, on the other hand, repaying a loan on time helps them. Although payday lenders don't lower credit scores of borrowers who fail to repay loans on time, neither do they improve credit scores when borrowers meet repayment deadlines (Kitsch 7). Therefore, in terms of a long-term solution, credit unions offer borrowers a way to improve credit scores and financial stability.

Given today's fragile economy, financial alternatives such as payday lending have recently received greater attention than in the past. When used as intended—to get money for a single, unanticipated cost—such institutions can be effective, as long as borrowers pay back loans on time. The dramatic problems, ranging from high levels of debt to bankruptcy, that arise when borrowers can't meet these requirements, however, have led to reform proposals, including creating rate caps and forcing banks to provide smaller loans. After considering the various suggestions, I have concluded that although other solutions might help reduce the problem, credit unions would best solve the issues that arise from payday lenders, given their not-for-profit status meant to allow them to focus on members' needs. On their website, the Credit Union National Association displays a drawing of a circle of united hands along with the phrase “Where People are Worth More than Money” (National). If this is truly the case, then in order to fulfill this statement, credit unions have a duty to offer small loans.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### MATTHEW DIFAZIO

A proud resident of Long Island, New York, Matthew DiFazio demonstrates in “A Pirate’s Position” his love for short story composition. Though a sea-going vessel seems an unlikely backdrop for a discussion of ethics and rhetoric, this character-driven story explores the responsibilities of authority figures, even on a pirate ship.

When he’s not sailing the high seas in search of inspiration, Matthew enjoys rock climbing, cycling, camping, reading, playing the piano, and, fine dining (who doesn’t?). Next fall, Matt looks forward to his first semester as a biology/English double major. He smells undergraduate research in his future.

Matt would like to extend a special thanks to two people: his high school English teacher, Bro. Stephen Balletta at Chaminade High School, and Prof. Matthew Capdevielle of the University Writing Program for their encouragement, support, and assistance.

## A Pirate's Position

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MATTHEW DiFAZIO



*Yaaaaar!* With Cpt. Lockjaw's last few words, a throaty growl of agreement rose from the *Foul Sophist's* deck and the crew made busy dropping oars into locks and unlooping lines from the dock's bollards. As the captain swept down the steps to amidships, one crewman remained: Scullcrushin' Pete, leaning smartly against the mainmast and smirking dumbly beneath a crimson bandana. Approaching the show of mockery, Lockjaw delivered him a sharp rap with the flat of his cutlass. "Get yer barnacle bitten aft in the crow's nest." Unfortunately, the crewman was not one to leave his thoughts unspoken. "Do you not realize the implications of your discourse on the values of plundering, pillaging, and general misbehavior?" More taken aback by the use of proper grammar than the challenge to his authority, Lockjaw's jaw was left uncharacteristically agape. Pete continued. "Your logic is sound, your authority unmatched, and your emotional delivery a sure winner, but do you abuse these advantages? Do you consider right and wrong?" Still flustered, Cpt. Lockjaw blew out his chest and prepared a blustery retort—only to be run over again by the crewman. "Surely you would not propose we make off with merchants' property, toss the unfortunate fellows overboard, and use our booty to frequent wenches and alehouses should you not believe these things to be right, yourself?" Simmering with rage and a pinch of confusion, Lockjaw grabbed a fistful of Pete's hair and dragged him towards the companionway, meeting his first mate, Forky "Lord Clean" the Bald. "Aye, bring this smart-mouthin' sprog to the brig. Gar."

Shortly thereafter, Skullcrushin' Pete stood below deck, neatly tucked behind bars in the ship's aft and mulling over his earlier thoughts. Staring absently at his wooden enclosure, he noticed a fist-sized knot in the planks overhead. With a jab of the bucket provided in the corner, Pete popped out the wooden plug and peered upwards into a warmly lit cabin. Sitting overhead was Cpt. Lockjaw, about to tuck



away a plump bird, presumably bought in port. “Oh excellent,” mused Pete, “he’ll not escape so easily.” “Ahoy Captain!” Nearly tipping backwards over his chair and spilling a pint of rum, Lockjaw whipped his good eye around to the hole in the floor. “Why thank you, Captain; I think I will have something to drink,” said Pete as he sampled the liquid dripping through the planks. Composing himself and hurling a few expletives for good measure, the captain proceeded to ignore the prisoner and returned to his meal. “So, anyway, I’ve further refined my position on the ethics of captaincy speeches. You are obligated to profess to the crew only what you yourself believe is true. If you know something to be false, you cannot morally encourage the crew to believe it (excepting circumstances where the good of the crew would be better served by a small deception, but not a large one). Furthermore, if you do

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*“Surely you would not propose we make off with merchants’ property, toss the unfortunate fellows overboard, and use our booty to frequent wenches and alehouses should you not believe these things to be right, yourself?”*

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not have good reason to believe the idea yourself, if it is only a whim or fancy without evidence, you cannot rightly convince the crew, despite your rank.” Through a mouthful, Lockjaw replied “Aye, me thinks ye be right... and me parrot concurs.” “Really?” said Pete hopefully. “No,” promptly replied the captain. Twisting around, Lockjaw stuffed a yellow, waxy lump into the hole, effectively muffling Pete’s voice.

Enjoying the graciously provided cheese the captain had stuck into the hole, and hoping for a second course in the near future, Pete resumed his lecturing where he had left off. “Since you reside in a position of influence, O captain, my captain, you have a greater responsibility to adhere to these principles yourself. Simply expressing an opinion or joking with the crew are different modes entirely from the rhetorical setting of your captain’s addresses. In these, it is most important to remember what I have said.” As he finished, Lord Clean approached, rubbing his golden earring and carrying a bowl of mush and a tankard of grog for the prisoner. “Oh, no thank you,” Pete said as he approached. “The captain has already been so generous with his dinner.” Wordlessly, as usual, the first mate dropped (he’s the quicker dropper offer) his delivery and left.

“Well, that’s my take on the issue,” Pete concluded, for the captain’s benefit. “I hope you’ll treat your future dialogues more seriously with the moral responsibility you shoulder.” The captain glared through the hole for a moment and slowly replied, “Nay, but if ye be wantin’ to philosophize an answer t’ scurvy, we’d have a use for ye dog.” “I’ll give it a shot,” said Pete as he winked in a most un-pirate-like manner.



## *Author's Biography*

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### MADELEINE HAMANN

In her essay “Ghandi Will Save Us All: An Evaluation of Character Development in *Ghandi*,” Madeleine Hamann explores some of the shortcomings of the epic film *Ghandi*. Inspired by an interest in the history of the non-violent movement and a tendency to never take anything at face value, the essay was one of several written in her film-based First Year Composition class. Madeleine is a member of the class of 2013 hailing from Sunbury, Ohio. She is studying civil engineering and plans to pursue a career conducting research in water resources. She would like to thank her professor Bryan Smith for always coaxing the best work possible out of all of his students.

# Gandhi Will Save Us All: An Evaluation of Character Development in *Ghandi*

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MADELEINE HAMANN



Incredible performances, stunning vistas, stirring moral issues, a record breaking cast size, and last—but clearly not least—the ever-necessary ten-minute train shot: the 1982 Academy Award-winning film *Gandhi* has all the makings of an epic. Beginning and ending with his shocking assassination and poignant funeral, the picture follows Mohandas “Mahatma” Gandhi on his impressive non-violent quest for liberation from British rule for his people in South Africa and India. As he progresses unfalteringly through the struggles he and his cause face, the viewer witnesses Gandhi’s seamless metamorphosis from a young, unimportant lawyer into a wizened, influential, and morally unquestionable leader. His proposals of rebellion through non-violence and non-cooperation are immortalized through the moving, panoramic depictions of one of the most acclaimed films of the 20th century.

The much-celebrated reputation of the film have led many to call it one of the most important movies of its time; however, despite its famous cinematic significance, the film is not significant in the way the filmmakers fully intended. On one hand, the film plainly demonstrates to its viewers Gandhi’s incredible historic influence—we are meant clearly to see that his innovative ideas of non-violent rebellion not only liberated a nation but also caused a revolution in the nature of protest worldwide. For all intents and purposes the 1982 film does an excellent job of educating its viewers on a significant period in history that may otherwise be undervalued in modern culture. On the other hand, the film falls short in its mission to instill in us inspiration from such an incredible story. In an attempt to convey the brilliancy and historical importance that Mahatma Gandhi represents, the filmmakers largely fail to capture the human side of a man who was truly just that: human. Though we see and are astounded by the amazing acts of this small brown man, the triumphant

plotline ignores the more familiar attributes of its leader making it difficult to connect with the movie on an individual basis and wean from it the inspiration that the filmmakers intended.

The actual breadth of the film creates the first major problem in its development. Though the plot of the movie is essentially set up chronologically, the filmmakers tend to skip over large chunks of time without much indication. As one watches the film it seems like Gandhi ages 20 years between two consecutive segments—he comes off the boat from South Africa looking quite young with his full head of jet-black hair, but in the next scene as he tours the Indian countryside the hair has disappeared and he seems uncannily old. Though by fast-forwarding the filmmakers are clearly attempting to touch on the most important events in Gandhi's life in a relatively small timeframe, because the indicators happen so abruptly it becomes confusing as to how *much* time passes between events—especially those in which there is no new indication of Gandhi's age. These gaps in the timeline alone

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*The 1982 Academy  
Award-winning film  
Gandhi has all the makings  
of an epic*

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cause confusion for the viewer, but on top of that the gaps also cause important details to be left out of the film. For instance, when Gandhi's British follower Margaret appears on the scene, it is obvious that she is meant to be an important aspect of Gandhi's life, but very little time or commentary is dedicated to explaining why exactly she is there or even what her true significance is. It seems more like the filmmakers knew she needed to be

included in the biographical film in order to maintain credibility but had no real use for her character in the development of the movie. Little parts of the story such as this are left unexplained or unmentioned in the film, leaving behind both an underdeveloped plotline and flat characters.

The ways by which the film develops the characters—or rather fails to do so—is one of the most devastating disappointments of the film. It is as though the filmmakers expect the audience to share their own preconceived notions of Gandhi's character rather than develop him fully. For instance, when Gandhi speaks for the first time at the rally in South Africa, a meek voice and lowered head typify the speech; less than three scenes later at the rally in the town hall Gandhi has perfected his rhetoric without any explanation or transition. His oratory skills are not the only attribute that seems to be magically bestowed upon him. There is hardly a moment, even at the beginning of the film, that Gandhi shows any sign of apprehension in his methods. He is virtually unfazed by the meager initial support or his multiple arrests throughout the film. When presented with weighty issues, it seems that Gandhi always has an appropriate piece of wisdom to share; however, there is hardly any explanation as to what experiences gave him the wisdom he has.

Though at the beginning his drive for justice seems to stem from his love of the justice of English law, this history is not at all reiterated during Gandhi's mission in India. We quickly forget this knowledge but are nonetheless expected to understand Gandhi's judgment, which becomes consistently more focused on securing justice through by ever more diplomatic means. The filmmakers begin to rely too heavily on the presupposed universal knowledge of Gandhi, and by doing so they fail to fully explain or develop his character.

This underdevelopment of Gandhi's character effectively undermines the film's goal by creating a very superhuman portrait of a man. Gandhi is not portrayed with near as much emotional depth as is necessary to understand his true complexity. We are shown only a few moments of weakness; for example Gandhi tries to abstain from having sex with his wife because he desires to turn his focus entirely on God, but he cannot deny the carnal pleasure that men so desire. But even this episode of weakness seems like the filmmaker's last-ditch attempt to bring his character to our level by demonstrating Gandhi's intuitive sexual drive. In another episode, Gandhi threatens to throw his wife out of his home because she refuses to clean the toilets—a duty which she considers beneath her but which Gandhi views as integral to community life. Though we are somewhat shocked by Gandhi's extreme response, the “portrait of weakness” is undermined by the fact that his response is based on his superhuman ideals which not everyone can uphold. As his wife says, “Not everyone is as good as you.”

By and large the film portrays Gandhi in a very superficial, almost god-like manner. Even under the snickering criticism of the British officials he is never without an answer, never thinking an impure or incorrect thought. He is morally sound to the point where he comes off as almost arrogant. Instead of the quietly strong-willed, morally contemplative, astonishing yet unassuming man that Gandhi indeed was, we are left with a superficial, inaccessible concept of a man. Where we are supposed to find a certain hope and fervor instilled by the acts of an equal we see only a superhuman to whom we can hardly relate.

One of the most important messages that Gandhi's life represents and which the film attempts to capture is the power of an individual. The film includes countless scenes where dedicated followers flock to uphold the ideals of the movement—scenes which are meant to show that without the help of his supporters, Gandhi could not have accomplished the many great works he did. In the film Gandhi also says his famous quote: “Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.” The line shows that Gandhi acknowledges how much support his mission requires. However the film's assertion that the small contributions the Indians made to the bigger picture were both noble and necessary causes and that

these individuals were integral in the making of history, the idea is completely overshadowed by the influence Gandhi has on the masses. By fasting to the point of starvation, Gandhi can influence an entire nation to do his will. The individuals who should be portrayed as free men who can attain the better life they desire become the oxen yoked to Gandhi's wagon of ideals—though they pull the movement along and ultimately have the power, they are driven by one man who seems to have power over them all.

Though a sense of individual importance is meant to be a central theme in *Gandhi*, the film's setup prevents the message from really hitting home with its viewers. The majority of the film focuses on the incredible accomplishments of Gandhi, but because of the god-like portrayal of his character, the viewer becomes more awestruck than inspired to make a difference. Though it is obvious that the filmmakers want us to draw a sense of individual importance from the film and though the viewer may even realize this on a mental level, the message never really comes through on the emotional level that it should. We know we should be inspired, but we simply are not, and this becomes the ultimate failure of the film.

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*Gandhi*. Dir. Richard Attenborough. With Ben Kingsley, Candice Bergen, and Edward Fox. Columbia Pictures, 1982.





## *Author's Biography*

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### CHRIS DILLON

Chris Dillon is from Littleton, Colorado, where he likes to spend his summers playing golf and traveling through the Rocky Mountains on fishing trips with his dad. The inspiration for his essay came from one of these trips, and it describes a place that is particularly special, a place that he returns to over and over because he loves the beauty of the landscape, the secluded location, and of course the fishing. He is majoring in business and hopes to return to Colorado after graduating to pursue his career while still being an avid golfer and fisherman. He is a resident of Morrissey Hall and would like to thank his First Year Composition professor John Dillon for guiding him along the writing process and helping him to become a better writer.

# Mepps Aglia #1

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CHRIS DILLON



You can still see snow on the tops of the mountains in early June. Sometimes the snow stays on the peaks year 'round and it's not uncommon to have a snowstorm in the mountains in the middle of summer. Despite this, the early summer in the Rocky Mountains is the best time to fish. Every year my dad and I go on a fishing trip, right after school gets out, when the summer has just begun. Now, this is not the typical kind of fishing that would first come to your mind. There is no boat. No big lake. Instead, my dad and I fish in some of the small streams found in the mountains; they are just tiny trickles, barely flowing through an open field or a small valley, winding slowly away out of sight. There are hundreds of these streams in the Colorado mountains, forming high above you as the snow melts from the long, cold winter. The water runs down the sides of the mountain forming waterfalls as it goes. Not some great roaring waterfall, but quiet and peaceful, making it beautiful in its own way. As the water continues off the face of the mountain, it eventually joins up with several other water flows, gathering enough strength to become more than just a dribble. A river? Hardly. These streams go almost unnoticed to the droves of people who visit the mountains at this time of year. "There are no fish in there," they say.

Now this particular spot that my dad and I travel to is far from anything; if you gave me a map of Colorado, I wouldn't be able to pinpoint within fifty miles of its actual location. Once you leave the highway, you must drive on miles and miles of dirt roads, and then there is a small turnoff from the side of the road. It is easy to miss if you aren't careful. Of the many streams in the mountains, this one is not particularly special. This spot tends to be completely deserted. But it is why my dad and I find ourselves going back there again and again. There is no feeling like coming around the bend in the road, seeing the turnoff to park your car, and realizing

it is empty. You are all alone, no other people in sight. Who knows how far you are from the nearest human. You have so much space, so much freedom. You seem more alive than when you hear people shouting and cars speeding by.

Once we leave the car, there is about a mile long walk to get to the headwaters of the creek. I can feel the excitement running through my legs as I walk down the trail, with each step it feels like I'm springing ten feet off the ground. The stream comes into view, the sun glimmering off the water. As we get closer, the reflection of the sun gives way to the reflection of the hillside above. Off the water I can see the two walls of the valley rising up, on the right a green slope rising slowly, interrupted here and there by a large boulder surrounded by golden prairie grasses, and then on the left, the hill rising at a steeper angle to the face of the cliff with a cluster of pine trees at the top and blue sky beyond—a crisp summer morning in the Colorado Rockies.

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*These streams go almost  
unnoticed to the droves  
of people who visit the  
mountains at this  
time of year*

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There is a beaver pond here, where the water collects into a little pool. There is no breeze in the air, the water is very still. The surface of the water is so flat, a slice of perfection, almost surreal, as if some unnatural force were holding the water in place, not allowing it to be disturbed. You can't help but stare at it for a while. The water is like a giant mirror at one angle, but then if you step closer and look straight down, you are struck by its clarity—your gaze penetrates all the way to the bottom, where you can see rocks outlining the floor of the stream and an occasional plant that has wiggled in between two rocks and is swaying back and forth in the current below the surface. It takes a lot of courage to finally throw that first cast and disturb the water—sending ripples all across the surface.

So the day of fishing begins. We do not fish with worms and a bobber. Instead, the bait of choice is a little lure, a spinner. It's just a small piece of metal called a *Mepps Aglia*. I think this is the only lure my dad has ever fished with in his whole life. As long as I can remember, I've always been giving him more of these lures for every birthday and Christmas. They come in different sizes, ranging from "00" being the smallest to "3" being the biggest. We usually choose a "1," a medium-sized lure. At the top of the lure is a loop to which the line is attached. Below it, the spinner—usually gold-colored, though sometimes silver or bronze—is attached to a little piece of wire that allows it to rotate as it spins through the water. Hidden discretely below the spinner is the hook, pointing straight out from the bottom, then bending a little and breaking off into three different directions slowly curving upwards and outwards. At the very end of each of the three parts is a little prong, a small prick

to keep the fish on the line. I attach the lure to the line by twisting the line over and under, over and under, one, two... seven times—a fisherman's knot. I pull the line through and tighten it. The lure is attached and as I hold it in my hand, I am amazed by its weightlessness. The hook and spinner can't amount to more than a few grams, and as I just hold it for a second, it seems so insignificant, with no more value than a small scrap of metal. I grab the pole and straighten the line, the lure shimmering in the sun.

*Splloosh.* The ripples expand across the surface, disrupting the glassy stillness. I begin to reel with the line pulled tight, slowly at first, then steadily picking up pace. I can feel the vibration on the line, reassurance that the lure is spinning properly. If you look hard enough, you can see the outline of the lure moving just below the surface, a glinting piece of gold. Sometimes if you are following the path of the lure as it spins through the water, you can see the fish bite the hook. You see it happen before you actually feel it on the line. I try a second cast. No luck. Maybe a third time. Still nothing.

Time to move on. Staying in the same spot for too long does not work; the fish begin to catch on. You are most likely to catch a fish on the very first cast, when they are unaware of your presence, and with each subsequent cast and disturbance of the water, the fish are less likely to bite, so by the time you get to the fourth or fifth cast, it's very unusual to catch a fish. We begin our walk. There is usually a two or three minute walk between good pools since we cannot fish in every spot in small streams like this one: often it is too shallow, or there are too many rocks, or there is an overhanging tree or shrub blocking your cast from reaching the water. On the way, we see a small bird flitting about near the water. It seems to take no notice of us as we approach, getting a better look with each step closer. It is chasing bugs near the water's surface, flying upwards only to swoop right back down, nearly hitting the water, and then turning to skim right across the surface, going fast enough to create small ripples. Then it stops for a moment, perched on the top of a rock in the middle of the stream, allowing us to see its full color for the first time. His feathers are a soft blue, like the color of a blueberry in the middle of the summer, and his orange and yellow beak protrudes at a funny angle. He looks at us for a second, and then suddenly bolts off the rock and flies away up the stream. "An ouzel," my dad says—he seems to know the names of all the creatures that inhabit the mountains.

In good spirits, we continue down the stream. My dad and I carry only one pole, the stream being too small for the both of us to fish at once. I take one pool, he takes the next, although he usually lets me fish more than him. It is his turn now, so I give him the pole.

He turns over the reel (since he is left-handed), flips the bail, and prepares to cast. With a quick flick of the wrists, the line is soaring through the air in a gently curving arc so that the lure just floats down out of the sky. With a quiet, yet crisp, sound, the lure lands right near the bank, a fine spot to draw out a fish from its cover. He reels in the line very deliberately, with a stern and focused face, eyes gazing straight ahead. As I watch, I look closely at his face: the wrinkles on his forehead seem to tighten slightly, while the rest of his face seems to be relaxed, as if at any moment he might break out into a smile—the face of a fisherman who is anticipating a fish on the line. Suddenly, he jerks the pole upward, snaring the fish on the hook. Ever so slowly he reels in the line, reeling for a short period, then taking a break and just feeling the fish tugging on the line, then reeling some more, then once more stopping for a bit, savoring the whole process. Reeling in a fish is not a race—it's pure pleasure letting the fish put up a fight, a fight that he cannot win, for he gets tired before you do.

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*It takes a lot of courage to finally throw that first cast and disturb the water—sending ripples all across the surface*

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Farther down the stream, the water is partially blocked by two large boulders. Below the boulders is a small little waterfall, falling into a pool. The water here is very deep, making it appear black, churning below the surface. Near the edge of the boulders, I can see where the water has eaten away at the rock, rounding out the edges over the years, while the main current escapes through the opening between the two rocks. Some of the water is

stopped, deflecting off the rock and swirling around and around. Here the water is calm but still moving, a perfect spot to fish. My dad and I approach the bank of the stream and use a ledge on one of the boulders for footing. From there we can get a good angle to cast into the pool just beneath the waterfall. My dad always lets me fish in the best spots, so he hands me the pole.

The cast lands right in the foam of the waterfall, and the lure drifts out of sight. Then suddenly the line goes tight, the pole bends, and there are two quick tugs. I swiftly pull the pole up as the fish begins to struggle, darting beneath the surface. The line goes left, then right, then back left again, a little deeper yet, then I reel in some more. After a minute or so the fish finally surrenders, being completely exhausted from its struggle. It is now quite easy to bring him in. I reel in the line far enough to pull the fish up onto land, and as I get near the fish in order to remove the hook, I am struck by its colors. It's a brown trout. Perhaps you have seen one, perhaps not. Judging by its name, it sounds rather dull and dreary. On the contrary, it is a remarkable-looking creature. The fish is golden from head to tail, with a darker hue of gold around the eyes and mouth and a thin dark line running down the middle, and a very light-colored, almost whitish underside. And then the spots.

Hundreds of spots. Black spots. Brown spots. Red spots. Black spots outlined in red. Red spots outlined in yet another shade of gold. Large dark spots faded in behind all of the other spots giving the trout some perspective. All of these spots extending across the body of the fish.

And then, holding the fish in your hands, the sun illuminates the colors even more so, giving life to the spots and making it seem as if they move. The sunlight strikes the fish and reflects off so strongly it is nearly too bright to look at. The scales of the fish are slimy and slippery, you must be careful not to let him slip out of your hands. Despite the sliminess, it is a feeling of pure delight holding the fish, you feel as if you were holding on to something so visceral that you are reluctant to let go of it. Alas, the fish is drowning and cannot be out of the water forever, so I release him back into the stream. It is remarkable the way the fish can shine so brilliantly in the sun and then the moment you go to put him back in the water, he just disappears.

## *Author's Biography*

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### PATRICK DuBOIS

Patrick DuBois is originally from Neenah, Wisconsin. A member of the class of 2013, he is pursuing a double major in history and political science, and resides in Keenan Hall. After graduation, he plans to attend law school, but in the meantime enjoys his involvement playing trombone for the Band of the Fighting Irish. Patrick's essay, "Good Intentions, Poor Arguments," was written as a rebuttal argument to an editorial that appeared in *Tikkun* about the war in Afghanistan. Rather than refuting the overall premise of the editorial, Patrick chose to illustrate the several areas where the original author did not take all different viewpoints into consideration, and he then offered alternatives to the author's original position. Patrick would like to thank Professor Kelly for all of his help and guidance during his First Year Composition course.

# Good Intentions, Poor Arguments

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PATRICK DUBOIS



How can the United States stop an enemy that will stop at nothing to destroy all things American? Can the United States remain in Afghanistan until all enemies are beaten down and the opposition has disappeared? Can “might be right”? Or must the United States change the mindset that has spread into the hearts and minds of its citizens for eight years, bringing about a new era of global peace and security? To Rabbi Michael Lerner from *Tikkun* and author of the editorial “Just Say ‘NO’ to the War in Afghanistan,” the only way to bring about an end to the war and violence in the Middle East is to completely and fully eliminate the pervasive desire by others to destroy the United States.

Rabbi Lerner believes that the primary reason that the war in Afghanistan is currently failing is the attitude that America has caused the very evil that it is trying to destroy. He believes that the misconception that the conflict in the Middle East qualifies as war has led to the difficulty in “winning” the war. Lerner argues that due to the disjointed assembly of the opposition, the conflict could be better described as a police action against a tactic, namely, terrorism. Lerner proposes a six-step plan that he believes would ultimately end the conflict peacefully: adopt new nomenclature for the fighting (as it is a fight against a tactic, not a state); create a global police force for areas in conflict; eliminate all nuclear weapons; end poverty; support the renewing of religious traditions; and take the lead as the United States to show the world how serious the country is about reconciliation (36). To Lerner it is vital for the United States, and specifically President Barack Obama, to adopt this plan as soon as possible so that both American and Middle Eastern lives can be saved through an end to the war. Meanwhile, opposition exists in the United States that believes that a troop pullout from Afghanistan will only lead to further destabilization in the region and encourage America’s enemies to attack the country. Although Lerner presents a detailed and well-intentioned plan for ending the war in Afghanistan, he offers an incomplete argument by overlooking details,



specifically in regards to the effects of nuclear proliferation and the executive abilities of President Obama.

While Lerner correctly states that the existence of nuclear weapons does lead to further nuclear proliferation, that is to say, more countries possessing nuclear weapons, he makes the mistake of oversimplifying the consequences to which proliferation would lead. Lerner argues that the United States needs “a careful global effort to protect every nuclear facility and to govern the creation and production of nuclear power” (36). What he proposes is a system that would eliminate nuclear weapons so that the existence of nuclear technology would be used for only energy purposes. Lerner also claims that nuclear weapons themselves ultimately destabilize the world, arguing that “the scientific knowledge and the means of implementing [a nuclear attack on America] are out there in the world. Many countries have already built these weapons, and nuclear proliferation increases the likelihood that they may fall into ever more irresponsible hands” (33). Lerner ultimately concludes that

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*Lerner is wrong in believing that the existence of weapons increases the likelihood of those weapons being used*

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even the existence of nuclear weapons greatly increases the chance that they would fall into the hands of someone foolish enough to use the weapons against an enemy.

However, Lerner is wrong in believing that the existence of weapons increases the likelihood of those weapons being used. Rather, the presence of nuclear weapons by multiple states can be argued to limit the chances of an attack with them. During the Cold War, both the

United States and the Soviet Union collectively possessed an exorbitant amount of nuclear weapons; yet at no point did a “heated” war break out between the two states. Historical theorists attribute this fact to multiple scenarios. One of the most popular theories involves the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction, or M.A.D. This theory sets forth the idea that when two or more countries have the capability of surviving a nuclear assault and can retaliate with their own nuclear weapons, neither country will initiate an attack due to the fact that the country would ultimately be dooming itself. While this theory developed around relations between states, it can also be applied to the issue in Afghanistan and terrorist groups. Ultimately, nations act for self-preservation, which means that a country would ensure that all possible steps were taken to prevent any sort of terrorist organization stealing developed nuclear weapons, as that state would bear the brunt of the retaliation. While the existence of nuclear weapons, or any type of weapon for that matter, leaves open the possibility that an extremist group could gain possession and use them for harmful means, Lerner does not examine the fact that the threat of an attack often has the ability to prevent attacks, and thus ensure peace.

Not only does Lerner fail to examine other potential outcomes from nuclear proliferation, he does not consider the consequences of his political proposal to President

Obama to fundamentally change the structure of the White House staff. Lerner seeks to change United States policy in the Middle East so that outside groups will no longer feel the urge to attack. However, some of the changes proposed by Lerner ultimately could lead to dissent within the country. For instance, Lerner proposes to President Obama, “Act resolutely, without hesitation, and replace those advisers and those military leaders who will not actively embrace this direction. Use your power as commander-in-chief and ignore the right-wing media barrage you will face, no matter what you do” (37). Yet what Lerner suggests to Obama can be seen as an attack on the democracy that defines the United States. He proposes that Obama remove opposition from the White House and ultimately act apart from the very checks and balances that keep the United States different from terrorist states like Iran. Even though many of Obama’s advisers may be part of the problem and may need to be removed, bypassing the system that has driven this country since its founding will not solve the inherent problem. Lerner once more errs on the side of oversimplification: he suggests that changing the culture in America can be as simple as changing advisers and then quickly using executive power to implement new reforms. While this process would allow for a more peace-minded staff to be in place, not only would the action be a long and difficult political process in which all of the new appointees would need to be approved by Congress (and run the risk of being stopped by conservative opponents), it would be in direct opposition to the moderates and conservatives of the nation who may or may not wish to have such a radical plan put in place. Lerner cannot allow fear of retaliation from other countries or a desire for global peace to obscure the necessities of the American democratic system, which has brought peace in its own right.

Lerner makes a stirring argument with only the best of intentions to bring peace to both the United States and the world, yet ultimately falls short in creating a complete argument by neglecting to consider the consequences of his proposals. While nuclear proliferation does create a greater number of weapons for terrorists to steal and potentially use, Lerner overlooks the mentality of M.A.D. and the idea that fear of attack can in turn prevent attacks. Furthermore, the president cannot completely remove opposition from the White House and act with absolute authority. By doing so, in the process of attempting to eliminate chaos in the global setting, Obama would be welcoming internal chaos in the United States. Although Lerner presents ideas for the good of mankind, the radical nature of his plan puts too much at risk when global peace is at stake. If “might does not make right” in the global setting, then neither can it within the democratic system of the United States.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### CAMERON CORTENS

Cameron Cortens is a student from Boise, Idaho, delighted to be studying philosophy and theology at Notre Dame. His future plans involve entering a Catholic seminary after graduation and discerning the priesthood.

In “Afghanistan and the Problem of Early Withdrawal,” Cameron challenges some of the ideas put forth by Rabbi Michel Lerner in “Just Say ‘No’ to the War in Afghanistan,” an article composed for *Tikkun* magazine. The arguments set forth in this rebuttal suggest a fairly strong position in favor of American presence in Afghanistan, and it is a position that the author admittedly holds with wavering uncertainty at best. Nonetheless, this paper is a response to what Cameron authentically believes is an overly simplistic perspective of hasty pacifism expressed in Lerner’s *Tikkun* article.

Cameron would like to thank Professor Edward Kelly, for whose composition course this piece was written, for supporting him and encouraging him to seek publication.

# Afghanistan and the Problem of Early Withdrawal

CAMERON CORTENS



In the aftermath of 9/11, there could not have been a soul in America that was not profoundly affected by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers. Yes, there were those who suffered direct loss in the disaster—thousands of grieving friends and family members of victims—but even for those with no relations who suffered at the hands of this plot, the event left in utter shock all Americans who patriotically envisioned their country as a symbol for democracy and justice in the world or those who simply thought of it fondly as home. It left us with the great resounding question: *Why? Why* did this happen? *Why* were they able to do this to the most powerful nation on earth? *Why* would anyone want to? And for policy makers, the question of *how* quickly arose as well. *How* will we respond to prevent the repetition of such horrific events? Of course we all know how the story goes after that. Military occupation of Afghanistan with a drive after Al Qaeda, the terrorist group that originated the attack, and the bin Laden hunt. (Not to exclude a largely ineffective but notably racially divisive Patriot Act for domestic security and Vice President Dick Cheney’s awkwardly-waged war in Iraq thrown into the mix.) All this brings us to our present situation in which just two months ago, our new Commander-in-Chief announced his intention to up the ante of troops in Afghanistan. And in the midst of it all, the small voice of a rabbi writing for the Jewish-American magazine *Tikkun* cries out “NO!”

In his article “Just Say ‘No’ to the War in Afghanistan,” Rabbi Michael Lerner argues that the manner in which our policy-makers have answered the question of how to respond to the terrorism of 9/11—namely, with military might—is fundamentally wrong. The military solution will fail to combat terrorism, Lerner claims, because it fails to address the reasons why terrorists have the desire to harm our country and instead preoccupies itself with disrupting their ability to do so. Impressively taking a role beyond that of a mere critic, Lerner then proceeds to offer

an alternate solution for dealing with the threat that terrorism poses to our security. The six steps of this alternate solution are: ending the war on terror, replacing military efforts with peace-keeping efforts by a global police force, dispensing with nuclear weapons, systematically donating a small percentage of our GDP to the third world (and encouraging other first world nations to do so), supporting spiritual movements that teach altruism and tolerance for religious pluralism, and finally formally stating that all this is being done on moral grounds and admitting error in the various ways that our Western capitalism's expansion has marginalized so many people in the past (Lerner 8–9). To differing degrees, I am in support of all the constituents of this alternate solution, except the first. Though there is deep insight in Lerner's claim that the United States' current foreign policy doesn't do enough to alter the circumstances that incite fundamentalist groups to violence against our country, his conclusion that we need to get the military out of Afghanistan is arrived at through faulty reasoning. I intend to show where he goes wrong.

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*Nothing we do can eliminate  
the possibility for violence-  
prone groups and individuals  
to commit acts of terrorism*

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At the very outset of his article, Lerner invokes a pun to analogize the war in Afghanistan with the much less popular wars in Iraq and Vietnam with his cynical hypothetical "Or should we call it 'Again-istan?'" (7). One can see why making such a comparison successfully could garner the support of many readers still on the fence about the issue of the Afghan War. However, the comparison is not a fair one to make. His complaint that the pacifists and liberal spiritual readers do not have enough of a voice (7), I will grant, is applicable to all three wars. However, Lerner tries to extend the analogy to prove that like the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, our military presence in Afghanistan is not vital to our security. Such an analogy does not hold up against the true differences that exist between Afghanistan and the other two aforementioned conflicts. President Barack Obama, in his speech at West Point shortly following his decision to increase troops in Afghanistan, articulates some of these true differences quite succinctly and in a way that clearly addresses concerns like those of Lerner. For one thing, America has the broad support of forty-three nations in its involvement in Afghanistan. Furthermore, he emphasizes, the Afghan war is a response to a palpable threat from Al Qaeda to our security<sup>1</sup>. The widespread international support for our military efforts in Afghanistan give the situation about as much legitimacy as would Lerner's

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<sup>1</sup> In his speech, President Obama is specifically addressing differences between the Afghan War and the Vietnam War, the Iraqi War notwithstanding. He also cites the fact that our military in Afghanistan is not trying to combat a 'popular insurgency' whereas in Vietnam, we were. I used only the evidence of international support and of a real security threat in Afghanistan, since these show the war in Afghanistan to be of a different color than *both* the Vietnam *and* Iraqi wars, and therefore speak more specifically to Lerner's complaint of 'Again-istan.'

idealized institution of global policing, whereas in Iraq and Vietnam, our nation was deplorably alone. In Iraq and Vietnam, our reason for being there was not obvious, as the failure to find WMDs in Iraq, for example, made it very unclear as to whether or not a real security threat existed. Indeed, the security threat from Al Qaeda in Afghanistan is transparently evident; in fact, it was made manifest in an actual security breach—the devastating attacks on the World Trade Centers.

Having debunked an unrealistic analogy made by Lerner, let us turn now to one of his more realistic arguments against the war on terror. Lerner asserts, “The whole notion of a war on terrorism is fundamentally misguided. Terrorism is a tactic” (7). He goes on to explain that terrorism is a method of threatening civilians with modes of violence available to individuals and groups with only limited means of creating and obtaining weapons. By this very nature of availability, it would be impossible to completely “control” it, without somehow imposing a powerful fascist regime upon the world (Lerner 7). I must accept the highly realistic fact that nothing we do can eliminate the possibility for violence-prone groups and individuals to commit acts of terrorism. As a tactic, terrorism is simply too readily available. This is the same reason for which Lerner emphasizes a shift to policies that aim at influencing groups and individuals such as those that tend to join the fundamentalist Taliban to become less violence-prone towards our nation. He wants to focus on changing the fact that people *want* to kill us since there’s a lot more chance of accomplishing that, Lerner reasons, than of eradicating the capability for terrorism in the world.

I agree with all of this reasoning, and thus am a supporter of his suggestion to cultivate more progressive spiritual ideas in the world and to redeem ourselves morally in the eyes of the world by contributing directly to hunger and poverty relief abroad. The thing that Lerner fails to acknowledge about the Afghan war is that its goal is not, in fact, to completely eradicate the capability for terrorism in the world. In his speech from December, Obama plainly admits that “the struggle against violent extremism...extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan” (25:10). According to Obama, the military goal in Afghanistan is “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future” (13:13) To reiterate, American military presence is not expected to prevent the capacity of all possible terrorists to threaten us—just one particular group of terrorists, specifically the group that has proven itself to be the most threatening to us. Lerner seems to assume that the use of military force to counteract the power for terrorism must either be a 100% efficient Orwellian fascist leviathan (which all of Lerner’s American democracy-loving readers are bound to find unacceptable), or else it is entirely useless. He does not give any service to the idea that our military can and should disempower terrorists that are already known

to be a very hostile threat to our security. However, as long as Al Qaeda remains functional and firmly lodged in the Afghan-Pakistani border with all their hatred for the West, they continue to pose an immediate security threat to us, and retracting the military forces that are currently keeping them in check would simply open up the opportunity for more attacks.

Now Lerner realizes that the immediate threat from Al Qaeda will not simply vanish, which is why his alternate solution does propose two defensive strategies. The first is simply to tighten up security around our own borders (7). The second, which I have already mentioned as part of his broader plan as well, is to replace the military with a policing force representing all peoples of the world (8). Under Lerner's plan, this would be the only force working to combat the fear-inducing violence that the Taliban use to devastate domestic populations. This alone is not a strong enough response. First off, it is unclear how much protection our nation can offer itself by

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*Our military can and should disempower terrorists that are already known to be a very hostile threat to our security*

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resorting to pure domestic defense. And let me remind the reader that the last attempt at sweeping reform in domestic defense in response to terrorism brought us the highly controversial Patriot Act, which many found to be compromising of our personal freedoms, such as the right to privacy, and which in practice ushered in many cases of ethnic discrimination against Middle-Eastern Americans. As for the global police, I concede that such a force created for the sake of human rights sounds like it

would be far more effective in the long run than purely military solutions to terrorism. However, it is *not* a short-term solution; seen as such an institution would take a long time for the nations of the world to form together. In addition, the many conflicting international interests that erect barriers to any large-scale cooperation give us little hope that this police force would not simply be another "toothless police force like those which have characterized the UN presence in Sudan, Rwanda, and the Congo," but instead a legitimate power, as Lerner demands (8). In the absence of such a powerful force, we must continue to meet the dangers that the Taliban's support for Al-Qaeda suspends over us with military defense.

In summation, I hope that spiritual progressives such as Rabbi Michael Lerner with a vision for improving the West's ethical standing in the world do receive more of a hearing from the powers that be. I believe that the six-step process of foreign policy reform and atonement outlined in his article really would have far-reaching consequences for the creation of a more peaceful and stable world, as it addresses some of the fundamental issues at the roots of violent extremism. However, in light of the present circumstances, this necessary progressive movement must accompany, and not replace, our military efforts in Afghanistan because as President Obama puts it,

“We cannot tolerate a safe haven for terrorists whose location is known and whose intentions are clear” (19:16). Not only do we know where to fight the Taliban and the level of hostility in their aims, but they have clearly demonstrated their capabilities as well. Lerner has clearly staked out his own pacifistic stance that “War is not the answer” (8). In a broad sense, I endorse this mentality. I think that Lerner is right to disparage the “military mindset” that the power of violence will solve all our problems (9). However, in jumping to the conclusion that war is not even *a part* of the answer, his alternative proposition would greatly risk American security at present. Our military must concentrate on dispelling the current known threat, while policy reforms like those espoused by Lerner’s idealism focus on preventing more such threats in the future.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### CATHRYN JENKINS

Cathryn Jenkins is a sociology major from Kansas City, Kansas, with plans to apply to the Alliance for Catholic Education program in preparation for a career in elementary education. This personal narrative was written for an assignment to bring a situation of genuine displacement to life by using descriptive language. She was encouraged to write this piece honestly about something that has left an indelible mark on her life. Cathryn is currently living in Farley Hall and continues to serve at the Holy Cross Convent, visiting nuns who struggle with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. She would like to thank Professor Edward Kelly for challenging her to write the piece without reservations.

# A Selfish Goodbye

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CATHRYN JENKINS



It's hot. My sister's hair is plastered to her forehead, her face flushed in the way that only happens when a child falls asleep after a long battle with her exhaustion. I peel her sweaty arm off of my lap and adjust the seatbelt that has lost its protective attributes after twelve hours of repositioning in search of sufficient comfort. I am confused as my dad pulls the car into a foreign parking lot, the change of pace and lights of surrounding buildings waking up my siblings. As I read the hospital's name, feelings of fear of what is to come hide behind feelings of anger for the inconvenience of this unplanned break in our trip. I want to be home, my ten-year-old self feeling that it's vital to make the car ride home now. I feel like a little girl who has been forced to give her grandmother a kiss at Sunday family dinner.

A fake smile is flashed at reception because I know it is expected. The long hallways are silent, as if nothing of importance can happen here. That is what I think. I think this as I enter the dark room, the light from a muted television revealing a face that is familiar, but shockingly different. She is thin, her voice unintelligible. She looks at us like a baby taking in her surroundings, seemingly unable to process what is really happening. I can't look. My eyes close, my arms cross over my chest, barriers from the picture that is making me feel so weak. The tears run from my eyes as if they know they will soon be refrained by my usually hardened exterior. My body shakes from the discomfort, from the foreign feeling of letting my emotions run freely. I can't see as we line up to say goodbye, line up the same way we have after so many Easters, Christmases, family vacations. This goodbye makes up for all of the simulated, meaningless goodbyes imposed upon us by our parents. It is real. And then it's over.

The hallway is silent. The elevator is silent. The car is silent. But my mind is ringing with embarrassment. I didn't want to see her. I just wanted to be home, and I am ashamed. The car ride home will not make it into my memory. It just isn't important.

## *Author's Biography*

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### REBECCA MARTON

Rebecca Marton was born and raised in Andover, Massachusetts. She is currently a biology major at Notre Dame and hopes to pursue a career in medical research. She wrote her essay “Stereotyping in the Admissions Process” in order to explore the possibility that admissions decisions are based, at least in part, on stereotypical views of certain aspects of applicants’ personal attributes, including race and religion. She was inspired to write her essay after experiencing the application process herself and subsequently reading an article on a related topic in *The New York Times*. She lives in Ryan Hall, is a member of the editorial staff of the scientific journal “Scientia,” and enjoys classes on topics as diverse as organic chemistry and European literature. She would like to thank her FYC teacher, Lauren Spieller, for all of her help and guidance throughout the essay writing process.

# Stereotyping in the Admissions Process

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REBECCA MARTON



*“Once you label me you negate me”*

—Søren Kierkegaard

Flooded each year with thousands of applications, admissions counselors at top universities face a daunting task in choosing which students to admit. With merely a few sheets of paper dedicated to each student, discovering the true essence of an applicant may seem like an impossible task. In order to manage the massive undertaking before them, admissions counselors sometimes resort to using stereotypes to reduce the complexity of each applicant. Although this may seem like a practical way to sort through the many attributes of each applicant, applying a label to a student makes their unique qualities obsolete. As stated in the epigraph by Kierkegaard, the gross oversimplification of stereotyping results in the loss of the fundamental nature and individuality of each student.

Stereotypes have been founded on characteristics such as religion, race, and ancestry. Throughout this paper I will show the use of each of these stereotypes in the admissions process. First, I will demonstrate that in the 20th century, the enrollment of Jewish students was restricted solely based on religion, disregarding their academic capabilities. I will also show that affirmative action is applied based on racial stereotypes, instead of directly to students who faced injustice. Similarly, in legacy admissions, students are categorized and receive benefits based on lineage. My goal is to prove that in each of these three cases, stereotyping applicants negates their individual qualities. It is also my objective to demonstrate the importance of realizing the prevalence of such oversimplifications in the admissions process, as they are detrimental not only to the affected students, but to the universities as well.

Perhaps the earliest major example of stereotyping in the admissions process took place in the early 20th century. At this time, an influx of Jewish immigrants was beginning to become established in the United States. As their social and economic standings improved, Jewish students began enrolling in universities at a much higher rate. For example, between the years 1900 and 1922, the proportion of Jewish students at Harvard University increased from a mere 1 percent to a striking 21.5 percent. Similarly, the percentage of Jewish students at Columbia University increased to 40% by the year 1918 (Golden 127). In response to this remarkable rise in Jewish enrollment, universities began to implement measures to restrict their numbers. The affected universities began to employ strict quotas restricting the percentage of Jewish students ranging from 3% at Dartmouth and Princeton, to between 10 and 12% at Yale (Douglass 52). University officials portrayed the new quotas as merely a means to correct an imbalance. A dean at New York University stated, “whenever the student body is found to contain elements from any source in such

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*The true motivations behind the anti-Semitic policies had their roots in stereotypes and generalizations based on religion*

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proportions as to threaten our capacity for assimilating them, we...restore the balance” (Buchsbau 79). With this statement the dean implies that the quotas were enforced merely to create a balance between the groups on campus so that all can become comfortable with college life. Despite such responses, the true motivations behind the anti-Semitic policies had their roots in stereotypes and generalizations based on religion.

One of the clearest examples of religious profiling and discrimination took place in the 1920's and 30's at Dartmouth College, where the sudden rise and subsequent decline of Jewish enrollment closely mirrored those found at other top universities. Like the other universities, Dartmouth faced questions regarding the fairness of their new restrictive policies. One report described how Jews at Dartmouth had “always mixed freely with other students” and “blend(ed) into the mass” (Buchsbau 79). This report shows that for many years, Jewish students had no trouble gaining acceptance among their peers. For all of these years, admissions councilors viewed Jewish students like any other applicants. In the 20th century, anti-Semitic sentiments among non-Jewish students arose as Jewish enrollment increased. Many of the students were unfamiliar with Jews, and therefore only certain stereotyped Jewish traits became recognized centers of controversy. To minimize conflicts, the university began to impose a restriction on Jewish enrollment. Not only did this policy result in unjust discrimination and the rejection of many well-qualified students, but it also undermined the university's original goal in restricting Jewish applicants. A good amount of Jewish students did not possess stereotypical 'Jewish' qualities. Consequently, they were not identified as Jews by their fellow classmates.

As noted in the same report, the students brought with them “a race prejudice, and with it a tendency to exclude from the fraternities all the Jews whom they can recognize as such, but they still are unable to recognize a good many” (Buchsbbaum 79). This statement demonstrates that many Jewish students did not become centers of controversy and were able to assimilate among fellow students. Despite the fact that many Jewish students would have been beneficial to the student body, the admissions council classified and restricted all Jews in the same way. The admissions counselors did not evaluate each candidate for their unique qualities, but rather discriminated against them for stereotypes associated with their religion. This policy not only led to the unfair rejection of many well-qualified Jewish applicants, but was also an inefficient way for admissions councils to limit on-campus controversy. By treating all Jewish applicants the same way, admissions councils rejected many students who would have been successful, productive members of their university’s student body.

Although restrictive quotas for Jewish enrollment are no longer enforced, applicant stereotyping is still prominent in admissions processes. One widely used form is the special consideration given to minorities. This institution, known as affirmative action, is designed to aid African Americans and other minorities in the processes of applying to college or for a job. The intent of this program is to rectify past discrimination and to help underprivileged minorities better their socioeconomic status. Although the goal of affirmative action is admirable, its execution unfairly assumes that all minority applicants are alike. As with Jewish policies of the early 20th century, admissions councils rely on stereotypes to simplify the implementation of affirmative action. In the same way that past admissions councils blindly limited the enrollment of all Jewish applicants, modern admissions councils give advantages to all minority applicants. As a result, many minority applicants who did not suffer from discrimination receive benefits just as many qualified Jewish students were rejected.

Instead of being a process dedicated to aiding the underprivileged sectors of society, affirmative action has become a matter of raising the percentage of minority enrollment. By simplifying its application, affirmative action’s true significance is lost. As a substitute for carefully examining the conditions and hardships of a student’s upbringing, admissions counselors merely label each applicant “a minority,” or “not a minority.” This oversimplification is the result of the assumption that if an applicant is a minority, then he or she must be underprivileged and therefore “deserving” of the advantage that affirmative action provides. William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, the former presidents of Princeton and Harvard respectively, demonstrate that from their point of view, affirmative action is simply a matter of raising proportions of minority students. In an article written in response to affirmative

action criticism: “When making a stew, adding an extra carrot rather than one more potato may make excellent sense...if there are already lots of potatoes in the pot” (Bok 178). To Bowen and Bok, each individual is either a potato, or a carrot. Carrots deserve a boost due to their underrepresentation, while a university can do without one more potato. By turning affirmative action into a program centered on race proportion and not reparations for previous hardships, they make the original inspiration behind affirmative action obsolete. From their perspective, affirmative action means rewarding students for simply being of a certain race, instead of for the discrimination and hardships they have overcome.

Despite universities’ propensity to label all minority students as being alike, this is not the case. The son of a wealthy African American family is not going to face the

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*In college admissions, the students who faced the greatest hardships and received the fewest opportunities often cannot compete with students who are the same race but received many more advantages throughout their childhoods*

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same obstacles as the daughter of poor, first-generation immigrants. Minorities come from every socioeconomic background, and from every part of the world. A student growing up in a suburban town with an excellent school system will receive a different quality of education than a student attending an overcrowded inner city school, and may ultimately have a leg up when applying to college. Due to the diverse backgrounds of minority applicants, those who grew up in a more privileged environment will have an advantage over those who faced greater diversity. However, schools apply affirmative action to all students of the same race equally, and therefore these differences are not recognized. As a result, the minority students who receive the benefit of affirmative action are often the ones who need it least. This phenomenon was

summarized in an article written by Alan Goldman, a professor of philosophy at the University of Miami. Although the article is written primarily about affirmative action in the workforce, it can be applied equally to college admissions.

Since hiring within the preferred group still depends upon relative qualifications and hence upon past opportunities for acquiring qualifications, there is in fact an inverse ratio established between past discrimination and present benefits, so that those who benefit most from the program...are those who deserve to least (Goldman 28).

In college admissions, the students who faced the greatest hardships and received the fewest opportunities often cannot compete with students who are the same race but received many more advantages throughout their childhoods. In forgetting to account for the unique situation of each student, universities not only fail to

accomplish the goals of affirmative action but also bring about the exact opposite effect. Instead of giving an advantage to students with the most challenging up-bringsings, the minority applicants who received the greatest opportunities are the ones who are most often admitted. Stereotyping based on race negates the unique circumstances surrounding each student. This negatively affects both the students who faced the most hardships and the universities who fail in their goal to help these students succeed.

While agreeing that some recipients of the benefits of affirmative action in the admissions process are not as “deserving” as others, defenders of the program insist that stereotyping based on race is the most economical way to give out admissions advantages. In his article “Should Reparations be to Individuals or Groups?” James Nickel concedes that ideally admission advantages should be given directly to victims of discrimination. However, in order for this to be carried out, every individual would need to prove in court that he or she is a victim of injustice. This process would be lengthy and time consuming, resulting in far fewer applicants receiving advantages. Nickel suggests that because there is a strong correlation between being of a certain race and having faced adversity, considering only race in affirmative action admissions decisions would be an appropriate solution to simplify the process (Nickel 21). His argument is that “it is better...to have compensation that is almost always deserved than a program which in practice would amount to almost no compensation at all” (Goldman 27). From Nickel’s point of view, it is better to accept many minority students into universities, some of whom “undeservingly”, instead of far fewer students admitted, but all of whom truly “deserving” it.

In rebuttal, Alan Goldman wrote an article arguing that it is not appropriate to use stereotyping in the admissions process because the correlation between being a minority and suffering injustice is not strong enough. Goldman points out that Nickel’s argument is flawed in that accounts for only the effect of advantages on minorities. Nickel fails to consider the effect that his plan would have on the majority and general public. Goldman argues that there are two injustices involved in every case of undeserved compensation: first, the payment for the undeserved benefit made by society in accepting less efficient service (since he will not be as competent if hired only because of preferred treatment), but, more important, the injustice to the white male applicant who is best qualified (Goldman 28).

Although this particular statement applies specifically to job applications, a university will suffer in the same way society does by accepting less qualified candidates. In addition, for every less qualified minority student that is accepted, at least one better qualified majority student is rejected. Although stereotyping based on race will greatly simplify the application of affirmative action in admissions processes



and result in more “deserving” students receiving advantages, it will lead to an even greater number of disadvantages for qualified majority students and for the university itself. Therefore, giving advantages to all minority applicants would result in more harm than good. For this reason, stereotyping based on race is not an acceptable way to simplify the application of affirmative action in admissions processes.

Stereotyping based on race not only gives a disadvantage to the most “deserving” minority applicants and most qualified majority applicants, but also causes a university to fail to accomplish the original goal of affirmative action. Affirmative action was originally inspired by the need to correct for years of oppression and discrimination that many minorities faced. The program is meant to aid those who faced challenging upbringings so that they may succeed and in turn supply more opportunities for their children. Not every minority applicant has faced adversity, and those who have will often not receive the benefit when race is the deciding factor.

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When stereotyping based on race is included as part of the admissions process, many minority students who did not face adversity are accepted over both more qualified majority students and other minorities who overcame greater obstacles. The oversimplification of affirmative action results in the unjust rejection of many “deserving” minority students and qualified majority students, and at the same time undermines the university’s goal to help the students who faced the greatest adversity.

Similar to the way admissions counselors rely on stereotypes for affirmative action decisions, admissions councils also use stereotypes for legacy admissions. Legacy is the policy in which universities give an advantage to applicants who are the children of alumni. One of the main goals of legacy is to admit students who will add to a sense of spirit and tradition. However, like in the case of affirmative action, admissions councils generally consider only whether or not a student is an alumni child. Schools assume that legacy children grow up learning the traditions of the school and will therefore help perpetuate those traditions while attending. In this way, legacy preference is especially comparable to affirmative action in that admissions councils in both cases assume members of certain groups all have similar upbringings. By making these assumptions and stereotyping legacy applicants, admissions counselors oversimplify each candidate and assume that if he or she is a daughter of an alumnus then they have a great love for the school and its traditions.

Universities look to legacy students to perpetuate these traditions and to keep the spirit of the campus alive. One of the best-known examples is the University of Notre Dame, which leads the country in legacy admissions. With each class

consisting of between 21 and 24 percent alumni children, Notre Dame's reputation for legacy preference nearly rivals its reputation for football excellence (Golden 117). Some alumni of the university claim that legacy admission "bolsters school traditions" such as Friday night pep rallies and lighting candles at the Grotto (Golden 119). Admissions officials agree, and insist that there is a "less tangible but real value to admitting students already familiar with the university's traditions... and its distinctively old-fashioned rules," such as same-sex dorms and prohibition of overnight guests. They argue that "without so many legacies...the student body would chafe at such policies" (Golden 132). In order to increase the proportion of students at the university who are familiar with and respect the traditions, the admissions council gives an advantage to all children of alumni. In doing so, they rely on the assumption that all legacy applicants grew up learning the school's customs and currently support their policies. Admission counselors stereotype alumni children as all being alike in school spirit, and those that are truly dedicated to the school do not stand apart from the rest. The label of "legacy" negates the passion that the student has for the university, and gives them an advantage in admissions due to their parentage and not their ability or desire to perpetuate school traditions. In addition, the accompanying assumption is that students whose parents did not attend the university do not possess the same love for school customs that alumni children do. In this way, both legacy and non-legacy applicants who are passionate about the university are negatively affected. Not only is this an unfair oversimplification of applicant identity, but the University also hurts their own cause by failing to investigate which applicants will truly add to a sense of history and tradition.

Regardless of whether or not legacy admissions is an effective and just practice, universities argue that it is necessary to increase alumni donations. With thousands of successful graduates each year, major universities receive much of their funding from wealthy alumni. Colleges believe that alumni are more likely to donate if they have a child attending the same school. As a result, universities give advantages to alumni children to raise the proportion of legacies in the student body. They do this in the hopes that it will result in increased donations. However, recent research has shown that increasing legacy proportions is not an effective way to increase alumni donations. A study done by Winnemac Consulting concluded that "after inclusion of appropriate controls, including wealth, there is no statistically significant evidence of a causal relationship between legacy-preference policies and total alumni giving at top universities" (Kahlenberg). In addition, the endowments of top universities have grown to such an extent that small alumni donations have nearly become obsolete. In his book *The Chosen*, Jerome Karabel argues that historically, one of the main arguments for favoring legacies was that private institutions depended heavily on the largesse of their alumni; however, with the endowment of

Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in 2004 at \$22.6, \$12.7, and \$9.6 billion, respectively, this argument—which was never one of high principle—has become much less persuasive (Karabel 551). As stated by Karabel, the endowments of the universities are so large that the need for fundraising no longer justifies giving an advantage based on lineage. Not only does legacy admissions unfairly stereotype students based on parentage, but it is also an ineffective and unnecessary way to raise funds.

By using stereotypes, admissions counselors negate the unique qualities that set each student apart from the rest of the applicants. Each of the Jewish applicants in the early 20th century possessed unique traits, yet many qualified students were rejected due to their religion. In the case of affirmative action, each minority applicant has a different upbringing and a set of opportunities provided to them, and those that did overcome adversity “deserve” to be rewarded for their hardships instead of their race. Similarly, in legacy admissions universities give out advantages to alumni children, regardless of their devotion to the school. By applying a label, admissions councils overlook a student’s unique qualities. However, it is important

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*Universities continue to stereotype a new batch of students each fall*

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to recognize that these individual characteristics are what create the student’s identity as a whole. Whether or not a student is admitted into a particular university has the ability to alter the course of the student’s life, and therefore it is essential that who they are as a whole is accurately assessed. It is amoral to base a decision of this magnitude on anything but the true nature of each applicant.

Stereotyping college applicants is not only immoral, but can also have ramifications for the institution. By reducing the students to labels, universities often admit students in such a way as to counteract their own goals, such as creating the best class possible or to aid certain sectors of society. In the years of the Jewish restrictive quotas, admissions counselors applied the same restrictions to all Jewish applicants regardless of their characteristics or qualifications, and therefore failed to create the best possible student body. Universities often fail to accomplish their goal of helping the students who were most challenged by viewing only race instead of degree of past hardship. Finally, universities are less successful in their attempts to enroll students who are passionate about school traditions than they would be if they developed a way to gauge an applicant’s school spirit rather than simply where their parents went to school. While undermining their own efforts, universities continue to stereotype a new batch of students each fall. Future applicants and universities alike would benefit from a decreased use of stereotypes in the admissions process as this would allow applicants to be more fairly assessed, and also universities to achieve their admissions objectives. Stereotyping in the admissions process is not only immoral, but is also just bad business.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### DAN MCMURTRIE

Daniel McMurtrie is a finance and Chinese major from Richmond, VA. He graduated from Phillips Academy Andover in Andover, MA, and School Year Abroad in Beijing, China, before coming to Notre Dame. Daniel's essay "Bad Romance: Lady Gaga and the Gay Rights Movement" discusses the musician Lady Gaga's influence on the repeal of the United States Military's Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy and the Gay Rights Movement as a whole. "Bad Romance" was inspired by a curiosity as to what the effect Lady Gaga's public support of gay rights was having on the Gay Rights Movement. Daniel would like to thank Emily Gandolfi, Silke Cummings, Maggie LeMaitre, Kerry Lanzo, Chase Ebert, Dominic Dejesus, Lance Mulcahey and David L. Robbins for their help in writing this piece.

# Bad Romance: Lady Gaga and the Gay Rights Movement

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DAN MCMURTRIE



In recent decades, the gay rights movement has moved to the forefront of American social movements. Following in the footsteps of women's rights and black rights, gay rights have become a massive social cause in the United States. Currently, the Congressional vote to repeal the United States military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) policy is the most pressing issue facing the gay rights movement. DADT dictates that soldiers may not serve while being openly homosexual and in turn they will not be asked to reveal their sexuality. For several years pop superstar Lady Gaga, a bisexual woman herself, has been an outspoken supporter of the gay rights movement. Ranging from songs containing references to homosexuality to outright speeches in favor of gay rights, Lady Gaga has brought a large amount of publicity to the gay rights movement. In response to the vote on DADT, Lady Gaga made several high-profile appearances and speeches in support of repealing DADT. But, due to a combination of Lady Gaga's existing fame and social media savvy, she temporarily appointed herself the figurehead of the gay rights movement in the wake of Congress' vote on the DADT policy. However, Lady Gaga's polarizing persona overshadowed her legitimate efforts to have DADT repealed and in the end the vote did not pass. I argue that while Lady Gaga did draw attention to the gay rights movement and the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy, her eccentric behavior and rebellious persona negatively impacted the gay rights movement and the vote on DADT.

In 1993 Congress passed a law preventing gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military. The law, referred to as the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy (DADT), did not specifically ban gay soldiers, but it restricted them from giving any indication of their sexual orientation. If soldiers violated the law and began serving as openly gay, they would be dismissed from service. The bill also dictated that the military would not delve into the personal lives of soldiers or ask them about their sexual

orientation. This law has drawn increased criticism from the gay rights movement over the years and in 2008, President Obama pledged to repeal it in his campaign platform (Spillius). Because of this, gay rights groups have put constant pressure on Obama to act on his promise and have the law repealed, and in 2010, two years after Obama was elected, the repeal was finally included in a defense policy bill sent to Congress. The provision regarding DADT was heavily debated, with high-profile Republican politicians such as John McCain speaking out against it (Bummiller) while gay rights supporters such as Lady Gaga spoke out in favor of repealing it (Zezima).

On September 21st 2010, Congress voted on a provision in a \$726 billion defense-spending bill that would have overturned DADT. The vote failed to include the provision dealing with DADT in the defense bill and also failed to overturn the DADT policy (“Senate”). DADT is set to be voted on again later in 2010, although

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it is questionable whether or not that will actually happen (Bummiller). Many military officials and senators, including John McCain, have refrained from stating that they were against the provision simply because they do not support gay rights, and instead have cited a lack of understanding of the consequences such a repeal could have. From veterans, military officials, and politicians alike, there was a resounding emphasis on minimizing the stress put on soldiers. As a result, the Pentagon is

currently conducting a survey investigating what the effect would be if soldiers were allowed to serve openly. The results are to be released on December 1st, 2010, and many politicians and high-ranking military officials have indicated the Pentagon’s report will sway the direction of their support (Bummiller). It is fair to assume, however, that Senator McCain, who campaigned on a platform that included not repealing DADT, and others in a similar position are likely to vote based on public opinion in their districts and not on the results of the Pentagon’s report (Bummiller).

In her article “Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement,” University of Connecticut professor of sociology Mary Bernstein discusses how different behaviors affect the ability of a minority social movement to affect political change and become accepted by the majority. Bernstein states that when a social movement highlights the differences between itself and the majority, it polarizes the movement away from the majority and isolates them while possibly creating a more unified minority. Yet, polarization also has negative political effects because distance from the majority reduces the ability of the minority to affect policy changes. Conversely, Bernstein states that emphasizing similarities between the social movement and the majority is more likely to effect policy change by drawing the majority closer to the minority. With this in

mind, Bernstein states that the gay rights movement has shifted from emphasizing its differences with the majority to emphasizing its similarities with the majority in order to gain popular support and effect political changes. The concept of emphasizing similarities is simple to understand; people are generally more likely to empathize with people they can relate to. Assuming the majority of Americans are not gay, it would be the best tactical move in terms of policy change for the gay community to highlight what similarities it has with the straight majority, rather than highlight the differences.

Born Stefani Germanotta on March 28, 1986 in Yonkers, New York, Lady Gaga was raised on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, attending high school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart. From a young age she showed an affinity for music, playing songs she heard on the radio on the piano by ear and writing her own music by age thirteen (Parvis). At seventeen she was accepted to the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and at twenty she signed her first record deal and began her career under the stage name Lady Gaga ("Lady Gaga: Bio"). Since then, Lady Gaga has staged an all-out assault on the music industry, churning out chart-topping hits and utilizing every asset, most notably social media, at her disposal to increase her popularity. Lady Gaga has made efficient use of Facebook and Myspace. She has the world's largest number of followers on Twitter with more than 7.2 million people receiving her updates to their computers and phones ("Top 100"). This being the case, Lady Gaga has given herself a very powerful ability to be heard.

Lady Gaga is openly bisexual and considers herself not only a supporter, but also an accepted member of the gay community. In an interview with Larry King on June 1st, 2010, Lady Gaga said that the gay community "has been the most enormous blessing of my life that I have them and their support and the way that they truly understand me and support me" (Lady Gaga, "Interview"). The rhetoric used suggests that while Lady Gaga may support the gay rights movement, she too feels supported by the gay community. In the same interview, Lady Gaga went so far as to describe her relationship with the gay community as "symbiotic." At the 2010 Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Awards in San Francisco Lady Gaga was given the Outstanding Artist Award, demonstrating the appreciation the gay community has for her.

Lady Gaga has featured homosexuality in several of her songs and music videos, the most talked-about example being the featured lesbianism in Lady Gaga's 2010 music video for her hit single "Telephone." However, "Telephone" highlighted extreme stereotypes of lesbianism rather than present the homosexual lifestyle as normal. At the beginning of the video, Lady Gaga is imprisoned in a women's detention facility that is inhabited by muscular, butch lesbians wearing bizarre, elaborate, masculine costumes. A fundamental purpose of a prison is to separate people who



are deemed unfit for society from the general population. With the lesbians in the video all imprisoned, Lady Gaga is portraying them as literally the rejects of society. In fact, once Lady Gaga leaves the prison, homosexuality is absent for the remainder of the video. Thus, Lady Gaga's portrayal of lesbianism in "Telephone" is symbolically separating lesbians (and homosexuals in general) from the majority by making them (and herself) into a shocking spectacle.

Lady Gaga has made her career largely through being a living spectacle, an embodiment of all things shocking, bizarre, and socially unacceptable. Lady Gaga explained it herself, saying "I didn't fit in in high school, and I felt like a freak. So I like to create this atmosphere for my fans where they feel like they have a freak in me to hang out with, and they don't have to feel alone" (Parvis). Indeed, the atmosphere Lady Gaga creates is freakish, even terrifying. She uses her shows to highlight the taboo, unspeakable and ever-present themes of sexuality and death. Her shows have been filled with disturbing images and themes such as distorted, corpse-like hands

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*With the lesbians in the video all imprisoned, Lady Gaga is portraying them as literally the rejects of society*

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stretching from a piano lid (Parvis 66), and Lady Gaga's childhood nightmare, the anglerfish, devouring her on stage (Lady Gaga, "Interview"). In addition, Lady Gaga's own outfits are a large part of her shows; everyone from world famous designers to homeless people appear to influence the always-surprising fashions that Lady Gaga wears onto stage (Parker). There is often an odd combination of overly formal wear (ornate dresses) and shockingly casual wear (fishnet shirts or stockings). Two of her

most outlandish outfits worn on stage consisted of firework-covered cleavage and plastic bubbles respectively (Parvis). When asked about her outfits by Larry King, Lady Gaga responded that her on-stage costumes were "meant to be kind of a rejection of what people view about women (Lady Gaga, "Interview"). Unfortunately, she did not elaborate much further. Lady Gaga's rejection of traditional views on women is in line with her rejection of just about everything else traditional. She pushes away almost everything that is considered normal and embraces everything considered abnormal. This causes many people to be offended by her, which makes them less likely to support her or her endeavors, such as repealing DADT.

Many people, especially those who hold more conservative or traditional beliefs, feel that Lady Gaga's rejection of conventional beliefs is insulting. Exemplifying Lady Gaga's ability to insult, Anna Pickard, a writer for *The Guardian*, wrote a commentary piece entitled "Who's most offended by Lady Gaga's 'Alejandro.'" Pickard noted that in the course of Lady Gaga's eight minute forty-three second music video she managed to offend everyone from the Catholic Church to Madonna fans to the League of Engineering Draftspeople. For example, at one point in the video, Lady

Gaga wears a latex nun's outfit, with an inverted cross placed on her groin to resemble a phallus, as she swallows a rosary whole. Everything in the scene from the outfit Lady Gaga wears, to the actions she performs is deeply offensive to Catholics and is even uncomfortable for some non-believers. People who feel insulted by Lady Gaga are not likely to support her; why would anyone stand up for the beliefs of someone who would denounce theirs? As a result, when Lady Gaga became the most vocal advocate for the gay rights movement leading up to the vote on DADT, many people were hearing the voice of a woman who had just publicly defaced their beliefs.

Lady Gaga arrived at the 2010 Video Music Awards with an entourage of soldiers who had been discharged from the United States military as a result of DADT; she was making an palpable statement in support of the troops harmed by DADT (Kaufman). But when Lady Gaga accepted her award for best music video, she walked on stage wearing a shocking dress constructed from flank steak (Clott). The dress absorbed almost all of the attention away from the soldiers, relegating the statement about gay rights to tabloid fine print. The grotesque dress appeared to serve no purpose other than to be freakish and stand out. And for Lady Gaga, standing out is hard, if not impossible to do anymore. James Parker, a commentary writer for *The Atlantic*, argues that while most pop artists have attempted to push the barriers to gain attention, Lady Gaga has finally broken all the barriers down. Parker feels that there is nowhere left for her (or any other pop star) to go artistically and he has crowned her "the last pop star." But as unlikely as Parker's declaration that Lady Gaga will be the last pop star is, with every freakish taboo already tried, worn, or sung, what else could she have done to stand out but wear bloody, rotting flesh? Whether or not Parker is correct in his assertion that Lady Gaga has broken down all artistic barriers is not as significant as the fact that someone, a writer for a respected commentary publication no less, would say that she has. If the opinion that Lady Gaga has gone to such extremes that none remain is not only reasonable, but also publishable, then Parker's opinion is at least a testament to the extent to which Lady Gaga has pushed the extremes as an artist.

While Lady Gaga's spectacular publicity stunts may carry positive underlying messages, all that translates to the public is the spectacle. On Monday, September 20th, 2010 Lady Gaga appeared at a rally for the Service Members Legal Defense Network in Deering Oaks in Portland, Maine, supporting the repeal of the DADT policy (Zezima). When she took the podium, she offered an explanation for her flank steak dress. Lady Gaga proclaimed, "equality is the prime rib of America, but because I am gay, I don't get to enjoy the greatest cut of meat my country has to offer... Shouldn't everyone deserve to wear the same meat dress I do?" (Zezima). However, while Lady Gaga somewhat explained her dress by making the comparison between it and gay rights, the explanation itself was weak and confusing. If Lady Gaga is the

gay minority who is not enjoying the “cut of meat” and also the celebrity wearing that same “cut” what is she really saying? It appeared as if rationale was thought of as an explanation for the dress rather than the dress being a product of the metaphor. This being the case, all that stuck in the public’s mind from Lady Gaga’s odd metaphor was the oddness.

Even when Lady Gaga attempts to leave out the spectacle and only portray a message, her persona drowns out the message. Leading up to the congressional vote on whether or not to repeal the DADT policy, Lady Gaga released a YouTube video asking her fans to call their representatives in Congress and ask them to vote for the repeal. Her rhetoric in the video is convincing and seemingly heart-felt (she pleads with the audience to do anything they can to ensure all Americans are given equal rights), but her persona dominates the visual aspect of the video. Her demeanor and more specifically her appearance, (coated in make-up with glazed unchanging eyes) is disturbing, almost inhuman. Because of this, even though rhetoric may

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*The dress absorbed almost all of the attention away from the soldiers, relegating the statement about gay rights to tabloid fine print*

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be convincing, watching Lady Gaga deliver it is unsettling. At one point in the video, Lady Gaga says “[she is] here to be a voice for [her] generation. Not the generation of the senators who are voting, but the youth of this country, the generation that is affected by this law and whose children will be affected” (Lady Gaga, “A message”). She draws upon the age-old stereotype of youth having different beliefs than elders, but her statement is not factually sound since many in her own generation,

let alone younger generations, do not share her stance in support of the gay rights movement. So, despite Lady Gaga being a well-heard voice, she is really only a voice representing those supporting the repeal of DADT. But due to the publicity Lady Gaga’s comments received (the video was distributed to her 7.2 million Twitter followers and featured on news outlets), she was by far the most noticeable figure supporting the repeal of the DADT policy. This vast publicity effectively made her the figurehead for the gay rights movement as the congressional vote on DADT neared.

As previously discussed, sociologist Mary Bernstein stated that the most effective way for a minority to affect political change is to highlight the similarities between itself and the majority (Bernstein). However, highlighting the differences is what Lady Gaga does; it is essentially all she does. It is clear Lady Gaga thrives on the bizarre: her performances on stage, her personal beliefs and her general persona; everything about her and the culture she has created emphasize the differences between her and the majority. This is not to say that what she does or who she is is wrong, but as a figurehead for the gay rights movement, she highlights the differences between the gay community and the majority in the United States, and as

Mary Bernstein stated, this results in alienating the majority and is less effective in achieving policy change (Bernstein).

Lady Gaga's embrace of the gay community comes at the expense of associating it with her rebellious persona. Ironically, while Lady Gaga certainly does not intend to do so, she damages the gay rights movement's ability to effect political policy change by throwing the support of her vast fame behind it. The same traits that made and sustain Lady Gaga as an attention-grabbing pop empress—separating herself from the majority, rejecting accepted norms, and embracing sexuality—are the very same traits that have reduced her ability to effect change for the gay rights movement.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### BROOKE MURPHY

Brooke Murphy has continued her education at Notre Dame after a childhood spent in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Her research evaluating Facebook and its potential compatibility with Aristotelian and Emersonian templates of friendship allowed Brooke to pursue her interest in the effects of communication devices on social relations. The essay was inspired by a mediocre first date, when her pretended absorption in the film *The Social Network* to avoid her companion resulted in a subsequent fascination with the Facebook empire. Currently, Brooke intends to cultivate her interests in English and art history at the undergraduate level in hopes of one day entering the publishing or architecture industries. She expresses her utmost gratitude and appreciation for Professor Ruth Abbey, whose encouragement and warm heart has allowed Brooke this wonderful opportunity for publication.

# Friending Aristotle and Emerson

## A Discussion of Higher Friendship in the Context of Facebook

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BROOKE MURPHY



The basic conception of Facebook, in its theoretical state, is a breeding ground fit for the cultivation of the most virtuous and idyllic friendships. Especially conducive to conceptions of higher friendships espoused by Classical philosophers and Emerson, Facebook has the potential to foster rarified relationships. However, modern society has perverted this mechanism, and its use of Facebook has actually intensified an already steady degeneration of friendship and its value. This essay will firstly describe the phenomenon of Facebook to reveal its influence upon modern friendship customs. Then it will discuss Facebook and classical friendship as derivatives of exclusivity, followed by a defense of Facebook's intended audience as compatible with classical friendship candidates. Next, I will expound upon Facebook's ability to overcome distance, and the subsequent augmentation of choice, as conducive to classical friendship theory. The discussion will then turn to society's misuse of Facebook, particularly concerning demographic patterns of use and a disavowing of exclusivity. An exploration of lower levels of friendship and Facebook will follow, as well as the possibility of these friendships becoming a burden to a noble life altogether. Next, Emersonian friendship will be applied to Facebook, and their preferred methods of communication will be found compatible. Then I will present Facebook and Emersonian friendship as both encouraging the improvement of character through honesty, which will lend itself to the suggestion that Facebook is more conducive to Emersonian friendship than Aristotelian friendship. Afterwards, the abuse of the status update and "like" button will reveal the ways in which society's use of Facebook has only further degraded both virtue and friendship. Finally, this essay will describe the trends of friendship in society as only becoming augmented by Facebook, and will contemplate the possible future for friendship in modernity.



Six years ago, Facebook was a series of coding and binary, occupying a remote corner of cyberspace. In the years since, that logarithm has exploded across the World Wide Web, toppling and consuming Internet giants like Yahoo and Google and strewing online traffic records in its wake. Facebook has accrued over 500 million active users and been translated into over 70 languages. If nothing else reveals the social influence and phenomenon that is Facebook, consider that over 50% of users log onto the site daily (Smith). A social networking site that has become so relevant to society has left its imprint upon the way modernity fosters and maintains its relationships, particularly friendships. Traditionally, the term “networking” implies relationships based on utility and the provision of mutual services. Yet Facebook’s invocation of the “friend request”, and subsequent transformation of the word “friend” from noun to verb, gave the site potential to host more intimate relationships, perhaps even the most perfect and intimate friendships as espoused by the Classical fathers.

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*Facebook has accrued over 500 million active users and been translated into over 70 languages*

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The theoretical concept of Facebook presents an ideal breeding ground for Classical friendship because Facebook was derived from the principle of exclusivity. In particular, Facebook was originally developed to service those great intellects and academics. Creator Mark Zuckerberg formulated his website for those few in possession of the coveted Harvard.edu e-mail address, a symbol of intelligence and association with a scholastic

Mecca. Students at Harvard devote significant time to education and the expansion of the mind. This type of lifestyle was considered leisured by antiquity and reserved for only the highest echelons of classical society. Aristotle proposed that “sharing in discussion and thought” is the sustenance of virtuous friendship (9, IX), and therefore believed higher friendship was exclusive because only men in possession of intelligence and a leisured lifestyle could achieve it. What’s more, the man perfectly suited for friendship possesses a mind “well stored...with subjects of contemplation”, suggesting that great friendship is contingent upon great intellect (4, IX). Thus, Aristotle’s candidates for higher friendship correlate to the exact demographic Zuckerberg intended in his design of Facebook.

Critics may argue, however, that the Facebook network was intended for persons unqualified for higher friendship because of their age. Created for college students, it should be noted that Facebook’s intended audience was between 18–25 years old. Aristotle, Cicero, and other classical philosophers proposed that only men of a certain maturity and wisdom could access higher friendship, and therefore candidates were much older. For instance, in the text *Laelius De Amicitia Liber*, Cicero cites the friendship between elders Gaius Laelius and Publius Scipio as an example of

virtue friendship. Not only are both friends of a mature age, but even the narrator of the friendship account is “old” and “wise” (Cicero). Thus, Cicero emphasizes maturity in his presentation of virtuous men and their idyllic friendships. Just because Facebook may have been *intended* for a specific age group, though, does not mean that it cannot host older users as well. Critics may object that even if Facebook was targeted at elders, this generation may be too technologically illiterate or incompetent to effectively use the site. If the medium of Facebook is not compatible with or accessible to those of ripe age for virtue friendship, then Facebook was a flawed system from its conception, and could never foster higher friendship. However, a recent study found a whopping 60% of Facebook users are 26 or older (Smith). This immense figure refutes the claim that the technological nature of Facebook prevents older users from participating in the site. Facebook, therefore, maintains the potential to foster and sustain classical friendship.

Since there appears to be no age barrier to Facebook use, the connectivity of the Internet offers Facebook limitless geographical breadth. While distance may not have been an asset to Aristotelian friendship, the concept of selection and choice is vital to its formation. Foremost, Aristotle argued that physical distance between friends would result in the decay of the relationship. “Distance does not break off the friendship absolutely,” Aristotle allows, but “if the absence is lasting, it seems actually to make men forget about their friends” (5, VIII). Essentially, Aristotle espouses the idea, “out of sight, out of mind” (5, VIII). In modern society, however, individuals are more inclined to foster relationships with persons across a broad span of countries. For example, the contemporary author, Deresiewicz, described his friends as follows: “One I’d met in graduate school...one in Boston, another in Brooklyn, one lived in Minneapolis now, another in Israel,” (8). The advent of Facebook eliminates the obstacle of geography and allows mankind to communicate and participate in friendship across vast distances. While Facebook cannot ensure that a friend is not forgotten about by distance, Facebook does improve upon the possibility of maintaining some level of friendship in a positive way. The important concept to realize here is that Facebook’s ability to supersede distance introduces a radical new vista of choice to the practice of friendship.

Of the classical philosophers, Aristotle in particular emphasizes the importance of choice and selection in virtuous companionship. Aristotle proposes that “mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character” (5, VIII). Thus, one makes a rational decision to befriend persons of a certain caliber of character or virtue. Usually, this implies that men will choose friends from the most virtuous persons at hand, but the advent of Facebook increases one’s access to potential friends. Facebook essentially augments the selection pool so that one may choose the “cream of the crop,” and the best suited mate for higher friendship, wherever

he or she may live. Furthermore, Aristotle supplies that the “good man is desirable” that one should want to love and be loved by him (5, VIII). This concept of a friend as “desirable” is reflected by Facebook’s Friend Accept and Friend Deny capabilities. The network grants one control over exactly whom they accept, or desire, for friendship and precisely whom they do not. In this way, Facebook incorporates the choice necessary for classical friendship into its design and user interface.

While theoretically Facebook offers the perfect conditions to germinate the most brilliant friendships since antiquity, Facebook’s actualization within society reveals a modern trend in friendship far different and more disturbing.

An examination of demographic influence in the context of Facebook reveals a perversion of the site’s perfect friendship potential. In particular, the dominance of a youth population transformed the social network into something too volatile to suit and sustain classical friendship. While it is true that 60% of Facebook users

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*The advent of Facebook eliminates the obstacle of geography and allows mankind to communicate and participate in friendship across vast distances*

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are older than 26, consider that the other 40% are concentrated within the narrow gap of 18–25 years of age (Smith). The later audience also experienced the largest growth within a thirty-day period, revealing a force that is only getting stronger (Smith). Aristotle believed that “friendship of young people seems to aim at pleasure; for they live under the guidance of emotion, and pursue above all what is pleasant to themselves and what is immediately before them” (2, VIII). Therefore, wistful and impassioned youths are unfit for the stability of classical

friendship. The overwhelming presence of young society on Facebook reveals that a mechanism, in its theory so suited for cultivating high friendship, is being utilized to propagate less valuable relationships.

“Far from being ordinary and universal, friendship, for the ancients, was rare, precious,...hard-won,...exceptional,” (Deresiewicz 2). The Facebook behemoth, once erected in the name of exclusivity, has been modified to suit a society of agape. Membership has become contingent upon the possession of any active e-mail address, making for a variant deluge of users in age, intellect, and virtue, and all sending a myriad of “friendship requests”. This propagation of users and friendships on Facebook implies that people are no longer concerned with nurturing few, intimate relationships. For example, consider that the average Facebook user has 130 friends; the value of these friends amounts to nothing near perfect friendship, as one cannot “live with many people and divide oneself up among them” (10, VIII). In other words, “one cannot be a friend to many people...just as one cannot be in love with many people at once” (6, VIII). Perfect friendship for the Ancients was

so rarified that it often reached intensities similar to that of erotic or romantic love. Deresiewicz specifies the friendships of Johnathan and Saul, and Achilles and Patroclus to express the intensity, sacrifice, “high calling”, and demanding qualities of character and virtue that composed the great friendship of Aristotle, Cicero, and their contemporaries and made the relationships sacred (Deresiewicz). Users of Facebook now need meet none of these criteria to activate Facebook friendships.

As society’s practice with Facebook reveals disinclination towards classical friendship, a subsequent discussion must concern the levels of Aristotelian friendships that are formed. Firstly, Aristotle suggests that friendship is a tripartite condition, arranged in a hierarchy and dominated at its pinnacle by Perfect, Virtuous friendship. The two lower levels are comprised of Utility and Pleasure friendship. Utility friendships occur when both parties receive some advantage or profit from the relationship, or pursue what is useful in another (Aristotle 3, VIII). The idea that utility friends “part when the advantage is at an end” stresses that such men were not lovers of each other, “but of profit” (4, VIII). In society’s practice of Facebook, the website has become infested by acquaintances that pose as “friendships” and abuse the title of a once-sacred arrangement. The Facebook members that don’t well know one another, use the other to up the amount of Friends they possess and thereby increase their esteem and self-worth. This prompts the question of how much, and how genuine, is the acquired user confidence. Lower level friendships are not concerned with virtues or the improvement of moral character, and therefore the joy derived from maintaining even vast amounts of utility relationships is both short-lived and unsatisfying. Evidence of Facebook utility friendships can be found in the trend that users have between hundreds and thousands of online “friends”; one could not possibly know intimately, or even derive pleasure from them all. This leads to a discussion of the second level of Aristotelian friendship: pleasure friendship. Based upon entertainment, those “who love for the sake of pleasure” love for the sake of “what is pleasant to themselves” (3, VIII). These are the Facebook friends that enjoy surfing through one another’s photos, status updates, and wall posts, but are not involved in one another’s lives offline. This type of Facebook friend constitutes the majority of Facebook relationships, as expressed by the advent of the phenomena “Facebook creeping”. “Creeping” references a person who derives joy and entertainment from the examination of another user’s life from afar. In this way, the Facebook site appears to have been adapted to pithy entertainment and society’s less valuable friendships. This perversion has even elicited unforeseen consequences on more than man’s friendships.

Society has altered Facebook into a hindrance to not just noble friendships but also a noble life. For instance, Aristotle suggests there is a limit to the number of lesser friendships man may possess, lest they become burdensome. “Friends in excess of

those who are sufficient for our own life are superfluous, and hindrances to the noble life” (10, IX). Even pleasure friends, Aristotle supplies, should be “few...enough, as a little seasoning in food is enough” (10, IX). Effectually, the mass quantity of Facebook friends that users sustain could be dividing and trivializing one’s time until one becomes a prisoner to morally void relationships. In turn, this may prevent humankind from achieving other elements of a virtuous and happy life.

Just as Facebook has been examined in the context of Aristotelian friendship, so too does the application of Emersonian friendship to Facebook reveal a basic compatibility in their perception of friendship. Specifically, Facebook is conducive to the exchange of thoughts and modes of communication preferred by Emersonian higher friendship. “Let him [the friend] be to me a Spirit,” Emerson offers. “A message, a thought, a sincerity, a glance from him, I want, but not news nor pottage,” (Emerson, “Friendship”). This suggests that ideal friendship is experienced by the

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*Society has altered Facebook into a hindrance to not just noble friendships but also a noble life*

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mind, and belongs to a realm that cannot be touched or seen. To Emerson, friendship is the communion of intellects, devoid of the burden of “personal relations” (“Friendship”). Why go to a friend’s home, “or know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited by him at your own? Are these things material to our covenant?” (“Friendship”). Facebook eliminates this “touching and clawing” because it is a medium through which pure thoughts and intellects can touch and grow with-

out physical or trivial indulgences. Furthermore, Facebook communication occurs through lines of text, in applications like Facebook chat, inbox, and wall posts. Friendship fostered through the exchange of words mimics Emerson’s preferred communication for ideal friends—the letter. For “in these warm lines the heart will trust itself, as it will not the tongue, and pour out prophecy of a godlier existence” (Emerson, “Friendship”). The letter, and its modern day equivalent of the email, keeps the friendship free of trivial burdens by allowing for purity and honesty. This communication encourages the Emersonian truth between friends that is difficult to have face to face.

There is one final attribute of Facebook that suggests it is an incubator more attuned for Emersonian idyllic friendship than Classical higher friendship. Theories on shared activity in friendship are a point of contention. Foremost, Aristotle’s perfect friendship is based in activity: “some [friends] drink together, others dice together, others join in athletic exercises and hunting, or in the study of philosophy...they do and share in those things which give them the sense of living together” (12, IX). In contrast, Emersonian friendship is more a spiritual than a bodily communion. Emerson would prefer to write a letter to his friend than take a walk; “that seems

to you a little. It suffices me...a spiritual gift worthy of him to give" ("Friendship"). Facebook is a virtual community, and thus cannot offer the shared physical activity that classical friendship desires. Therefore, Facebook provides conditions much more compatible with the nature of Emersonian friendship than that of antiquity.

Facebook has the potential to cultivate idyllic Emersonian friendships because it allows for the improvement of character and the increase of self-sufficiency through honest discussion. As cited previously, Facebook is conducive to sharing intellectual thoughts and ideas, those of which can expand upon the mind and virtue of two persons. Emerson supports this idea when he refers to friends as "excellent lovers" who "carry out the world" to "new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all thoughts" ("Friendship"). Moreover, online networks like Facebook allow users to be more truthful and express thoughts that may be too uncomfortable or painful to say in a friend's presence. For example, friends can more easily point out flaws and give undesirable advice to the other. Known as the "anonymity of technology", the Internet has resulted in much more blunt interactions when the situation is depersonalized. This empowerment to speak more honestly stems from not having to witness uncomfortable consequences, like crying and tension. Facebook's ability to conduct Emersonian Truth allows friends to be "nettles in the side," or two "beautiful enemies," that challenge, unsettle, and drive one another forward (Emerson, "Friendship").

Despite Facebook's obvious affinity for Emersonian friendship, society has destroyed this opportunity to achieve such friendship with its abuse of the status update. The status update capability, added a year or so after Facebook's advent, has resulted in an inundation of trivial postings about the routines, locations, and feelings of its users. For instance, Deresiewicz cites a stereotypical status update he found on a spring weekend: "[So-and-so] is in the Park with the rest of the City" (8). Emerson would consider the previous statement unnecessary "news and pottage" that would hinder a perfect friendship. Why does society feel this need to broadcast our stream of consciousness to an anonymous crowd? Deresiewicz suggests the modern person uses the status update to seek "confirmation of his existence" (10). Perhaps the popularity of the status update reveals, that in a world of hundreds of Facebook "friends", society's abuse of Facebook has robbed it of the security and love that stems from higher friendship.

Society has further perverted Facebook to reflect humankind's need for approval from others, and thus transformed Facebook from a breeding ground of self-sufficiency to its graveyard. This search for approval has been satisfied by the "like" button. Members of Facebook can "like" certain comments, status updates, or photos with the press of key; every time another user approves of one's Facebook activity,

that user feels accepted and confirmed by society. The birth of the “like” button has allowed man to become less and less self-sufficient, and more dependent upon the opinions of others. Emerson would disapprove of this base trend, summing up his entire philosophy into the words, “trust thyself” (“Self-Reliance”). It is ironic how Emersonian friendship was determined most suited for Facebook when society’s practice of Facebook has encouraged a trend Emerson would despise.

Facebook’s conspicuous lacking of a “dislike” button should be noted here. The absence of the “dislike” button inhibits users, in some respect, from fully expressing their disapproving opinions and thoughts. In other words, Facebook users may not actually be on the constant hunt for approval, but it rather appears this way due to a deprivation of a “dislike” button. This may be one fault in the design of Facebook that inhibits virtuous friendship because it impairs upon the honest sharing of thoughts. However, it is a problem that can be easily remedied by the Facebook Corporation.

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*Facebook has the potential  
to cultivate idyllic  
Emersonian friendships*

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Examination of the respective ways that society utilizes Facebook elicits a discouraging modern theme, the so-called Prostitution of Friendship. This “prostitution” is mostly conveyed through a loss of respect for the name “friend”. Emerson believed friendship is the most solid and robust relationship, “fit for serene days” but also “rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty, and persecution” (“Friendship”). Facebook reveals (and perhaps intensifies) an expansion of the term “friend” to include friends, acquaintances, estranged family, recognizable faces, people that can barely be tolerated for an hour’s lunch, let alone through rough roads and hardship. Instead, society has prostituted the name of friendship to reflect “modish”, “frivolous”, and “worldly alliances”, and in doing so, degraded friendship from something rarified to something hollow (Emerson, “Friendship”). Modernity has sacrificed quality for quantity. Having so many “friendships” does not fill the modern man with security, as friendship no longer guarantees “they [two friends]...even find each other pleasant”, but keep one another around in the “hopes of something good to come” (Aristotle 3, VIII).

This poses an interesting question: What will friendship mean to future generations? Will this degeneration continue until all our relationships are facades and shells, so far perverted from the models of Cicero as to be unrecognizable as friendship? Would higher friendship even survive in contemporary society? “Families are gone, and friends are going the same way,” Deresiewicz quotes from *In Treatment*. Theoretically, the Facebook conception has the potential to incubate those sacred,

intimate friendships of the philosophers. But oh, “what a perpetual disappointment is actual society” (Emerson, “Friendship”).

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## *Author's Biography*

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NICHOLAS OCHOA

Nick Ochoa is a finance major from El Paso, Texas. This essay on the marginalization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) individuals within the American Hispanic-Latino Culture was written to investigate the dynamics of subgroups within larger social groups, and to understand the treatment and experience of gays in the American Hispanic culture. This issue is particularly relevant to Nick because he is a Latino American of Mexican decent dedicated to advancing the idea that individuals should have the freedom to participate in a society which values differences and appreciates the freedom of individuals to express themselves, regardless of self identities, cultural affiliation, or any other personal characteristics.

He will serve as the Multicultural Affairs Committee Chair in next year's student body government, a position that exists to address the needs of ethnic and cultural minority students on campus.

# Marginalization Among Latinos in the U.S.

## The Acceptance of LGBT Individuals in Traditional Latino/Hispanic Culture

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NICHOLAS OCHOA



The U.S. is full of many different demographics that make up what is collectively known as the ‘great American melting pot’; from ethnic, cultural, racial, religious and political groups, there is no shortage when looking for a social minority or historically marginalized and/or underrepresented group. It is not uncommon for members of a given minority also to be double minorities—that is, part of two marginalized and underrepresented groups. This paper will examine various phenomena associated with a very specific minority: that of the Gay Latino individual in America<sup>1</sup>; more specifically, focusing on the marginalization of gays within the Hispanic American cultural sphere, the problems that arise from this marginalization, and methods by which such issues can be resolved.

As with any ethnic or cultural minority, there are conflicts within the group to understand and determine how to fit into the larger dominant social context. American minorities deal with problems regarding assimilation to the dominant culture and continuation of their ethnic heritage, even with varying levels of integration into the American society. As with other minority groups, this is the case for Hispanic Americans. Regardless of the level of adaptation Hispanics have reached, they still may not fit into the greater American culture; and as integrated minorities, they may no longer fit into the culture of their respective places of origin. Thus, they are caught in a cultural ‘in between.’ David Breining describes

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<sup>1</sup> “Gay” in this paper refers to any individual who engages in non-heteronormative sexual and/or social behavior and/or identifies with the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Questioning, Transgendered and Intersexed (collectively referred to as the LGBTQTI Movement here) movement. In this sense, “gay” is not used in a way that excludes lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or intersexed individuals, but rather, as a simplified term which acknowledges the complexity of identities and experiences within the non-heteronormative social culture. Additionally, the term “Latino” is used to refer to individuals who are part of the American Hispanic culture. “Hispanic” is used as an all-encompassing term to refer to ethno-cultural groups in the US with genetic and/or cultural backgrounds/affiliations to South American-Hispanic countries and identities.

cultural displacement in his paper on Chicano gay identity that Latinos are straddling a border in the sense that the Chicano does not fit into the Mexican culture or the Anglosaxon culture (17).

Within this narrow scope that examination of the Hispanic American minority provides, it is important to recognize the subtleties of subgroups within this minority group, as cultural affiliation and transformation occur within ethnic groups as well as interethnically (Rodriguez 75). Gays are as much a part of the Hispanic population as they are of any population; however, their condition and identity is made special by the fact of their status as double minorities. They must cope with their identities as Hispanics in America, and as gays in a heteronormative Hispanic culture. Gay Hispanics deal frequently with discrimination based on gender non-conformity (qtd in Ramirez-Valles). Underlying factors which explain this discrimination within the Hispanic context examined here are: (i) traditionally conserva-

tive religious stances on homosexuality; (ii) strong family identities; and (iii) rigid gender roles. Discussion of this aspect of the Hispanic American experience is instrumental in understanding the dynamic condition of nation's largest growing ethnic minority.

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*Traditionally conservative  
Catholicism remains a very  
influential part of Hispanic  
identity today*

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Traditionally conservative Catholicism remains a very influential part of Hispanic identity today in both the American and foreign Hispanic worlds. Historically, Hispanic populations are heavily Catholic; the Church's

conservative stance on gender identities and relations restricts homosexuality as an unacceptable identity. It is only in recent years that some Catholic groups and institutions have developed less stringent ideas about homosexuality, though the Church is still not open to homosexual acts or behaviors. It is no surprise then that many Hispanics are not open to the ideas of alternative sexualities and gender identities.

Equally important and definitive of the Hispanic culture are strong family ties and identities. As is true for most Americans,

the family represents a basic structural and relational arrangement which serves as a primary socialization agent by supporting heterosexual norms and values. Given the heterosexual orientation of families, parents of lesbian and gay adolescents assume their children are heterosexual (Herdt, 1989) and see no need to provide accurate information about homosexuality or the lesbian/gay community. In fact, some of the information provided by families may be inaccurate and negative....family members are often...a source of negative attitudes and stereotypes long before a child has realized he/she might be gay or lesbian (Greene, 1994a) [Waldner 86].

However, the Hispanic family structure is a more rigid one than the non-minority American family. This phenomenon is perfectly described in Breining's text: "Unlike the generally more egalitarian, permissive family life of white middle-class [gays] in the U.S., the Mexican family appears to play a far more important and restrictive role in structuring homosexual behavior among Mexican men" (5). Prevalent in Hispanic culture are notions of virility complexes among men and virginity among women (Reis 90) which contribute ideas of rigid gender roles: men as controlling, virile producers whose purpose is reproduction and protection of the family unit, and women solely as submissive vessels by which men ensure their genetic continuation. Hispanic individuals with alternative sexualities threaten the traditional family structure in that they are biologically unable to advance the family agenda. Because homosexual men and women require another of the same sex in their relationships, this is problematic to the patriarchal structure of the Hispanic family unit: in an alternatives relationship that deviates from the binary controller/controlled model, who is to control whom? The idea that one man is to be subordinate to another or that a woman dominates her partner challenges the norm of a male-dominated society. Indeed, it can be summed up in stating that male subordination and women's liberation/domination makes a patriarchal society feel anguished (108). As described in Breining's text, "Chicano life requires allegiance to patriarchal gender relations and to a system of sexual meanings that directly militate against the emergence of alternative [bases] of self-identity" (5).

The main problems faced by gay individuals in America are (i) familial estrangement; (ii) stigma, shame and humiliation; (iii) and threats to physical well-being. Loss of support systems is highly important in the generation of gender and individual identity in any context. Such losses are especially important to the gay Hispanic population, in which family identity plays a central role in identity formations.

In studies published in both *American Pediatrics* and the *Journal of Homosexuality*, it was found that "Latino men reported the highest number of negative family reactions to their sexual orientation in adolescence" (Ryan 350); additionally, it was found that "parental rejection is often motivated by homophobia...and traditional values (351). Religion, political ideologies, and family structures reinforce heterosexual behaviors by negatively sanctioning behaviors linked to expressing a lesbian/gay identity" (Waldner 85). As a result, family estrangement is not uncommon among gay Hispanics. In a culture highly focused on family identity and connections, this is often a traumatic experience for most parties involved and can extend from the sphere of the immediate family to the larger family and even more broad non-familial social groups to which individuals may belong.

The shame and humiliation often involved in announcing one's alternative sexual or gender identity (or the involuntary discovery of such identity by others) can be far-reaching and may manifest themselves in a number of ways. Individuals may be displaced from their homes, stripped of resources, and slandered on different social levels so that they are isolated or estranged by not only their immediate communities but also larger social groups (such as extended families, neighborhoods, etc.) as well.

Regarding physical safety of gay individuals, a 2009 survey conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Education Network found that nearly 9 out of 10 students experienced harassment at school in the past year due to their sexual identity and/or gender expression; 70% were physically harassed and 31% were physically assaulted (Kosciw 3)<sup>2</sup>.

Arising from stigmatization of sexual minorities combined with minority stress<sup>3</sup> are a number of complexities many gay Hispanics face. Mental health of gay Hispanics

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*Family estrangement is not  
uncommon among  
gay Hispanics*

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is of great concern when investigating the issue of cultural acceptance of gay Latino individuals. Equally important are ways in which affected individuals cope with the stresses of a doubly marginalized life: the use of substances and the practice of risky sexual behavior may function as maladaptive coping strategies among LGBTQ individuals, including Latino LGBTQ individuals

in response to stress created by stigma regarding their race and sexuality (qtd in Bruce 237). In fact, "there is solid evidence linking experienced stigma based on homosexuality to a host of negative outcomes, including depression, substance use, suicidal tendencies, and sexual risk" (qtd in Ramirez-Valles).

Waldner's study on gender identity acknowledges the fact that "gay identity formation is complicated for gay[s] because of conflicting pressures to conform to a heterosexual identity and the internal need to express homo-erotic drives." The report went on to state "such identity confusion can induce low self-esteem, depression, denial, [and] suppression," thus it is not surprising to know that many gays cope with sexual identity issues by withdrawing from their families and society as a whole, and by indulging in other self-destructive behaviors including chemical dependency, prostitution, running away from home, and suicide (84). In a study

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<sup>2</sup> This biennial National School Climate Survey which includes responses from 7,261 LGBT students between the ages of 13 and 21 from all 50 states and the District of Columbia is the only national survey to document the experiences of students who identify as LGBT in America's secondary schools.

<sup>3</sup> *Minority stress* refers to specific stress that is experienced as a result of one's identification with a group that is stigmatized and is the target of discrimination and prejudice (qtd in Wei 412).

examining minority stress published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Wei's results indicate that minority stress is positively correlated with depressive symptoms—the effect of minority stress may be even more potent for members of double minorities. Supporting this are results from studies conducted by Diaz (2001), Meyer (1995) and Ryan (2009) which report that Latino gays are anywhere between 3 to 5.9 times more likely to suffer from and report high levels of depression and distress compared to their non-Hispanic peers.

The numbers for suicide amongst the same gay Hispanics compared to white survey participants are generally the same as figures for mental distress and depression: Meyer 2008's results indicate that Hispanic subjects made serious suicide attempts at almost three times the frequency of white survey participants. Ryan's numbers on suicide attempts also do not change drastically from the numbers on harassment, as Ryan's study found that gay young adults who faced family rejection were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide.

A study conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) which surveyed 3,492 gay youth ages 15 to 22 showed that one in three used substances such as crystal methamphetamine, ecstasy, marijuana, or cocaine at least once a week and that their drug use was three times as high as that of a national sample of men in the general population (Thiede). Information from other studies indicates that gays are generally three times more likely to use illegal drugs than non-minorities (Ryan 347).

As illicit drug use is not necessarily an end behavior in and of itself, there comes with the examination of drug use in gay Hispanics the investigation of possible consequences of such substance use. Individuals use substances to cope with stress, which may lead to sexual risk behaviors (Ramirez-Valles). The same CDC study mentioned above showed that a third of the study's participants observed reported frequent use of illicit drugs, and nearly two-thirds of the same sample pool had seriously thought about taking their own life (63%), with the highest percentage (72%) found among lesbian youths. The study also links high-risk sexual behaviors and increased HIV incidence among men who have sex with men with use of illicit drugs (Thiede). Bruce repeatedly describes the use of substances and the practice of risky sexual behavior as methods of maladaptive coping strategies among Latino gays, and also attributes sexual risk behavior to individuals' internalization of society's negative attitudes about them; these experiences of racial stigma are fairly common among Latino gays.

Though not all members of ethnic and sexual minorities suffer the negative health consequences of discrimination and while some gay Latino individuals successfully cope with and confront stigma, it is important to understand why such large

percentages of this population are involved with drug use and risky sexual practices. Ramirez-Valles, whose study cites precedented literature in the field that examines the health risks faced by the Latino sexual minority population, explains the use of illicit drugs and engagement in risky sexual behaviors within the Latino gay community:

Stigmata based on [gender nonconformity] and race may work as stressors increasing the likelihood of sexual risk behavior via the use of alcohol and other substances. Stigma means a labeling of individuals or groups that discredits them. Labeling comes with social distance and discriminatory practices toward those labeled. Stigma may lead to negative health outcomes when it is internalized. Individuals may engage in substance abuse and sexual risk acts to compensate for feelings of devaluation, shame, and rejection. These behaviors, in turn, may exacerbate feelings of devaluation and shame as individuals may

feel they lack self-control. Individuals may feel hopeless and dissatisfied and then abuse substances as a coping mechanism. As a consequence, they lose assertiveness to negotiate safe sex.

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*At the collegiate level, many universities have programs and centers that encourage openness in discussion of gay issues for their students*

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This explains in great detail why the rate of HIV/AIDS among Latino gays is three times higher than that of non ethnic minorities in the U.S (Ramirez-Valles). Since gays have higher rates of drug use (which can generally lead to risky sexual behavior) and ethnic minorities are also

more likely to partake in the use of illicit drugs, it follows that more gay ethnic individuals are likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors which explains why the rate of HIV/AIDS among Latinos is so high. Additionally, Ryan's studies have resulted in figures that show Latino gay young adults were 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse than their white gay counterparts.

Secondary problems faced by gay Latinos and other gay ethnic minorities caused by the problems described above include homelessness, prostitution, and academic dropout, among others (Waldner 84).

Now that the problems facing gay Hispanic Americans have been addressed, it is appropriate to discuss possible solutions. The proceeding pages will enumerate current resources available to gays, then examine the current public engagement in gay issues, and finally suggest improvements to ensure and promote visibility and equality of gay Hispanics as valuable minorities in our society.

Among the many resources available to gays in America today are numerous organizations in the education sector. At the collegiate level, many universities have

programs and centers that encourage openness in discussion of gay issues for their students. Additionally, these programs often provide services such as counseling and therapy for those experiencing hardship with gay issues as well as physical and mental health support groups. Clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances exist throughout the country in many universities and are now starting to gain popularity at the high school levels.

Organizations funded by private entities are numerous and of various sizes throughout the nation. Community groups such as the Trevor Project, Man2Man, International AIDS Empowerment, PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and local Pride groups exist to promote gay inclusion, rights and equality in communities nationwide. These organizations can serve as social and political groups which foster sense of community and belonging within the gay community as well as outlets for expression and can provide many services to individuals who associate with them.

Current public engagement on gay issues has improved dramatically throughout the years, both in mainstream media culture and representation of gay issues in government. In the media, the gay community has experienced a generally increased visibility as many popular shows, networks, movies and publications have begun to include gay themes in their productions. Compared to even just the last decade, there is much higher frequency of inclusion of gay issues in the media at large.

Equally important in discussing gay visibility is the acknowledgement of the fact that there is much attention paid to representation of gays in the legal sphere. High profile gay issues such as service of openly gay members of the military, gay marriage and protection of gays' legal rights have garnered much attention in the last decade and a half. Civil rights groups and special interests groups such as the HRC and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) now include protection of gays' rights in their efforts to lobby for change in current personal rights protections.

Though there are many outlets which allow for increased visibility of gay issues in society at large, it is a fact that inequities in gay rights still exist; gays are still not allowed to marry in the U.S. (with the exception of select states), gays are not allowed to serve openly in the military, and though many still face harassment because of their identities (as evidenced by the studies mentioned above), sexual identity or sexual orientation are still not recognized as identities for which governmental entities provide legal protection. It is through education that our society can learn to accept and value the gay perspectives of many in our nation.



Through responsible education, reform of unjust norms is possible. Many organizations exist today whose goal is to promote knowledge and understanding of the gay experience, and though government may not provide protection of civil liberties to gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersexed and transgendered persons, there is still much being done to promote equality for individuals with historically nontraditional gender identities.

As with any shift in cultural thinking, change must first occur on the individual level; that is, through individual personal experiences, individuals may come to understand the richness of perspective alternative identities have to offer to the larger society. The breaking down of barriers continued by stereotypes which has occurred over the last century with the integration of ethnic minorities in the American social sphere is what must occur in the gay context. Author Fredrick Luis Aldama addresses this in his book *Brown on Brown: Chicano/a Representations of Gender Sexuality and Ethnicity* in declaring “unfortunately, often the most widely publicized representations are the ones that do the least to engage the public in serious reflections and understanding of gay, lesbian and bisexual experiences and identities” (3). In order to engage the public in serious reflections about the gay identity and experiences as Aldama suggests, individuals must be willing to explore different perspectives in order to reach greater understanding and appreciation for diverse viewpoints.

In a country founded on principles of equality, and within a historically marginalized culture that has struggled for civil equality in America for decades, it is important that gays be accepted and embraced in the Hispanic/Latino-American culture because just as Hispanics have important perspectives, rich experiences and equal potential to contribute to American society as any ethnic group, so too do gays have much to offer society, Latino culture and movements for social minorities in the larger American and Hispanic/Latino-American contexts.

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## *Author's Biography*

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### KELSEY REPINE

Kelsey Repine is a Colorado native who currently resides in Welsh Family Hall. As a science preprofessional and psychology double major, Kelsey aspires to create and lead her own non-profit organization—one that specifically targets individuals with medical disabilities. In her piece “The Game of War,” Kelsey Repine creates a narrative essay based on her relationship with Jason—a young patient at the Craig Hospital for Brain and Spinal Cord Injuries. Jason inspired an essay that not only characterizes his own personal struggles but also reflects how his challenges and story affected Kelsey. She is still involved in various non-profit organizations in the Denver-Metro area and in the Notre Dame community. Kelsey extends her appreciation to John Dillon, her First Year Composition teacher, for all of his advice, patience, and encouragement.

# The Game of War

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KELSEY REPINE



As I sit across the table from Jason, a twenty-four-year-old, freckled, fiery-haired patient who is recovering from a paralyzing head injury after crashing his flashy red and yellow Ducati into the side of a Wal-Mart Semi, I am frustrated that I cannot win one game of “war”. Who wouldn’t become irritated after losing what seems like a thousand games in a row? I know, however, that Jason’s desire to win is as strong as his hair is red. We shuffle through our cards quickly, searching for the winning card. Plunk—I cautiously place down my card. I wait. He silently flops his card onto the fragile, 80’s-style desk that rests between us.

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“I am the youngest child of three; I have two Labrador retrievers, Freckles and Matilda; my favorite dessert is red velvet cake; I’ve never been out of the United States; I—”

“Whoa...Jason! Slow down. Let’s start again from the beginning,” I tell him as I shuffle the cheap deck of cards. The cards have “Colorado: the Centennial State” glazed across the back—cards that were obviously purchased at the hospital gift shop for what I would say at most three dollars. Jason is unusually talkative today. It must be the weather. People always say that the weather can dictate mood. Well, today is unseasonably warm and almost nauseatingly bright for this early on a Tuesday morning. I turn my head and look out of the window of Jason’s small hospital room. The sky is as blue as it gets, not one cloud in sight—something you read about in a Robert Frost poem.

“Kelsey, did you hear me? I said I have two older sisters...Kelsey?” I snap back into reality as I swivel my head around. “Yes, I heard you. Two sisters. What are their names again?” Jason slams his overused cards a little too hard on the wood table. As

I pick up the cards to shuffle them for a new game, I wonder how many people must have played with these cards. Their edges have frayed and grayed with time. The corners are beginning to peel and reveal the cottony material that rests between the two faces. The queen of hearts' face is almost indistinguishable because of the unflattering rip that streaks across the left side of her face.

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"Kelsey, this is Jason. He is one of our newest patients here," says Mrs. Sanders. I have the urge to plug my nose because the sterile environment burns my nostrils. I can handle the smell, but the constant, faint push-pull of his feeding machine haunts the room and becomes increasingly irritating. Jason's brittle body looks almost lost under the thin white covers of his hospital bed. A blue, shiny, protective helmet covers his head, but I can still see the part where his skull is missing. It looks like someone took a small orange out of the side of his head. The indentation

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*The queen of hearts' face is almost indistinguishable because of the unflattering rip that streaks across the left side of her face.*

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on his left forebrain is so large that I am shocked the first time I see it—but I try not to look. In the stale hospital light, I slow my breathing to seem less anxious than I feel. I am confused because Mrs. Sanders doesn't introduce me to anyone else. She leans firmly on the end of Jason's bed frame and her knuckles turn white under the weight of her body. I look around, but there is no one else to introduce.

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"Mom, I want you to meet someone. This is Kelsey." Jason's mother, a petite woman with a green, oversized, plaid pea coat and the same sizzling red hair as her son, walks silently to my side. She looks like one of Dorothea Lagne's migrant workers—so beautiful, but a kind of icy beauty. She touches my arm. I shutter. This is one of the times that Jason remembers my name—he remembers it on the day that he is being discharged from Craig Hospital. I become increasingly impressed with his improvements.

We slide his wheelchair down to the basement cafeteria to get breakfast. This morning, it is a mix of ProtiDiet high-protein chocolate milk and frosted-flakes cereal, not only Jason's, but my favorite as well. I watch Jason slowly drag his stubborn left arm up to his mouth with each laborious bite. If an arm could be a teenager, Jason's left arm would be a fifteen-year-old girl immersed in teenage angst. Jason tries to bend the rules and switches the spoon from his degenerate left hand to his almost athletic right one. He tries to be secretive, but I always catch him.

After breakfast, I wheel Jason back upstairs where he will have physical therapy for the day. One of the physical therapists quizzes Jason. He asks two questions, one

shot each: "Jason, who is your friend? What did you guys have for breakfast?" On both questions, he strikes out.

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"Clank! Clank! Clank!" Jason's lime green wheels make a rhythmic clatter on the pale tile as I push Jason down the even pastier white hallway. We laugh at the obnoxiously fluorescent butterflies that the hospital painted on the walls in attempt to make the sterile environment seem welcoming, happy, cheerful. I shove the chair a little faster for Jason's 11:00 a.m. appointment. The music's tempo between his chair and the tiles picks up.

"Wait! Where will you be when I finish my speech class?" Jason is persistently worried that I will escape from his grasp during his occupational and physical therapy sessions. "Jason, I promise I will be in the gym when you get back," I reply. Even though it concerns me that Jason is paranoid that I will leave him, I am happy that he wants me to stay. I am glad that I can be there for Jason when his family cannot because they live in North Dakota. Only once does he open up to me about being homesick, but promptly thereafter conceals his initial confession with a corny joke. Jason laughs before the punch line—a deep, heavy cackle unexpectedly protrudes from his small body, but only to turn into a light and genuine giggle. And yet, no matter how hard Jason tries to keep a smile on his face, it never covers the scream of loneliness I see in his eyes.

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I have not played war since then. War is how we passed the days. War is what we talked about when Jason was having a bad day, or why I woke up unusually grumpy that morning. War is my favorite black Converse shoes that I always wear. War is the thick piece of Jason's hair that always sticks up in the back. War is how I discovered that Jason's mother is a nurse who typically works nights at Bismark Regional Hospital and that his father is the manager of the packaging assembly line in a local dairy factory. War is debating which place would be better for a vacation: Europe or South America. War is ignoring the incessant, dull buzz of the hospital machines. War is finalizing the plans for Jason's first tattoo. War is the new haircut that I hate. War is agreeing that chocolate chip cookies are better than peanut butter ones. War is Jason's lunch break. War is my Tuesday afternoon.

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Jason slides his card forward onto the table. His hand wobbles slightly but his motor skills have improved greatly since his injury. I see a sly smile begin to creep across his thin face. He flips the card over. Crap. Jason gleefully throws both hands up in the air and looks triumphantly to the sky. His hands balance in the air for one

second too long. As if his hands are openly clenching an invisible pole, they reveal a quick moment of tension, victory, and excitement all at the same time. He lowers his now relaxed hands to the table and they rest, palms up, staring at me. The glitz of his fake Rolex watch catches my attention as the thin, black second hand lurches around the dial uncomfortably slow. Suddenly, he looks into my eyes, remembering it is just a card game.



MCPARTLIN  
AWARD  
ESSAYS



## *Author's Biography*

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CHRISTINA MONDI  
(MCPARTLIN AWARD—FIRST PLACE)

Christina Mondì hails from Cincinnati, Ohio, and is one of Farley's Finest of the class of 2014. Christina is a psychology major with a double-minor in Catholic social tradition and science, technology, and values, and hopes to enter the field of pediatric psychology. Her essay, "Authorship and Authenticity in Women's Indian Captivity Narratives," was sparked by a recurring interest in the "stories behind the stories" presented to her in literature classes. How does the authorship of a historical text influence the reliability of its message? What effect does the transparency—or lack thereof—of the writer's identity and intentions have on the tone of his or her work? In researching and crafting her essay, Christina discovered that, within the context of such background, history (and what is written about it) can be cast in a whole new light. She thanks Professor Tobias Boes for his support and guidance.

# Authorship and Authenticity in Women's Indian Captivity Narratives

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CHRISTINA MONDI



The line between literary fiction and reality is often thinly drawn. Facts and fables tend to blend on the written page, and discrepancies may arise between the actual nature of events, the author's recollections of them, and readers' interpretations of the corresponding text. Whether such inaccuracy or exaggeration is problematic depends on the text's intended role (for instance, accurate historical account or commercial entertainment) and, in turn, the identity of the text's composer—whether it be a vested first-person source, or a third-party ghostwriter. The influence of authorship is particularly evident in the women's Indian captivity narratives of the late 1600s through 1800s. Each narrative proceeds similarly: a well-to-do woman is taken hostage by Indians, experiences personal and spiritual reawakening during her captivity, and lives to tell the tale. Yet whereas ghost-written and -edited narratives like Mary Rowlandson's and Mary Jemison's compromise authenticity for the purposes of commercial and religious appeal, first-person accounts like Sarah Wakefield's offer a less polished, but more honest glimpse into the captivity experience. The style, tone, and degree to which these narratives can be trusted vary widely depending on the main factor that sets them apart from each other: their authorship.

The immediacy and extent of editing with which the narratives were composed suggest their intended purposes. Critic Kathryn Zabelle Deuronian-Stodola notes that the purported author of one of the most widely-disseminated captivity accounts, Mary Rowlandson, "composed her narrative within a year...of her release in May 1676; however, it was not published until 1682" (1998b, 5). The narrative's preface by the influential Increase Mather claims that the account "*was penned by this Gentlewoman her self, to be to her a Memorandum of Gods dealing with her [sic]*"; however, "four prominent Puritan ministers", including Mather, likely "sponsored Rowlandson's...narrative...arranged for its publication... [and likely made] editorial additions and revisions" to it during the six years between its original composition

and first publication (Mather, 9; 1998b, 5). The resulting text is highly structured, and most glimmers of uncensored emotion are overwhelmed by a multitude of Scriptural citations and declarations of religious piety amidst suffering. At times, Rowlandson even vicariously inserts herself into the words and misadventures of Biblical martyrs, as when she prays “with Job, *Have pity upon me...for the hand of the Lord has touched me*” (29). Such “sermon stylistics”, Deuronian-Stodola argues, support the suggestion that Rowlandson’s first-person account was extensively edited by her male superiors (1998b, 5). Rowlandson’s sincere spiritual sentiments can thus be difficult to discern from the picture of piety painted over less-heroic aspects of her account by her editors.

Whether the religious overtones and formality of Mary Rowlandson’s narratives are simply reflective of her education and role as a minister’s wife, or hint at a heavy

editorial hand, is debatable. After all, as critic Richard VanDerBeets points out, “if the captive drew...lessons from his experience, he...felt obliged to pass them on to others who might profit from the morally instructive nature of Indian captivity” (7). What modern readers may perceive as coldness and over-the-top religious sentiment may have been a genuine expression of piety by a Puritan woman eager to remind others to “rely on God himself” and to recognize “*the salvation of the Lord*” in her release from captivity (Rowlandson 51). From an editorial standpoint, however, Teresa Toulouse argues that Mather and

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*A well-to-do woman is taken hostage by Indians, experiences personal and spiritual reawakening during her captivity, and lives to tell the tale*

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other ministers re-crafted Rowlandson’s account so that she was “represented as submissive, obedient, and loyal to the tradition of the New English ‘fathers’ and their God” with the purpose of “justifying and persuading their readers of certain political and religious beliefs” (9;7). Freed women like Rowlandson were painted as living testaments to the faith and salvation accessible through the Puritan tradition; surely, if these former captives clung to these traditions even after their horrific ordeal, ordinary citizens could do the same. The popularity of Rowlandson’s text, as proposed by Gary Ebersole, may thus be accounted to the fact that it was “narrated in an authoritative manner through a biblical interpretative frame... [and] issued from a theocratically-sanctioned press” (23). The basic facts of Rowlandson’s captivity are preserved; however, what Rowlandson probably intended to be a personal account or spiritual autobiography was, in all likelihood, edited into a much broader piece shaded with religious and political propaganda and stereotypes.

The extent of the role that male ministers and editors played in the composition of Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative is ultimately uncertain; as indicated by Increase Mather’s note in the Preface, they actually denied *any* editorial involvement. Such deceit and denial make it difficult to analyze the content and reliability

of the narratives. VanDerBeets argues, however, that “the worst offenders...were journalists...who ‘Edited’ for publication the accounts of captives” (26), as in the case of James Seaver and his subject Mary Jemison. Like most captivity narrative ghostwriters, Seaver openly admitted his role in recording the text—but also proceeded to “put speeches into the mouth of Mary Jemison” and “constructed an elaborate apparatus” based on a three-day interview with her, claiming that “without the aid of fiction, what was received as matter of fact, only has been recorded” in their accounts (VanDerBeets 27; 1998b, 120; 20, Seaver 123). Thus, narratives such as the one telling the story of Mary Jemison, were promoted as directly-dictated accounts, but were, in fact, heavily fictionalized.

While the employment of a reputable ghostwriter in Mary Jemison's narrative is not necessarily problematic, the narrative's execution and the surrounding circumstances of its composition are somewhat suspicious. Seaver conducted his research interviews with Jemison when she was eighty years old, decades after the events described in the narrative actually took place. This delay, along with the remarkably detailed and relatively lengthy nature of the text, raises the question: just how much was the elderly Jemison able to remember, and how much did Seaver invent to fill in the gaps? The narrative is composed in the first person as though it were directly recorded from Mary Jemison's mouth, but its occasional lapses into poetic melodrama (“alas! how transitory are human affairs!”) lead VanDerBeets to accuse it of employing elaborate thought processes and language of which Jemison—a barely-educated child when she was first taken—would hardly have been capable (Seaver 13; VanDerBeets 26–27). Seaver, VanDerBeets concludes, “fully indulge[d] himself at Mrs. Jemison's expense and through her narrative persona”, publishing her story not for the purpose of historical record, but to capitalize on the commercial value of the kind of “fictional thriller” to which her story lent itself (27;36).

Indeed, according to VanDerBeets, “the infusion of melodrama and sensibility” into edited or ghostwritten narratives like Rowlandson and Jemison's “capitalized on what became an increasingly profitable...market. The chief concern...was neither accuracy nor sensation nor fidelity to the hard facts...but rather the salability of pulp thrillers” (ix–x). Ironically, both Rowlandson and Jemison's texts are among the most widely-disseminated of the captivity narratives, hailed for their insight into the religious and societal perspectives of female captives of their times. How do the propaganda and revisions of these pieces, however compare to more raw accounts? VanDerBeets asserts that “because of these known fraudulent and fictionalized accounts, many writers of authentic narratives felt obliged to attest the veracity of their own accounts”—writers like Sarah Wakefield (31). In the preface to her narrative, Wakefield declares that her writing “was not intended for perusal by the public eye...[and] I do not [have any]...expectation of making money by it, but to vindicate myself...[from those] who are ignorant of the particulars of my captivity”

(241). Her prime motivations in telling her story are not financial or even spiritual, but rather, very personal.

Wakefield's account—composed within a year of her release from captivity—demonstrates a richness and variety of details and meditations which Rowlandson and Jemison's largely lack. Whereas the latter two narratives are carefully organized into removes or chapters and carefully conform to the expressions of bravery and piety which religious and commercial audiences would have expected, Derounian-Stodola asserts that Wakefield “trusted her own conscience, guilt, and sense of justice” in composing an honest, uncensored account of her physical and emotional captivity (1998c, 239). Wakefield professes that “God was with me” during her suffering, but does not discount the magnitude of her suffering in doing so—suffering of such intensity that she admits to having “passed through death many times in imagination” (Wakefield 259; 254). She frequently speaks in defense and praise of the Indians, and openly recounts her “continual fear and anxiety” and spiritual

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*Such deceit and denial make  
it difficult to analyze the  
content and reliability of  
the narratives*

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confusion during her ordeal—all of which would have been vetoed under “the intervention of a male editor or minister” (Wakefield 254; 1998c, 239). Wakefield refuses to edit her true beliefs and emotions to her audience's satisfaction, confidently declaring, “let—people blame me if they will, [but] God, who knoweth all things will judge me” (268). In this way, Sarah Wakefield's captivity narrative stands apart within its genre, in terms of its immediate

composition, authorship, and raw content. Her narrative can be more reliably taken as a factual, rather than fictional, account than either Rowlandson or Jemison's.

Given their chronological construction and the identity and intents of their writers, Rowlandson and Jemison's accounts must be read within the context of religious propaganda and commercial semi-fiction, respectively. The absence of outside influence and the immediate composition of Wakefield's piece considerably enhance its reliability as an accurate account of women's Indian captivity. Whereas Wakefield intended for her narrative to be a spiritual autobiography and historical record, Rowlandson and Jemison's—though well-intentioned as personal and religious testimonies on the women's parts—were reconstructed by male elites for mass appeal. All three narratives were meant to deliver insight—about the Indians, about religion, about perseverance among adversity—and to touch audiences' perceptions of the world and their place within it. The moral and social conclusions readers were intended to make after reading the narratives were, in Rowlandson and Jemison's cases, carefully predetermined by moral and social leaders. Not so in Sarah Wakefield's case. In terms of authenticity, authorship truly makes all the difference.

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LARA GOLEBIEWSKI  
(MCPARTLIN AWARD—SECOND PLACE)

# Real Appeal

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LARA GOLEBIEWSKI



Since the earliest days of network television broadcasts in 1939 (Barnouw 306), the television has become an increasingly powerful and important means of entertainment and communication in American culture. In its most recent annual report, The Nielsen Company, a business created to monitor and measure media audiences, revealed that the average American home has 2.93 television sets, statistically more television sets than people residing within the home (U.S. Homes). As television broadcasting evolved, the medium not only documented but also influenced our country's history and passions, from the birth of Little Ricky on *I Love Lucy* and the Kennedy-Nixon debates to the Vietnam War and the first lunar landing. Television continues to play a vital, constructive role in modern American culture.

There is no doubt that television is firmly planted in our homes and in our daily lives. Television programming can take us across continents, reveal the secrets of science and nature, mold our opinions, and draw us together. In his analysis of "Television and Morality," Lawrence I. Rosenkoetter considers the dramatic influence this ubiquitous medium has had over children and adults alike. "Perhaps its constant presence in the home may reinforce its lessons with a power unparalleled by the other media" (Rosenkoetter 470). Every aspect of our society is both reflected and affected by the television programming that consumes an average of eight hours and fourteen minutes of life in a typical American home (U.S. Homes).

As our country's morality shifted over the past fifty years, television shows ventured into new territory. The transformation of the archetypal American family can be traced through the decades, along with the changing standards that reverberate within the plot lines of popular programs. In the 1950s, *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951–57) captured the essence of daily life for a young newlywed couple. In keeping with the rigid expectations of the viewing public, the sex life of the show's main characters, Lucy and Ricky Ricardo, was a taboo subject. Even the implication of such intimacy was carefully avoided. The married couple was shown sleeping in separate beds and,



despite Lucy's obvious pregnancy, the expectant couple's scripts did not include the "P-word" (Landay 32). Extending well into the 1960s, television's most popular domestic comedies, such as *The Donna Reed Show* (ABC, 1958–66), *Leave It To Beaver* (CBS/ABC, 1957–63), and *Father Knows Best* (CBS/NBC, 1954–62), continued to "present idealized versions of white middle-class families in suburban communities that mirrored the practices of ethnic and racial exclusion seen in America's suburbs more generally" (Spigel). TV viewing gave Americans a sense of a peaceful, idyllic life, but did not depict a harsher reality.

Television's portrayal of life in America gradually became more representative of the struggles of reality in the 1970s and 1980s. Primetime shows like *All In The Family* (CBS, 1971–79), *Maude* (CBS, 1972–78), *The Jeffersons* (CBS, 1975–85), *One Day at a Time* (CBS, 1975–1984), *Family Ties* (NBC, 1983–89) and *Murphy Brown* (CBS, 1988–98) dealt with cumbersome issues like cohabitation, interracial relationships,

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single parenting, class inequalities, divorce, political differences, and abortion (Roman 93–130). Meanwhile, popular daytime programs such as *The Phil Donohue Show* (syndicated, 1970–1996), *The Sally Jessy Raphael Show* (syndicated, 1985–2002) and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (syndicated, 1986–present), began to "feature real-life family feuds with guests who confess to incest, spousal abuse, matricide, co-dependencies and a range of other family perversions" (Spigel). Both in daytime and primetime programming, television started to address the challenges and controversies

that were a part of everyday life. As American television programming matured, the country's core concerns and values were propelled to the forefront by popular shows, creating opportunities for further dialogue in television studios and in American homes and workplaces.

Thus, TV programming that reveals the moral flaws in our society is not a concept that was created in the 21st century. Critics and many among America's older generations have been vociferous about the "smut" that youth in America watch on television today, yet in the 1980's, the same was said for shows we now consider cult classics. "The A-Team," for example, was harshly criticized for being too violent and bloody. Though few deaths were actually portrayed, many parents considered it inappropriate for their children to watch. Interestingly enough, a movie about Colonel Hannibal Smith and his comrades is currently in production, further cementing "The A-Team's" place in television history. The same generation that censured the TV show in the 1980's is responsible for placing a classic "A-Team" plot, accompanied by the requisite violence, in the box offices for today's children.

Reality TV is a relatively recent and somewhat controversial addition to the many types of programs that make up modern network, cable, and satellite television's various genres. While news programs, sporting events, dramas, and documentaries have been the mainstay of television programming for decades, the phenomenon of reality TV can be traced back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. One such reality TV pioneer, MTV's *The Real World*, videotaped the lives of seven diverse strangers who lived together for several months in a SoHo neighborhood of Manhattan ("The Real World"). Airing in 1992, the inexpensive series was different from the polished, packaged programs typically seen on network television. Rough, shaky filming and simple cinematography, along with the raw, contentious, and wholly human cast made *The Real World* a critical and commercial success.

When it first aired, *The Real World* provided a surprising, relevant and fascinating snapshot of young urban life in the early 1990s. As the season unfolded, the roommates' pursued their dreams of stardom in various fields, and Americans vicariously experienced their romances, loneliness, racial tension, prejudices, triumphs, failures, and angst. Miles Clements, a freelance writer and editor for *The Los Angeles Times*, noted that, with a few exceptions in the year's television lineup, the initial season of "The Real World almost exclusively addressed the needs and desires of the youth generation" (Clements). Ensuing seasons amplified the gritty realism and exposed an increasingly shocking image of young America. Weighty societal issues such as substance abuse and addiction, AIDS, bigotry, violence, and sexual promiscuity surfaced regularly, prompting public criticism of the housemates' immature and irresponsible behavior. As always—impressionable teens and preteens watched, reality television filled a societal need by providing a format and a context for the discussion of norms and acceptance of human differences and shortcomings.

Maryann Haggerty notes that today's reality TV is "an umbrella term that lumps together hundreds of programs" ranging from shows documenting triumphs over illnesses and cooking competitions to shows that challenge participants to face their fears or battle for one man's affection (Haggerty 679). Following *The Real World's* lead, reality-based, seemingly frivolous programs like *Rock of Love* (VH1, 2007–2009), *Joe Millionaire* (Fox, 2003), *American Idol* (Fox, 2002–present), and *Survivor* (CBS, 2000–present) have filled coveted time slots, boosting ratings and stimulating chatter in teenage cliques, around the office cooler and in blog postings. Due to the typical mix of vapid stars, silly situations, and constant conflict, today's reality programming has been labeled as mindless entertainment, and "has been an easy target for those who see it as a harbinger of cultural decay. It is dismissed as lowbrow and routinely slammed for being unreal" (Haggerty 679).

Among the most often criticized modern reality television shows is MTV's *Jersey Shore*, which first aired in the fall of 2009 ("Jersey Shore"). Drawing from the successful formula of its predecessor, *The Real World*, *Jersey Shore* chronicles the antics of eight young people as they spend a hedonistic summer together in Seaside Heights, New Jersey. Like its previous incarnations, *Jersey Shore* "focused the lens on various subcultures and rites of passage, uncovering a host of memorable characters in the process" ("Jersey Shore"). The cast members, all in their twenties and self-professed "guidos" and "guidettes," relish their "GTL" lifestyle, which revolves around the essentials of gym, tanning, and laundry. The housemates seem focused on having fun, spending their days on the beach and their nights "fist-pumping" in local clubs. It's hard to imagine that *Jersey Shore*'s unique mix of larger-than-life personalities represent American culture, but the show's popularity has skyrocketed, drawing a series high of 6.7 million viewers (Hibberd).

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*Programming that reveals the moral flaws in our society is not a concept that was created in the 21st century*

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Van Toffler, the president of MTV Networks Music and Logo Group, believes that MTV's current lineup of reality shows, including *Jersey Shore*, are "authentic realities" and "that is what's resonating much more today." Toffler says that modern young people "are more conservative and family-based than the generation before them" and that, like their target audience, the housemates of *Jersey Shore* "like to learn their life lessons alongside mindless fun." ("Jersey Shore' Saves MTV"). It is true that the *Jersey*

*Shore* cast endorses a joie de vivre that is refreshing in these tough economic and political times. Their delight in daily life might represent a hope for the future.

MTV describes the show in the most positive light, proclaiming that "*Jersey Shore* uncovers sometimes surprising, often hilarious and usually over-the-top personalities as they juggle work, love, nightlife, friendship and the drama that ensues" ("Jersey Shore"). The housemates' merriment, though, frequently careens out of control, with excessive drinking, casual sex, gratuitous fighting, and ethnic stereotypes. These affairs have piqued the interest of a variety of critics, including Governor Chris Christie ("NJ Gov"), New Jersey tourism officials, women's groups, UNICO National (an Italian American service organization) and advertisers like Domino's Pizza (Friedman). Detractors fear that reality television can "distort young viewers' perception of life" (Haggerty 677), leading young people to expect adulthoods comprised of fun and games, little work, and few consequences. MTV defends its programming choices in a recent press release, stating that, "For over 28 years, MTV has evolved, challenged the norm, and detonated boundaries—giving each new generation a creative outlet and voice" ("MTV Press"). Melissa Henson, Director of Communications and Public Education for the Parents Television

Council, questions MTV's lofty motives and objectivity, arguing that "It's hard for me to believe that they are really sincere when they produce and distribute so many programs that really glamorize irresponsible behavior."

Other detractors worry that the strong stereotypes, usually relating to women, racial and ethnic groups and GLBTQ people, presented on reality TV shows will give rise to ethnic, gendered and racial bias and discrimination. Often as a result of creative editing and manipulation, typical stereotypes are fleshed out: women are depicted as spoiled bimbos or conniving backstabbers, blacks and Latinos are typecast as violent criminals, and men are shown as aggressive and oversexed. TV critic Jennifer Pozner attests that reality programming "manipulates reality to reinforce some of society's worst stereotypes" (Deggans). Robert Thompson, a professor at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, acknowledges that reality TV does occasionally present negative images of some groups, but that these stereotypes already exist in society, and reality shows, with the consent of cast members who sign on for the season, are simply reflecting a flaw in our culture as a whole. He maintains "that if one cares to look very hard, American culture, American popular culture in particular, is filled with stereotypes and misogyny and all of this kind of stuff" (Haggerty 683). Even if the stereotypes depicted on reality shows are hurtful, we can only benefit from the opportunity to discuss and grow from our societal faults. Stephen Marche, a writer for *Esquire* magazine, confirms that "This is a good thing. We should celebrate. This new self-conscious stereotyping is evidence of the triumph of complexity over simplemindedness" (Marche).

Reality television is, first and foremost, a source of entertainment. As Jennifer Pozner concedes, "Reality shows can be fun, compelling and cathartic. And after a long, stressful day, it can be comforting to zone out with mindless entertainment" (Pozner). It may be possible, though, "that what is making us smarter is precisely what we thought was making us dumber: popular culture" (Gladwell). At first glance, shows like *Temptation Island* (Fox, 2001–2003), *Survivor* (CBS, 2000–present), and *I Love Money* (VH1, 2008–2010) seem like mindless entertainment. However, according to Steven Johnson, the author of several books about technology and modern culture, many reality television shows involve higher-level thinking and processing on the part of the viewer. When we watch reality shows, he argues, "the part of our brain that monitors the emotional lives of the people around us—the part that tracks subtle shifts in intonation and gesture and facial expression—scrutinizes the action on the screen, looking for clues" (Johnson 96). Rather than offering only moronic, unproductive viewing, reality programs can provide an opportunity for serious social thought and analysis.

Today's reality television, "at its best, is teaching TV a new way to tell involving human stories" (Poniewozik). Some reality television shows are intended to share a human-interest story and help those in desperate need, while helping the television audience at the same time. For example, ABC's *Supernanny* (2004–2008 and 2010), Jo Frost, not only educates the chaotic families she visits with her parenting tips, but also provides real-life examples for frustrated parents in her television audience. NBC's current hit show, *The Biggest Loser* (2004–present), gives morbidly obese contestants the training, education, facilities, and incentive to lose weight, while sharing diet tips and inspiration for our epidemically-overweight country. *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (ABC, 2003–present) helps families in desperate need of home improvements and financial assistance by giving them a new home, a vacation, and a fresh start in life. As Maryann Haggerty points out, "sheltering people who might otherwise be homeless is generally considered a social good" (Haggerty 681). Beyond the families that are affected by host Ty Pennington's amazing ef-

orts, the show has reenergized the spirit of volunteerism in America while sharing uplifting stories of human courage, family love and perseverance. There are a multitude of other reality television shows like "Intervention' and 'Hoarders' that aim to solve social or personal problems" (Haggerty 681). Far from mindless television, reality TV is a tool for educating the public about personal and societal problems and possible solutions.

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*Television serves as a  
source of news and  
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and entertainment*

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Television is an essential, often overlooked feature in most American homes. Among other roles, the television serves as a source of news and information, education, and entertainment. Understanding the history of television programming helps us see the evolution of idealized family values into the self-indulgence of today. Whether censored or not, television shows have consistently reflected the ideals, values, flaws and foibles of our society. While the emergence of reality television shows has brought new insights into the human condition, the format has been criticized for its glamorization of irresponsible behavior, negative stereotypes and lack of intellectual substance. A closer examination of modern reality TV shows, however, reveals that this genre can serve as the voice for a new generation. These shows frequently create opportunities to discuss relevant societal concerns. In the process of telling inspiring human stories, reality shows often provide information about and solutions to real-life problems for reality show participants and audience members alike. Many shows require higher-level thinking and an understanding of complex social interactions. Reality television shows are a fun source of entertainment, but it's not mindless entertainment.

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## *Author's Biography*

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YUKO GRUBER

(MCPARTLIN AWARD—THIRD PLACE)

Yuko Gruber was born in Yokosuka, Japan, and grew up in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. She is currently a biochemistry major and intends to add a peace studies minor to her course load. A lover of both service and travel, she dreams of one day being employed by Doctors Without Borders.

The included version of the essay “What is Poetry?” was written at the end of Professor Stephen Fredman’s literature seminar *Self and Society in American Poetry* and evolved considerably from its first draft at the beginning of the semester. The essay began as an attempt to distill some of the complex themes and trends that span the genre of poetry and instead reaffirmed for the author that she will never be able to quite pin poetry down.

Yuko wishes to thank Professor Fredman for his advice and imparted knowledge, as well as all of the members of her seminar, whose lively discussion and poignant insight inherently shaped this essay.

# What is Poetry?

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YUKO GRUBER



A distilled mode of written expression, poetry relays events and conveys sensations in a compact and artistic format. As a dynamic fusion of structure and freedom, poetry has grown in its various forms to include assorted appearances and to fulfill a wide range of specific purposes. Great poetry can emerge within the bounds of time-proven schemes of meter and rhyme, such as in Edna St. Vincent Millay's sonnet "I will put Chaos into Fourteen Lines," or in the succinct and shocking novelty of free verse, such as Margaret Atwood's poem "You Fit Into Me." Despite the flexibility and diversity of poetry as a literary form, certain elements and intentions are traditionally shared between poems, among them rhetorical devices, specific attention to form and organization, and a commitment to rousing strong emotion. Even as modern poetry stretches to test the limits of language and expression, poetry of all forms and eras continues to be linked in its endeavor to forge connections that enable new insights into life and the varied experiences of those who share it.

Ancient and widely studied, sonnets are a form of poetry notorious for their meticulous, fourteen-line structure and specific rhyme schemes. In a play on such a reputation, Millay's poem "I will put Chaos into Fourteen Lines" describes how the speaker wrestles the "arrogance" of personified Chaos, trapping him in the snare of a relentlessly precise sonnet. In lines 5 and 6 Millay addresses an apparent paradox of the traditional sonnet, hailing both its "strict confines" and the "sweet order" it provides. As a consequence of such duality, classical and conventional forms of poetry like the sonnet can serve as a familiar, stable framework in which poets work to make sense of complex and abstruse ideas or feelings. In fact, the speaker's claim to "hold [Chaos's] essence and amorphous shape" within the sonnet is a most direct example of using poetry as a means to conceptualize abstractions.

Beyond establishing familiarity, the enduring structure of the sonnet is a prime illustration of the brevity and discipline that often distinguish poetry from prose or other literary forms. As a result of such condensed construction, poets must pay particular attention to every word they introduce into their works. Phrases are not chosen merely for their denotation, but also their connotation, syllable count, cadence, alliteration, possible alternate meanings, and relationship to the language that surrounds them. The phrase Millay designs to describe the struggles of Chaos in the sonnet mirrors the struggle poets undergo in determining what verbiage will create the most precise interpretations of the ideas they wish to impart. Chaos “twist[s] and ape[s]” in a primal contest to free himself from the confines of his entrapment as poets must manipulate words in order to free their own convictions and elucidations through their writing. The multi-faceted images and comparisons that are the result of powerful and economic word choice complement structure in proposing conclusions about the most ambiguous aspects of life, among them emotions, beliefs and the relationship between language and human experience.

Drawing connections between the mundane and the sublime through unique combinations of phrases is one of the most significant functions of figurative language.

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*Modern poetry stretches to  
test the limits of language  
and expression*

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Poetry has grown, however, to include much more than those ideas disclosed within traditional dictates of length, rhythm or rhyme. Indeed, poetry can serve as an experimental medium in which the function and capacity of lan-

guage and structure are explored. Margaret Atwood’s poem “You Fit Into Me” of only four lines is a testament to the powerful emotions and dramatic circumstances that can be conveyed in minimal space by capitalizing on the duality of words and images in the English language. What begins as an ostensibly romantic poem with the allusion to two halves of a clothing fastener, “You fit into me / like a hook into an eye,” veers sharply into grotesqueness with the clarification of the intended definition of both “hook” and “eye.” The imagery turns gory as the hook is revealed to be a weapon and the eye a living organ: “a fish hook / an open eye.” Atwood’s poem evokes an understanding of a supremely complex relationship in the shocking juxtaposition of the definitions of hook and eye. The connotations jump from domestic and enamored to destructive and bloody almost instantaneously. Though the final image is a painful one, the sense that the relationship had been satisfying and positive at some point in the past also remains. The comparison of both kinds of relationships to verbally related but physically disparate objects is very different from Millay’s mythology-reminiscent personification of a state of disorder, but in both poems items or concepts readers are familiar with are used in order to help make sense of feelings or concepts that are much harder to define.

Specific attention to structure and organization of the content of poems has been addressed as a means for creating a familiar framework for complex ideas, but structure and organization of a poem do not have to be well established or widely used in order to enhance the meaning of their content. Following the notion of organic meter—the form of a poem serving its function as much as the words themselves—the shock value of Atwood’s message draws significance and impact from its short length and irregular meter. Poetry is truly an art form in that its appearance can contribute substantially to its themes. Even the shape of the well-known sonnet serves Millay’s purpose: the square, rather sturdy dimensions of the poem reinforce the idea of confining Chaos within distinct, unyielding restraints. While the organizations of the two poems are evidently dissimilar, an even more subtle and fundamental disparity between the pieces exists in the way in which the speakers of the poems relate to their respective audiences. The reaction created by the juxtaposition of two sets of straightforward images in “You Fit Into Me” is clever and effective, but also immediate and intuitive. The brevity and directness of the Atwood poem creates a visceral reaction to its content: the images are gut wrenching and very much physically defined. Millay’s poem, though riddled with violent imagery, utilizes a more intellectual envisioning of Chaos and draws its full significance from a synthesis of Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian tradition. “I Will Put Chaos Into Fourteen Lines” is built upon a religious struggle to conquer Chaos, indicated by the “pious rape” the speaker must enact to unite him with Order. The poem relies on the metaphor of ensnaring Chaos, an apparent embodiment of the disordered, shapeless entity from which Greek gods were formed, within a small, well-defined entity. Yet even the trap (the sonnet) is an abstraction rather than a tangible object explicitly defined.

Layers of language interact with each other to construct Millay’s ultimate impression of taming a presence of disorder and confusion, and thus the poem serves not only as a way to express an emotional desire to literally triumph over Chaos but also as an investigation of poetry as a means to achieving such a goal. Millay seeks not only to relate to readers by appealing to their empathy but also to force them to question whether or not disorder can be conquered simply by declaring that it can. This dissemblance highlights a notable difference in possible motivations behind poetry: the creation of emotional connections as opposed to the exploration of the capacity of language and the ability of language to bring abstract concepts into reality or to shape human conceptions of reality altogether. “I Will Put Chaos Into Fourteen Lines” can even be declared to be a coalescence of both motivations. Though the poems of Atwood and Millay both represent the efforts of their respective speakers to respond to destructive influences in their lives, the contrast in the way they seek to affect readers is a function of their unique treatments of language.

Poetry itself is an abstract concept, one that is nearly impossible to define in absolutes. It is a kind of literary expression that means an incredible number of things to different people, and one that takes so many forms that it is much easier to explain what is not poetry than to establish firmly what is. However, there are recognizable trademarks of poetry, most notably the use of imagery, figurative language, and unprecedented comparisons in attempts to describe the uncertain or ill-defined. There is, too, a mission to most poetry: to create reactions in its audience. Rarely is poetry written with the intention to merely inform a reader of a dry fact or concrete truth—emotion and new insight act as the crux of poetry. Thus, though poetry is a continually evolving body of many subjects, structures and intentions, poems are bound together in their ability to create new connections, inspire reactions, and raise a never-ending series of questions and answers.



SNITE MUSEUM  
ESSAY CONTEST  
ESSAYS

## *Author's Biography*

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NATALIE BOLL

(SNITE MUSEUM ESSAY CONTEST—FIRST PLACE)

Natalie Boll is a native of Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. The McGlinn student is considering majoring in French and Francophone studies as well as either anthropology or political science in the College of Arts and Letters. She eagerly anticipates studying in Angers, France for her sophomore year as she looks to expand her horizons in preparation for a career international in scope. Natalie's essay "A Marine Paradox" was inspired by the Dutch Baroque painting *Shipping on a Rough Sea* by Andries van Eertvelt that is currently hanging in the Snite Museum of Art (and she thinks you should go visit the museum when you have a chance). In her essay, she analyzes the basic elements of the oil on panel piece in order to create a context for the work and propose a possible explanation for its existence. Natalie would like to thank Professor Charles Rosenberg for sharing his knowledge of Art History and for his guidance in the writing process throughout the course of the seminar.

# A Marine Paradox

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NATALIE BOLL



The early seventeenth-century oil on panel painting *Shipping on a Rough Sea* by Dutch artist Andries van Eertvelt currently resides in the University of Notre Dame's Snite Museum of Art. The Snite is a modern structure with an understated façade centrally located on a campus full of Collegiate Gothic architecture. While not particularly out of place, it fails truly to conform to its surroundings. As one enters the main doors located beneath a plate glass clerestory and between ivy-covered walls, it is surprising to experience the soaring expanse of the atrium, something which is unanticipated from the unimposing exterior. Continuing left into the 1500–1700 gallery, a museum visitor enters a bright, though more confined, space with paintings and sculpture on display. *Shipping on a Rough Sea* is a relatively small painting hung in the corner of one of the dividers in the back of the gallery. It is placed in such a way that a casual visitor might only briefly glance at it before moving on to a next, more imposing work. If one were to remain and appreciate and analyze the piece, though, perhaps it would strike its viewer as an interesting representative of a popular genre of Dutch Baroque art.

*Shipping on a Rough Sea* is a seascape without any recognizable story, biblical, historical, or otherwise. The most conspicuous element in the work, which is rich in detail, is the large ship occupying the right corner of the foreground flying Islamic colors. It is being propelled dangerously close to the shore by winds and crashing waves. The ship appears to be part of a fleet, perhaps of richly loaded trading vessels or military transports, caught in a squall. The powerful waves produced by the gales of wind damage the ships and force many men overboard into the frothing sea. The sky, however, seems to be clearing on the leftmost horizon, allowing sunlight to penetrate the heavy cloud masses filling the sky and to illuminate the spray of the water and other details that add to the richness of the image. A fortress-like tower stands on the rocks in the right background. These components combine to form a work layered with potential meaning.



In order to study the work in context, it is necessary to keep van Eertvelt's background in mind. The artist was born in 1590 in the Flemish city of Antwerp, where he joined the Guild of St. Luke, married Catherine Vlieger in 1615, and studied and painted until 1627. He then went to Genoa where he studied under Cornelius de Wael for about three years. In 1630 van Eertvelt moved back to Antwerp where Anthony van Dyck painted his portrait. Because van Dyck was a talented portraitist who would go on to become a court painter for King Charles I of England, this indicates that van Eertvelt had attained a certain level of recognition. Indeed, van Eertvelt is considered the first Flemish marine painter. His pre-Italian works are chromatically dark, making use primarily of green, black, and brown tones; *Shipping* fits this description well, allowing us to infer that it was completed before 1627. After Genoa, the scenes in van Eertvelt's paintings were more of calm harbors rendered with a softer palette.<sup>1</sup> The path of the artist's life suggests that he would have been aware of contemporary religious, political, and economic issues, as well as of other artists' styles and techniques, putting him in the position to create art that is

at once aesthetically pleasing and an informed commentary on contemporary topics.

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*Van Eertvelt is  
considered the first Flemish  
marine painter*

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The chromatic composition and subject matter in *Shipping* reinforce the painting's sense of a moment in time rife with unpredictability and also illuminated by a hint of hope on the horizon (literally and figuratively). Immediately present are the dark greens, blues, and blacks that portend an

unfortunate outcome for all trapped in the storm. The dark tones create an ominous sense, along with implying great depth to the menacing seas. One could say that the palette brings out the most malevolent side of nature. Contrast is brought into the painting by the rusty red-brown scheme employed to call attention to the jutting rocks in the foreground, the wood of the ships, and the clothing of many of the figures. The brown tones draw the viewer's eye to the ship that is about to become beached on the shore, or worse, crash into the rocks just in front of the viewer's perch. Finally, van Eertvelt highlights the painting with white accents, notably using scumbling to depict spray suspended just above the waves. This gives the work a very realistic feel, as if the waves might crash at any moment. White is also employed in the sky as a means of suggesting an end to the misery brought about by the storm; hope is just beyond the horizon. While the use of color greatly enhances the portrayal of countering forces, the geometric elements in the scene create an even stronger sense of instability and uncertainty.

The diagonals present in the composition have the power to draw a viewer's eye where the artist would have it rest and to establish a sense of violent instability. The strong diagonal created by the main mast of the ship in the foreground signals

that the ship is in trouble. The V-shape formed by the other mast and rigging of the ship shows the sure ruin of all aboard because such contesting forces on a single vessel imply imminent destruction. Looking over to the left, there is yet another ship depicted with its masts set at a diagonal to the horizon, illustrating that there is no help for the first ship as the others in the fleet are in just as desperate a situation. In the background though, we see a fortress standing sturdily vertical, unaffected by the chaos surrounding it. There are two classes of rock formation in the scene: jagged (in front) and smooth (under the fortress). Both are creations of nature, but while the jagged formation seems to represent forthcoming peril, the smooth one suggests stability and permanence in life. Thus the nature of the natural is paradoxical, both good and bad for mankind. Similarly, the land of shore embodies safety for those already on it, but certain death for those on a foundering vessel.

The precise depiction of the ships implies that this work may have hung in the home of a seafaring merchant. The attention to detail shows the artist painted for the “period eye,” or how a contemporary viewer might have appreciated a work in context.<sup>2</sup> A Dutch merchant would almost certainly have been quite familiar with the structure of his sea-going vessels. Displayed at eye-level on the wall of a public room in a merchant’s house, *Shipping* could have served as a reminder of the luck involved in all affairs associated with nature; man has ultimately no control over the outcome of his life. To take this notion one step further, one might suppose that nature can be equated to the capitalist market so important in Dutch and Flemish culture in the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> Such a message would have been relevant to anyone involved in the mercantile trade.

The overall conflict between nature’s malevolence and the perseverance of man is pertinent to any visitor to the Snite who lives in our world in which man continues to invent devices and develop methods intended to alter the course of nature in his favor. The message about fate and man’s inability to control it is also relevant. Hopefully the viewer will spend the time to ponder the significance of the varied elements in van Eertvelt’s *Shipping on a Rough Sea*.

### Notes

1 All biographical information comes from: Wassink, L. J.

2 Barrett, Melissa. “Period Eye: Comparative Perspectives.” CitizenNewscaster.com Home of Citizen-directed News Media. Web. 21 Sept. 2010.

3 Matthias, Diana C. J.

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## *Author's Biography*

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JACK CUNNINGHAM

(SNITE MUSEUM ESSAY CONTEST—SECOND PLACE)

Jack Cunningham is from Belleville, Illinois. He is a member of the Notre Dame Class of 2014, currently pursuing a double major in the Program of Liberal Studies and preprofessional studies and hoping to become a doctor later in life. For now, he enjoys modern literature and discovering new music. Jack's essay "Holy Trinity or Divine Liturgy" explores a particular late-Renaissance painting of the Holy trinity and the choir of angels. In it, he makes several connections to Umberto Eco's wonderful novel *The Name of the Rose* and examines the painting's place, or lack thereof, in late-Renaissance art. Jack is grateful to his Humanities Seminar professor Dr. Eileen Hunt Botting for her support and insights.

# Holy Trinity or Divine Liturgy

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JACK CUNNINGHAM



*I saw a throne set in the sky and a figure seated on the throne...The face was illuminated by the tremendous beauty of a halo...Around the throne...were [the] ancients...so that wherever their pupils were...they converged on the same radiant spot...Bodies inhabited in every part by the Spirit, illuminated by revelation, faces overcome with amazement, eyes shining with enthusiasm...there they all were...singing a new song, lips parted in a smile of perennial praise.*

—Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (41–42)

Adso's impression of the abbey door in *The Name of the Rose* corresponds almost exactly to the painting. Painted in the latter half of the seventeenth century, *Holy Trinity* is immediately eye-catching for its centric quality. The painting focuses the viewer's gaze to the Trinity in the center before the eye can expand outward to the choirs of angels surrounding the images of God, singing praises and giving adoration to the Creator.

Intriguingly, this painting is startlingly reminiscent of Italian Proto-Renaissance painting. The artist, whose name is not known but who was probably from Crete, used techniques and styles similar to those of Giotto some four hundred years before. The gold filigree used in the halos and the background, for example, is a staple of the works of many contemporaries of Giotto. Also, this particular artist shows a strange lack of awareness for perspective, which was developed in the early fifteenth century. This makes his figures seem two-dimensional, which, while not necessarily a flaw, is not expected of a post-Renaissance Italian painter. However, he pays immense attention to detail—one can see every single hair on God's beard—which confers to the work a sense of passion combined with dignity.

Perhaps the artist even used an antiquated style with the purpose of better conveying the divine mystery. By not using perspective and by not humanizing the characters, he creates the effect that the subjects of the painting are not of this world but are instead supernatural. The sublimity of his subject is also suggested in the way he uses the clouds to contain the Divine Liturgy and in the poses of healing that he gives to the Father and the Son.

Outdated style notwithstanding, *Holy Trinity* is a beautiful work, and in fact its homage to antiquity makes it more useful for understanding *The Name of the Rose*, and, incidentally, Dante's *Inferno*. Eco's novel treats art in terms of reverence and divine mystery. These themes are realized most eloquently in Adso's trancelike vision at the door to the church. Adso is confronted with a work of art that seems so mystical, so divine, that his soul "was carried away by that concert of terrestrial beauty and majestic supernatural signals" (Eco, 43). In fact, this particular painting

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*Perhaps the artist even used  
an antiquated style with the  
purpose of better conveying  
the divine mystery*

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much resembles the door to the church—or half of it does, for the church door also gives a depiction of hell not seen in this work. Instead, *Holy Trinity* portrays two devout humans below all the splendor and majesty of the divine, kneeling in prayer. This is another parallel to Adso, who is wrapped up throughout the novel in the wonder and awe of God.

Another way in which *Holy Trinity* and *The Name of the Rose* are connected, more subtly, is through the symbolism of the books of scripture held by the angels. If one looks closely, it becomes apparent that the books held by this divine assembly are written not in English or in Latin, but in Greek. The monks in Eco's abbey are often assigned to translate or transcribe Greek works, and of course, the text that was the cause of all the trouble in the abbey, Aristotle's book of comedy, is written in Greek. In the painting, the Greek can be taken as a symbol of how even the pagans' works praise God; however, in the novel, the antagonist Jorge comes to the opposite conclusion.

This painting also refers to Dante's *Inferno*. While the heavenly host surrounding the Trinity has a stronger parallel to the *Paradiso*, it can also be connected to Dante's first work. We see all the smaller, disembodied faces in the clouds; these represent the souls of the righteous departed, in heavenly communion with God. Then there are the heavenly host, singing praises, reading adorations, and performing rituals in the service of the Lord. And finally, the Trinity itself resides in the center: the dove representing the Holy Spirit, and the Father to the right with Jesus at his right hand. In a way, this can be seen as the opposite of the hell Dante portrays in his *Inferno*. In it, there are different levels of hell, each corresponding to worse sins

and more torturous punishments as Dante journeys down the infernal hierarchy. At the very center and the very bottom, we see Lucifer in all his twisted glory, chained and cursed forever as a monument to the evil that caused his fall. In the painting, of course, we see the opposite. A heavenly hierarchy is shown, with the righteous dead given less stature than the angels, all of course worshipping the Trinity that abides in the center. A connection can be drawn between these two works, in that they represent the two sides of the coin of eternal life with much the same structure.

*Holy Trinity or Divine Liturgy*, as a work that mimics a style that had long passed, connects especially well with works such as *The Name of the Rose* and *Inferno* that are either from or engage that period. It also provides a later historical perspective on the divine mystery, re-told in the vein of a Giotto or a Cimabue. But perhaps the most striking aspect of this painting does not depend on any connections to history or literature. This painting is a masterpiece in its own right, on its own artistic merit. The colors and the attention to detail given the figures by the artist are breathtaking. It is a shame that the painter is unknown, because *Holy Trinity* is a truly inspired work, one for which its creator should be remembered.

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## Author's Biography

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MATTHEW DOYLE

(SNITE MUSEUM ESSAY CONTEST—THIRD PLACE)

Matthew Doyle is a member of Keenan Hall who grew up in Natick, Massachusetts. His essay “Light in the World, Light of the World” began as an assignment for his Honors Program seminar with Professor Cornelius Delaney. The students all visited the Snite Museum of Art on campus to observe medieval art in conjunction with their reading of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*. Gualitieri di Giovanni da Pisa’s *Madonna and Child* in the Snite was, along with *The Name of the Rose*, the subject of Matt’s essay discussing how light is used in Christianity and Christian art to represent universal goodness and Jesus Christ. The author would like to thank Professor Delaney and Diana Matthias at the Snite. Matt is a member of the Glynn Family Honors Program and Political Science major. He is very interested in foreign language and is taking German at Notre Dame in addition to maintaining a conversational level of Spanish fluency. Matt plans to attend law school or a graduate program in public policy.

# Light in the World, Light of the World

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MATTHEW DOYLE



“When Jesus spoke to the people again, he said: ‘I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” In this passage from St. John’s Gospel (8:12) Jesus tells His disciples and the people gathered about His mission on earth. In a very straightforward description, Christ calls Himself the Light of the World. Those listening are able to comprehend, if only at a basic level, what Jesus is claiming to be and provide. “The Light of the World” is Jesus proclaiming, in a new way, His role (or belief in His role) as the Son of God. “The light of life” is another way of declaring the eternal salvation He promised to His followers. Jesus makes it clear that those who do not follow Him will not be afforded the salvation of His followers by pointing out that they “walk in darkness”.

In modern times the idea of light and dark as synonyms for good and evil is widespread and common. At the most basic, secular level, “good guys” tend to be portrayed with white and light colors and “bad guys” are clothed in black. This coupling of good with light and evil with dark clearly existed at, and before, the time of Jesus. He gives the analogy its most significant interpretation, as explained above, and in so doing sets the precedent for the entire future of Christianity. We associate light with “good guys”, Jesus, and eternal salvation in Heaven. Over the 2000 years since Christ’s life, Heaven has been almost always depicted as a place of extreme, bright light as a sign of the presence of God. In fact, most descriptions and depictions of holy people throughout time include brightness and light, often in the form of a halo. The two examples that this paper will compare are Gualitieri di Giovanni da Pisa’s *Madonna and Child* painting, currently in the Snite museum of art, and passages from Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose*.

Gualitieri di Giovanni da Pisa’s *Madonna and Child* in the Snite museum of Art was painted in Italy in the 14th century. The wood panel around the painting is covered

with gold, or a gold-like substance. As the title suggests, the painting depicts Mary holding the infant Jesus. They both have orange-red hair, somewhat plump features, and narrow eyes. Most of the details of the images of the Madonna and Child can be attributed to the painter's tastes and what must have been norms for the time. More importantly for this discussion, however, is the gold leaf surrounding the figures on the canvas. Surrounding images in gold leaf was a very common practice in churches throughout Europe at the time. Gold was used for three important reasons: the effects light has upon it, its value, and its durability. During the day, when sunlight filled the church, the light would have a jewel-like quality. The sun's rays would reflect off of the gold leaf and break into many different colors that would spread throughout the church. This gave the images a magical aura as multi-colored light moved all around them, and even seemed to come from the images themselves. At night when the only light source in churches was candles, the gold would seem to flicker with the candles behind the images. The images would not

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*Gold was used for three important reasons: the effects light has upon it, its value, and its durability*

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reflect light, though; they would be still against a backdrop of shimmering, gold light. Gold's significant value and durability made it the easy choice for pieces of art such as this. It evoked the notions of power and royalty in the common people, who would probably only ever see gold in churches. At all times of the day, therefore, Jesus and Mary appeared heavenly, regal, and powerful.

Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* is a murder mystery set in an Italian monastery in the 14th century. Two visitors to the monastery, Brother William of Baskerville and his scribe Adso, set out to solve the murders and uncover the secrets of the abbey in advance of a delegation from the Pope meant to discuss other matters. It is in this context that Brother William and Adso are able to see much more of the abbey than a usual visitor. At two different occasions during their explorations of the grounds, Adso finds himself so in awe of features of the church that he has heavenly thoughts and visions. As with da Pisa's painting, light plays an extremely important role in these situations. The first is on page 41 when Adso is staring at the door of the church. Unlike the painting, light does not reflect off the carvings in the door to make them more magnificent, rather the vision that Adso has includes the imagery of the Light of the World. "The face was illuminated by the tremendous beauty of a halo...while around the throne and above the face of the Seated One I saw an emerald rainbow glittering." Adso's conception of Jesus in heaven, as an adult, is very similar to the effect that light has on da Pisa's painting of Christ as a child. Both include brilliant illumination of the Light of the World and bejeweled light around Him. The manifestation of heaven to Adso, a young Benedictine novice, is Jesus surrounded by light and countless figures around Him in perpetual adoration.

The second example of light's profound role in the church in *The Name of the Rose* comes on page 142 when the abbot shares the wealth of the abbey with Brother William and Adso. Most churches were arranged to allow as much light as possible to enter them during the day, so as to have the most profound effects on what was inside. Paintings like da Pisa's, the Altar, and adornments of the church were made all the more glorious with light, symbolizing the One True Light. As Adso explains, "...light came in bursts through the choir windows...creating white cascades that, like mystic streams of divine substance, intersected at various points of the church, engulfing the altar itself...eventually the whole altar seemed of gold, from whatever direction I looked at it." Adso receives the full effect intended by those who built churches and the abbots and priests who filled them with precious objects and religious art. Paintings like da Pisa's, bejeweled chalices and other articles, and the altar were all beautified by the presence of light. Adso is supposed to be an intelligent, well-read old man when he is writing the book, but most non-residents of that abbey would be poor commoners from the villages surrounding it. They would not even be able to describe the effects of the light on the riches and were likely to be even more inspired.

Jesus told us to call Him the Light of the World and to follow in His path. Throughout the history of Christendom, those who attempted to follow in that path understood the importance of this Light. They chose to portray that light literally through their art and in their churches in order to glorify God and pass his message on to others. Eco's *The Name of the Rose* includes strong literary examples of how an individual might have reacted to these phenomena. Da Pisa's *Madonna and Child* gives the Notre Dame community an actual example of the art common in this time that would aim for these effects. These two pieces together reflect the importance and significance of light as an image for good in the Christian tradition.

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